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FOURTH MANSIONS by R.A. LAFFERTY



THE NEW NOVEL BY THE AUTHOR OF *PAST MASTER*

"R. A. Lafferty has always been uniquely his own man, but in this book he surpasses himself. It is wild, subtle, demonic, angelic, hilarious, tragic, poetic, a thundering melodrama and a quest into the depths of the human spirit. You'll think about it for a long time and probably go back to it more than once."

—POUL ANDERSON

"Whom the gods would destroy, they should first have read **FOURTH MANSIONS**. The closest comparison I can think of is a psychedelic morality play where the Virtues and Vices keep sneaking offstage and switching masks. One comes away from it as one awakens from a dream."

—ROGER ZELAZNY

"Raphael Aloysius Lafferty is one prodigious liar and **FOURTH MANSIONS** is his best and longest lie. It's as strange and inventive a book as I have ever read, like some fantastic amalgam of A. E. van Vogt and **The Circus of Dr. Lao**, but no one would have written it this way but Lafferty."

—ALEXEI PANSHIN

R. A. Lafferty, a unique and fascinating writer, combines soaring imagination with matter-of-fact common sense, an almost lyrical writing style and strange, biting satire. In FOURTH MANSIONS he gives us a weird over-view of reality, in a story of:

Seven very special people blending to create a higher form of humanity;

A laughing man living alone on a mountaintop, guarding the world;

The returnees, men who live again and again, century after century;

A dog-ape plappergeist who can be seen only from the corner of the eye;

— And a young man named Foley, very much like you or me, who begins to find out about these people and these things, and how they are shaping the destiny of the world. . . .

RAPHAEL ALOYSIUS LAFFERTY was born in Iowa, moved to Oklahoma when four years old, and has been there ever since except for travel and four and a half years in the army. Now in his fifties, Lafferty describes himself as "a correspondence school electrical engineer" who has worked for electrical jobbers most of his life. He has published scores of stories in both the science fiction magazines and such journals as *New Mexico Quarterly*, *Literary Review*, etc.

His first published novel was **PAST MASTER**, an Ace Science Fiction Special that was nominated for both the Nebula and Hugo Awards as Best SF Novel of 1968. His other novels to date are **SPACE CHANTEY** (Ace) and **THE REEFS OF EARTH** (Berkley). An omnibus volume of Lafferty's short stories and novelettes will be published next year as an SF Special.

FOURTH MANSIONS by R.A. LAFFERTY

AN ACE BOOK

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FOURTH MANSIONS

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I: I THINK I WILL DISMEMBER THE WORLD WITH MY HANDS

"For there are all these obstacles for us to meet and there is also the danger of serpents."

Interior Castle: Teresa of Avila

THERE IS entwined seven-tentacled lightning. It is fire-masses, it is sheets, it is arms. It is seven-colored writhing in the darkness, electric and alive. It pulsates, it sends, it sparkles, it blinds!

It explodes!

It is seven murderous thunder-snakes striking in seven directions along the ground! *Blindingly fast! Under your feet! Now! At you!*

And You! You who glanced in here for but a moment, you are already snake-bit!

It is too late for you to withdraw. The damage is done to you. That faintly odd taste in your mouth, that smallest of tingles which you feel, they signal the snake-death.

Die a little. There is reason for it.

There was a young man who had very good eyes but simple brains. Nobody can have everything. His name was Freddy Foley and he was arguing with a man named Tankersley who was his superior.

"Just how often do you have to make a total fool of yourself, Foley?" Tankersley asked him sharply. Tankersley was a kind man, but he had a voice like a whip.

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"An enterprising reporter should do it at least once a week, sir, or he isn't covering the ground," Fred Foley said seriously.

"You do it oftener," said Tankersley. "Why is your nose bleeding, Foley?"

"I do it oftener because I'm more enterprising than your other reporters. Oh, my nose bleeds every time I get caught a good one there."

As all cats (and especially tigers) are loose in their skins, this Freddy Foley was loose in his face. There was room there for far more things than his winking innocence and his easy grin. There was room for multiplex character that Freddy hadn't developed yet, for expressions he had never used. It was a face unplowed, though momentarily bloodied.

"This should count for several times," Tankersley went on. "This goes beyond being a total fool. Do you know what position Carmody Overlark holds?"

"Special Assistant to Secretary of State."

"Right, Foley. And you come here with this cock and bull story—"

"Capon and steer story rather. Surely you know that much about the Mamelukes."

"And because his given name is Carmody, and because there lived more than five hundred years ago a man named Khar-ibn-Mod— Say, your head is gashed badly too! Did someone do it to you on purpose?"

"Yeah, they tried to kill me, I think. And this Khar-ibn-Mod had the exact appearance of Carmody Overlark. It's a face that could happen only once."

"Some similarity. An old woodcut is hard to compare with a face that neither of us has seen except on paper or screen. Who tried to kill you, Foley?"

"I don't know exactly. I could figure it out, but this Carmody Overlark story is much more important, and I request permission to follow it out."

"Well, you are most certainly denied that permission,

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Foley. How would a man who died five or six hundred years ago—?”

“But we don’t know that he died. History is strangely silent on that point.”

“History is strangely silent on millions of small details. History would more likely note it if he didn’t die. And that is all you have?”

“Oh no, Mr. Tankersley. I’ve come on quite a few more details and they all confirm my theory. The difficulty is that they sound a little improbable. If you won’t accept the possibility that Carmody Overlark and Kharibn-Mod are the same man, then you sure won’t accept the less conventional details. They make the main statement sound like the time of day.”

“And I’m about to bid you the time of day, Foley. I believe I’ll put you on the seismic disturbance case.”

“No sir. I already know all about that. It isn’t interesting when you know it.”

“You know what’s causing the low-grade seismic disturbances coming from the hills northwest of the city these last several evenings? Then you know more than quite a few smart people know. Tell me, Foley.”

“No sir. You’d believe me even less than you believe the Carmody stuff. They aren’t low-grade disturbances, though. There’s a lot of twisted stuff in that bunch but it isn’t low-grade. It isn’t even physical. The little earthquake jolts are mental, but they fool the people who feel them.”

“I don’t believe you know what low-grade means in this sense, Foley. But they certainly *are* physical. Mental jolts will not fool or affect instruments.”

“Yes, Mr. Tankersley, I believe they will. But I want to stay on the Carmody story. Mr. Tankersley, did you ever feel that someone is sucking out your blood or ichor, draining you of the fluid that might let you become a little more than a man? Or did you ever feel that there

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was a net cast over us and we were all held in this net by a hegemony of spiders as yet unidentified?"

"Those spiders are my reporters, Foley, and they do spin some pretty thin stuff. Now I will tell you one thing: there are *stories* that reappear with the same faces when they should have been dead for more than five hundred years. And there's a special aspect to reappearing stories about reappearing men: follow one out and you will be killed for it every time. I don't know why this is so but I tell you that it is. They may have attempted you already and you too dumb to know it."

"No sir, I'm not too dumb to know it. I know they're trying to kill me or scare me to death."

"Ah, why don't you take off the rest of the day and get drunk, Foley?"

"I did that Monday on your advice. I'd still rather have followed up *that* case."

"Well, it was better than having you go off quarter-cocked on the Knoll story. That would really have gotten us laughed out of town. And this thing now, *drop it!* No more Carmody stuff. No more stuff of men who live for centuries or who live more than once. Try one more bender for my sake now, and I hope to see you tomorrow morning, red-eyed and trembling, with your, ah, sanity restored, and ready for work. Get out of here now."

"Yes sir," Freddy Foley said, and he got out.

Good eyes but simple brains, that was Foley. He really could see at levels where many folks cannot, where Tankersley could not; where even Jim Bauer sometimes could not.

The Harvesters had begun to meet in the evenings at

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the home of James Bauer. It was a nice place on a hill-side above a lake and Bauer had named it *Morada*, the mansion.

(“*Morada*,” an ashen voice conveyed, “besides meaning a dwelling place, means a sojourn; but *morada* also means mulberry-colored, or violet, or purple: the color of the sky at dusk in mid-winter, the color of snakes in shade.”)

There were seven of the Harvesters. It takes at least seven to make up a set at brain-weaving, and this was their favorite game. They met in the evenings especially, and often in the daytimes, for they all had a sort of entanglement going about each other. Apart from each other they were powerful in their persons. Together they became critical mass.

Morada was the home of Jim Bauer and his wife Letitia. The Manions and the Silverios lived quite close by, and this made six—just short of the critical mass. Bedelia Bencher was free to be anywhere at any time. Now she came to *Morada* every evening. She completed the weave. Thereupon there were low-grade seismic disturbances, earthquake jolts which were mental but which fooled instruments and men.

The weave was a most peculiar perfect circle—it had two discrete ends. One was the airy Bedelia Bencher. The other was the massive Jim Bauer.

This Jim Bauer was in oils, in the splotchy sort of oil-painting that Eakins did do well, that should have been sketchy in result, and wasn’t.

(Wait—a bird just fell to earth not eighty feet from this Bauer; fell to earth with every bone in its body broken. It was a large dusk-flying bird of the kind that is called Night-Hawk, and it fell with resounding concussion. Only a bird that is already dead will fall heavily like that. Nothing to be done about a dead bird. Continue.)

Even when in motion, James Bauer seemed always to

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be posed for such a portrait. He was a big, young-looking man, and it was all choice beef that hung on him. He had a rich voice and he had been a rich boy. This still made a difference to the two other men present (or coming into presence), though they all were passing rich now. These three had been to grade school together at St. Michaels, and they still adhered together for all the differences and years. It made a difference that Jim Bauer had been the rich kid, that he had been to Europe and to Rio while he was still a boy, that he had been off to rich-kid boarding schools some of the years. It made a difference that he had known the names of operas and things like that, that he had had French cigarettes in French packs when the other ten-year-old kids could hardly come by one cigarette a week.

And this rich-kid air still clung to Jim. A large part of his aura, of his psychic power, was built out of the group remembrance of such things. Well, what is any person's influence built out of if not of trivial but clinging things?

Bauer means farmer or peasant, which Jim certainly was not. It means a knave too. It also means a pawn at chess, but Jim Bauer believed that he was no one's pawn. He was a biologist at Bio-Lab of America. He was a New-Left Actionist; so had his father been, so had his grandfather been. He called himself a Centrist, but he belonged to the eccentric. He was intelligent, or at least of very tough brains, startling mental stamina and well-bottomed memory. He was a pan-math, a catchword artist. He was the Bishop's left-hand man. Jim said that he himself was a privileged mutation, that the whole world was mutating, that it could only be saved by such privileged mutations as were the Harvesters.

Bauer had invented the seven-handed game of brain-weaving. Do not try it! It is a seven-bladed sword; it is no joke. It really can be done, and that is the fearful part of it. Bauer said that it was a patio game; he also said that the health and balance of the world depended

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on the seven of them playing it well. Bauer spoke with a colorful and intricate rumble. He had copied that rumble from someone; he had practiced it and developed it. It was a part of his psychic power now. It was a personage rumble.

Bedelia Bencher came onto the patio at Morada, and certain flowers in a bowl lifted their heads and followed her.

"I thought those were artificial flowers," Bedelia piqued.

"They are," said Letitia Bauer, "but they've learned to raise their heads when you come just as natural flowers do."

"Has your little Freddy busted on this one yet, Bedelia?" Bauer gave out with his clattering rumble, he also lifting his head at Bedelia's coming. "Have you heard any echos that he's busted on Carmody Overlark? Oh, Freddy is our patsy and our proof! Let us no longer doubt that we can influence minds distantly when we put minds together here. We can sift Freddy Foley like wheat. Soon we'll be able to sift the whole world. It comes the harvest, Harvesters! We can brain-weave, we can influence. 'Bust grandly over the man Carmody Overlark,' we wove to Freddy, and he caught it across town. 'Goof gloriously, Freddy!' we wove, and I felt him take it up. How could anyone touch a man like Carmody Overlark? But your little Freddy has busted on him, I know it, I feel it! It was about mid-afternoon today. Have you heard echoes of it, Bedelia?"

"Echoes? Earth-rumbles!" Biddy Bencher crinkled. "Tankersley called my father; my father called me. 'You'll have to find another boyfriend to play with,' my father said. 'You find me one who's so much fun,' I told my father. Tankersley called me. 'If your father didn't own such a piece of this paper this kid would have to go,' Tankersley told me. 'Why do you fool with the fool anyhow, Biddy?' he asked me. 'He's out of his

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mind, that Foley kid. He's clear crazy, and he hardly seems to realize that he is. You can't hang a story like that on a dog.' 'But what was it, Mr. Tankersley, what was it?' I asked in my innocent way. 'Wild fillies couldn't tear that story out of me, Biddy,' he said. 'You couldn't hang a story like that on a dog; how could you hang it on a man as *untouchable* as Carmody Overlark?' But I don't know what it is yet."

This Bedelia (Biddy) Bencher was a drawing in red chalk by Matisse. She was red-haired and lightly freckled and beautifully bony (the last her own description). She had a lustful mouth and innocent eyes, and was full of green passion. She was nineteen years old and had been nineteen for quite a while.

"How can anyone as stupid as you are have a near-genius rating?" her father once ranted. "Those mind-raters must be out of their minds."

"But I've always been near genius, dear Father," Biddy had answered. "We have always been close."

Biddy had no mother. She had been born, she said, near-grown and nubile from her father's forehead. "You can see the scar yet," she'd say, and the father Richard Bencher did have a livid scar across his forehead, but he had a different explanation for it. Biddy *did* have a brain, however, and the seven-minded game of brain-weaving would have been impossible without her.

"Find out, Biddy, what little Freddy has pulled!" Salzy (Ensalzamiento) Silverio cried as she materialized there on the patio. This Salzy was a bit by Degas, yet he would never have guessed the twisted passion of this dark, gay, unsmiling young woman. "Not twisted," Salzy once said of her own passion, "it is helical. That sounds better."

(*A mouse in mimosa roots nine feet from Salzy was blinded with blood and died quietly with its brains exploded. Odd, though: that mouse died with a smile.*

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Salzy, in the aura of her, was a gentle and unknowing murderer of many small bits of the ambient.)

"We will not do another thing that involves Carmody Overlark directly," Arouet Manion said dimly. It did not seem that these persons arrived at Morada or entered the patio there. It seemed that they were already there in potential and now became realized, one by one. "We went for Carmody by name and face; we wanted him to play a hilarious joke on himself at a diplomatic function. And he exploded back at us, almost blew our brains out. Yet there is a vacuum there also. He isn't real, you know. We aren't the only ones who have stumbled onto brain-weaving. I can hear that Carmody laughing in my mind yet, and him more than a thousand miles away all the time. And when we linked him with the Foley caper I felt him flow through our minds again. 'Goof gloriously, Freddy,' we wove, but Overlark himself added something to that weaving. I'm almost afraid to find what idiocy Freddy has busted this time."

This Arouet Manion was a Reynolds piece. Having a Reynolds face, he appeared more profound than he was. But that maker touched many of his characters with his irony. (*One hundred yards away a good man fell from grace in an instant, sinning silently to himself, and then reaching for the telephone to actualize that sin; it was the sin of calumny. It was not an ordinary sin to this man. It came to him in a wave of sticky evil, as an outside influence.*) Manion had a size and strength of both mind and body. It might be of poor quality, but there was a lot of it, enlivened by boundless energy. Manion was a doctor, a psychiatrist. He was a semi-pro psychologist and an amateur philosopher. He was also a Teilhardian and a concordist. Being so, he was a man completely without humor, but also there was nothing serious in him. Turgid, yes, but not serious. But he was one of those who were beginning to move the world, literally.

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"We need a new target," sparked Wing Manion, who crackled in the air every time she moved. (Was Wing Manion as sparky a woman as that?) "I say, let our new target be Michael Fountain. He's the most informed man we know. He is also, I believe, the best man we know. It's simply that he's a man of no energy at all. A low-pressure fountain is our Michael. Let's weave power for him, then, so he can move the world. He's the one we need to be Lord of the Harvest."

Wing Manion reminded one of a fish done by Paul Klee: not in her actual appearance, of course, but in her style. Yet she was good-looking, and Klee never painted a good-looking fish in his life. Those Klee fishes, though, they have passion.

(*Instruments at a seismograph lab in the city picked up low-grade seismic disturbance as Wing Manion solidified into the group, bringing it nearer to critical mass. These curious little jolting earthquakes had been recorded for several evenings and there were distracting elements to them. Really, they were not real. "Impulsion without content," was the interpreted reading of the seismometers. Without content? Wing Manion? Those machines are feebled minded.*)

Wing Manion was devoted, she was kind. She loved kids, she even loved rocks. Biddy Bencher said that Wing Manion was a sexpot who happened to be a saint and so was complicated back on herself. Being married to an incompetent psychologist didn't help.

"Don't you think we're being a little too godly in all this?" Hondo Silverio asked the bunch of them. Hondo startled them all anew every time he came into presence, struck them with shivers of fear or at least strangeness. Yet there was no better man anywhere. "Has God called us to be Harvesters? Jim Bauer says that God has called him. Arouet Manion says that God-in-process has called him. Well, nobody has called me except my own depths, and those caverns aren't to be trusted.

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We've stumbled onto a trick that frightens me. We really can move men and mountains. We really can determine, to an extent, what the world will be. Shouldn't we be giving rather than taking?"

"No, we should take always," Jim Bauer said. "We are Harvesters and we harvest."

"We have come onto the trick of amplifying and projecting psychic energy," Hondo continued. "Look out! By a trick or coincidence, we are all of us people of powerful passion carelessly channeled. By another trick we could turn into rutting animals. We are a bunch of psychic athletes, but we are neither very good nor very wise people. What right have we to pour fire into Michael Fountain or into anybody? We came onto an easy and harmless vehicle in Freddy Foley. He doesn't know what hit him, but I think he enjoys being the half-cocked fool. But we ran into stark and laughing mystery when we tackled Carmody Overlark himself. It's almost as if he were mind without real body. I have the feeling he could have annihilated us if he wished. Let's be careful."

This Hondo Silverio could have been by Ingres. (*Out at St. John's a five-year-old boy had been dying, but he didn't die. His temperature fell six degrees in six seconds. He was well. "It was the big snake, my friend the big snake," the boy said, "he made me well right away. Why don't they let the big snake be a doctor, and make the little doctor be a snake?"*) Hondo was a petroleum geologist and a driller. But he was also historical geologist and archeologist. He said that he had found his wife Salzy in Mexico City. But she said that he had blasted her out of a Mexican shale-formation where she had been in an old and evil stratum with serpents and saurians. There was sometimes a frightening gaiety about this couple, something of serpentine mottled green humor, wholly uncontrollable under-strata of recklessness bursting up in artesian fountains of

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water that was frosty with forbidden minerals. Oh, Hondo meant it when he said that they should be careful. He meant especially that *he* had to be careful.

"We *hope* that there will be danger in releasing these things," Letitia Bauer said with great seriousness. "We call ourselves the Harvesters and we talk of harvesting a better world. What I want is a livelier life and a deeper one, a life worth living and a death worth dying. I'd see the whole white froth of accommodation and present ease swept away in a moment if it would give us anything deeper." (*Over a hill, and not at all far away, a middle-aged couple jumped to their feet in trembling and horror. It was that damnable harp again! The sudden sounding of it was not pretty harp music. It was unworldly, atonal, now muted, now thunderous, horrifying and charming harp music. For three evenings it had played like that, enough to affright the dead. The harp, a newly acquired antique, was in a room by itself. It harped, but there was no harper, and it had no strings.*) "Ah well, be it that widow and orphan and the weak and deficient are delivered from their poverty, then," Letitia Bauer continued (herself sounding very much like a harp without strings), "but let the strong never be delivered from their struggle! If we have not this hope of danger, then all is lost in a swamp. Each one of us has a dangerous power in his own person. We have it very much more than seven times over when we set up a weave. Dangerous powers are not really dangerous unless they are used. Let us use them! Tonight we will pour what fire and what danger we can into Michael Fountain. There is no man needs them more."

Letitia Bauer was the pale or moon-colored, slim woman whom Burne-Jones had painted several times: as Beggar Main, as Norse Goddess, variously.

The world jerked. Seismometers recorded high-grade seismic disturbance as the brain-weave now came rak-

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ishly and dangerously into action while the seven burgeoning persons of it seemed sometimes at ease, sometimes in passion, sometimes doing other things or nothing at all. But they reached critical psychic mass now, and every act of theirs would give a wobble to the world.

The brain-weaving was something that the Harvesters themselves did not understand, though they had developed it deliberately. Now they gathered the power and the goal to themselves, and they projected it. They did not, any of them, understand it completely in their own persons, but they understood it more completely when the seven of them were linked together. Surely they would understand it in near totality when they had linked more and more strong persons to themselves. These seven were all projecting persons and they could feel their own effect welling through.

Jim Bauer, mixing drinks at the little patio wheeled bar, had broken into rumbling and powerful song. Bauer had to have a big belly to support his big chest to support his big rough song. And he had to have a powerful neck to support the powerful and massive head in which so much of his activity was carried out. There was reason for everything in the spreading construction of him.

Bauer projected with big hands, almost with holy hands; he mixed drinks with hands that were like the hands of God-over-the-world. He was the Harvester in his hands, and it meant something. He came at the mind of Michael Fountain then, came with massive head and barrel chest and great hands and rumbling spirit, and slipped off. Came again, slipped again badly, swore with a joyous rumble, came again as he mixed Michael's name with his powerful song, encountered strangeness that he had not known to be in that Michael Fountain, welled in and wrestled with that strangeness.

Bauer was doing things with lime and sugar and tin-

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kling glass rods, and at the same time he was burglarizing a mind eight hundred miles away. But was not Michael Fountain right here in the city?

Somewhere and not right here in the city, a bewildered young man sat upon a battered bed, clasped his hands to his head, groaned deeply, and at the same time grinned a prodigious grin. The young man liked the encounter that stunned him, he liked the new violent pain in his head; he liked all new violent things whatsoever. "I have a new horned-bull in my head," the young man said. He swayed with the pain of it and grinned more goblinishly.

Wing Manion had peeled off a robe and gone down the crumbling steep concrete and iron stairway from the patio to the lake. She was into the chilly December water, and then down deep under the water and crouching in the secret mud. She enchanted the name of the quizzical man who was her friend, as much as he knew how to be a friend to anyone. She would give a fiery sword to this Michael and he could turn it which way he would. She would teach this Fountain how to flow! She came to the man in his rumpled house and room.

Michael Fountain knew her mind instantly. He liked Wing Manion, perhaps, more than the others of the group. But he slipped off from her instantly and almost untouched. He had always been an avoiding man. But Wing was puzzled in her surge. James Bauer was not there at work, and James had given the strong feeling that he had entered the mind. Wing broke water and reviewed and memorized the entire world in one intaking flash. Then she descended shimmering under a shelf of striated rock into a catfish castle. She came again at the mind of Michael Fountain with fire and metal and water, and again she slipped badly from him. She came again, slipped, and then struck the mind-trail of James Bauer and followed it seeking entrance. And the entrance she found was the most unexpected sort.

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Here was a new area, weird even to Wing Manion, and she added her own weirdness and excitement to it. Who would have imagined that there were such enchanted and crooked groves in dry Michael Fountain? Jim Bauer was there also, and the network had made its first linkage.

"I had no idea there was such a man as this inside Michael Fountain," Wing thought, like a catfish bubbling. "Why, that makes him everything we need. I will give this man inside the sword, I'll teach him to flow. Oh, how I could teach him, how he could teach me! What flow! What a flesh-fountain he is!"

"Now I have a new *bruja* in my head," a young man said. "I like the fire-witch. Which of us shall be burned up first? A bull and a witch, and I rise and go somewhere. There is something that this lout is called to do."

Michael Fountain, the dry man, paced the floor of his cluttered living room with the beginning of worry. Two of the young people had come at him, venturing, and he had sloughed them off. But they had fastened onto something, either inside him or outside him, they were fastening onto something that might already be wild enough without their mind-meddling. And they had accidentally brushed a third something: this was not the powerful, awakening, grotesquely grinning young man with a new bull and a new witch in his head (Michael knew this young man somehow, either inside or outside of himself): this was another and weaker man, a man who had somehow been caught in the cross-blast of it and had died of it. "They've killed a man, unwittingly," Michael Fountain said. "Somehow I will find out who it is tomorrow. In any case I will have to force the wild ones to give up directing their gadget."

Salzy Silverio had gone around the shoulder of the little lake to an overhung natural rock-garden under the

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cliff. She coiled herself there in the mossy rocks of serpentine shale and water trickled down on her. She was full of her own helical and otherwise twisted passion. Her husband Hondo went around to her, carrying drinks. There were green mottled sparks when the auras of the two of them came into contact. Oh, these were both gracious and benign and urbane persons, full of all graces and grace! Theirs was intelligence and vitality and kindness. and amid their strong coiling passions was a great center of compassion. They were the great and intelligent and superior and noble snakes such as rule one of the distant worlds of which one reads. Salzy had once stated, when in one of her double-helical moods, that her husband Hondo had two pizzles, as have certain snakes. "Oh, is that true?" Letitia Bauer had demanded at the time. "I'll have to find out whether you're joking or whether it's true. It could be true, you know." "It could be true." Salzy had said snakishly.

Hondo and Salzy had entered the brain-weave, and now there were five additional linkages added to the one that had been before. "That there be fire in the Fountain and new snakes for old!" they wove. They brushed the conventional Michael Fountain but lightly, slipping off and shivering him, and entered at once into the weird young man who was possibly interior to that Michael, who was possibly far distant from him and yet known to him. And that young man was now on his feet, he was running, loping in that ungainly but rapid and tireless way that big men of his race have. He was loping down dusky but warm December streets toward the river. Inside his gloriously bursting head was a she-snake of his own high people, one who had been blasted out of old sleeping shale-strata; and with her was a noble creature as male as himself, deep with artesian welling-up.

Arouet Manion entered the brain-weave with cool pan-

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theistic elegance. He would bring ancient ice and not fire to the Fountain. His spiritual fathers had taught him that the highest goal was to put out the lights of heaven, but the next highest was to exalt the earth. He really had this mystic attachment to the earth and he could communicate it. He had a real place in the brain-weave; it could not have worked fully without him; it may be that his place was to pervert it, but place it was. He touched the surface Michael not at all, he was immediately into the young man.

Arouet did not inhibit the fire-force and violent surge of the mind and network he entered. He sent a rale and tremor through it all, and then a giant reaction. He was like explosion and shattering of ice followed by a steeliness and autre precipitation. The wrongness of the man set up roaring tensions and angry despondencies but it strengthened the intrusion. Its false mystique would influence and move this new dynamic mass for the stark life of its surge. It added its diabolical gaping nothingness, and the reaction to that was white fury. The mind of Arouet Manion had great natural energy wrapped around a void, and it contributed a new angular velocity and a mad rain of strange particles. The brain-weave would not work fully without Arouet; it would not work fully if any one of the seven were missing. "Pray that it may not work, pray that it may not work at all," Michael Fountain gasped, white and trembling from near brushes with it.

The linkages multiplied, and then multiplied again as Letitia Bauer came with her own ashen and angular passion and swift hope of danger. The brain-weave was fabricating a new and uncontrollable personage in the name of Michael Fountain, but did he know it? He knew it in fright and agony, and he slipped away from it again and again. He had felt the death of one man caught in it accidentally; he felt the total penetration

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of another. But were not both of these himself in some way?

The brain-weave had entered, deeply and forever, into a mind under that of Michael Fountain, and yet it was a mind associated with his. Had the brain-weave made a new mind and a new man and named it Michael Fountain?

A ghost in red chalk completed the brain-weave, a red wraith of disarming simplicity and shattering profundity: so young an anima that she still had not shook off the poltergeistic manifestations of her own adolescence; a numinous pink spook, lazy with summer lightning and instantaneous with blood-gaiety, shyly murderous, with a laugh like breaking crystal, eldritch and ethereal: Biddy Bencher the young red witch.

They had completed the heptameles, the seven-person weave. It was full to overflowing, and it overflowed with a lightning-line of power.

A loping lumpkin of a young man had fallen in half faint and full pain against the guard-rail of the bridge, bleeding and glassy-eyed. He was struck by the line of power so that the thin soles of his shoes smoked. Such strikes had killed others, but this one would transfix and animate him.

Now he burst into a real *carcajada*, a guffaw, an elephant laugh. He came onto his feet again. He still reeled, but now he reeled with a swagger. He was Miguel Fuentes and he had just become a main person in the world.

"Now I have a *canelón*, a cinnamon cookie in my head," the young man joked with a thick tongue: for *canelón* means gargoyle as well as cinnamon cookie, and Biddy Bencher was both.

"Get out with you all now!" the germinating man ordered. "You have done me! You have changed me the man, and I will remember what I must do. I think I will

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dismember the world with my hands as though it were a *cabrito*, a kid to be barbecued. I will remember the big thing and I will do it."

This timeless man (who had lately been a young man) lurched across International Bridge and set about effecting certain things in the world.

II: EITHER AWFUL DEAD OR AWFUL OLD

Simplicity into the world all bare,
Unweaponed, careless, witless, artless clown,
Lays hands on curly anacondas there
And drags the very dragons through their town.

Simplicitas: Orthcutt

BIDDY BENCHER came into the Scatterbrain Lounge later that night. She was fevered and spent, but quite alert and full of monkeyness.

In the floor of the Scatterbrain there was a bronze disc countersunk, and on it was the inscription THIS IS THE EXACT CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE. Whether it was the exact center is an unsettled question. Hugh Hamtree, who owned and operated the Scatterbrain, said that the disc was already there when he took over the place. The previous owner, Birdie Mounteagle, was remembered as a whimsical man.

"Freddy, little left eye of an owl," Biddy cried when she saw young Foley there, "did you not have a startling idea today? I had heard, no, I had felt, that you had something going. Had you not a one-in-a-million idea?" Lustful mouth and innocent eyes, this Biddy was a cinnamon cookie full of arsenic.

"Biddy, I still have the idea, but how do you know? How are you people monkeying with me?"

"We don't monkey. We infuse with real live pop-skull and green lightning. I have to know. What was the rare idea, little frog-foot, and how did it go?"

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"The same as all my one-in-a-million ideas. I'm not allowed to follow it out. I'm not even allowed to think about it." That unplowed face of Foley was getting faint plow-marks now.

"Did old Tankersley order you to get drunk and forget about it?"

"He did. And it isn't as much fun when you take it for medicine."

"How can men retain positions of authority and remain unreceptive to such striking ideas as yours? Ah, what was the idea?"

"I don't want to talk about it, Biddy," Freddy said stubbornly.

"That's a black lie. You *do* want to talk about it. At least *I* want to talk about it. And are we not one, my own mouse-ear?"

"We are one if you say we are, Biddy. Well, I had the notion that perhaps Carmody Overlark (everyone has heard of him these last several years) was the same man as Khar-ibn-Mod, a Mameluke diplomat who served an Egyptian Caliph some years back."

"How many years back, Freddy?" (*Those* are innocent eyes?)

"About five hundred years, Biddy. It seems sillier when I say it out loud."

"Why, it doesn't sound silly at all, little blueberry bush."

"Why are you about to bust then, Biddy?" (How can he be a man yet, when this she-kid treats him like a kid?)

"It's my new diet, Freddy; I eat nothing but bubbles now. But I can see how Mr. Tankersley might not dive right into a story like that without being pushed. Why do you think they're the same man, bendy pretzel?"

"Ah, they look a lot alike and their names are kind of alike," Freddy said sadly.

"Theories have been built on slighter bases. They

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didn't stand up very well, though. How would Carmody still be around after five hundred years, little honeylocust? Wouldn't he be either awful dead or awful old?"

"There's an alternative, Biddy, but I shiver at mentioning it. Laughter of a loved one can be very cruel. Not that you would laugh at me till I'm gone."

"And not that you love me when I'm not here. Will you tell it to me all at once or a little at a time?"

"A little at a time, Biddy. I love you but I don't trust you. I can hear Bauer and Manion hooting now when they find out what you've made me do. But there's something to it, Biddy! I know now that there is. You've put me onto something real with your meddling. Biddy, find out all that you can about Carmody Overlark. I'm going to find out what he does and how he does it."

"The guy might have gotten froze in a block of ice in that Egyptian river," the proprietor Hugh Hamtree interrupted. "Then they might have just found him and thawed him out a couple of years ago. They deep-freeze a lot of things now. I can't see where they lose any flavor at all. If he was froze solid quick enough—"

"Leave us, Hamtree," said Biddy. "Our private conversation is not meant for outside or outsized ears. There's a man at the front bar who wants a drink and is too shy to ask for it. Your new cashier is being talked into cashing the hottest check in town, and your check-in boy is robbing you blind at this very minute. Be off, or I'll push you into your own ice-maker machine and freeze you solid quick."

"Freddy, little corn-ball, I'm with you to the end, which may not be very long. It's possible that you're using someone's old kidney for a brain, but you're still my boy. I remember several times you've been right when you hadn't any business to be. I was always for the underdog, and, doggy, you're way way under. How can I help you?"

"Find out everything you can about Carmody Overlark,

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Biddy. Your father and your friends know people who know details about government people. Find out any odd stories that attach to Carmody Overlark, particularly any new ones that have attached to him in the last year or two."

"All right, Freddy, little oyster, I'll find out what I can. Now I have to leave you and go to find another man in his chambers. Don't be jealous. He's only one of those fascinating older men."

"I have to go see a man too, Biddy. He may already be in bed. He may be provoked with me for waking him up. He gets provoked with me quite a bit. Can I call you a taxi?"

"No, my man is within close walking distance. Will you walk out with me? My man gets provoked with me a lot too. Which one of us are those fellows whistling at, my own woolly-worm? Oh, do you turn this way too? We'll walk together a while, then. I'm very worried about this man. It's been several hours and I haven't heard any news or sirens about him."

"Why would there be? What is it? Should there be news? Shall I call my paper?"

"No, I'll call by his place first. By the amount of powder we poured into him, there should be an explosion by now, Freddy. I turn in here. Oh, is your man in this apartment building too? I tell you, little green cantaloupe, we should have made a tiger out of that man by now. He should have started to pull the world down around our ears already. You take a man as smart and great-minded as he is and build a fire inside him. Oh, how did you know to punch seven? That's my floor. Hey, that's got to be yours too, that's the top floor in the building. Here. Thank you, Freddy; you go on to your own man now."

"You go on to your own, Biddy. Oh, were you coming to see Michael Fountain too? He doesn't know I'm coming. Does he know you're coming?"

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"No, I don't think he does. He'll be doubly surprised. Knock and step back, Freddy. He may really have turned into a tiger. He might blast us."

"He's left the door ajar, Biddy. I think he's expecting us, or someone."

"Probably world personages already flocking to—" They went in.

Michael Fountain had only a night-light on. He was wrapped in an old bathrobe and sitting deep in an easy chair. He was sixty years old, lean and lined, only a fringe of pinkish hair around his pate, craggy featured, with a hook to his nose like that of a Plains Indian or an Armenian, but he was perhaps too pale to be either.

"I want to talk to Bedelia, and Freddy wants to talk to me," Fountain said kindly. "Where shall we begin?"

"Oh, begin with Freddy, old earmuff. It will be bloody enough when you start on me," Biddy said, "and you may soften a little in the meantime."

"You think you may have a great silent laugh at Freddy and his caper, Bedelia, and that I will be laughing too. I believe, though, that the several capers of your group have gone past the laughing stage. Just what is it that you want to know about Overlark, Freddy?"

"First I want to know how you knew I wanted to know about Overlark, Mr. Fountain."

"I monitor a few of the antics when I suspect that they are becoming dangerous. The scavengers, who call themselves the Harvesters, instructed you to goof gloriously about Carmody Overlark. What is it, Freddy?"

"I think there's something odd about him. I want to know if you have anything odd. In particular I want to know if there's been any significant change in him in the last year or so, since the beginning of his meteoric rise."

"If he's risen like a meteor then it's quite a dim one,

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for he isn't generally known at all. Oh, reporters and dilettantes will have heard of him, of course, but he isn't a big name. There *has* been one change in him in the last several years, though. He changed his name."

"Oh. From what and to what? And when?"

"From Charles to Carmody, and just about two years ago."

"So the Carmody from the beginning has been Carmody only about two years. Why did he change it?"

"He gave numerology as the reason. And you're about to say that an intelligent man does not believe in numerology? But a man doesn't have to give a reason to change his name legally."

"Did he have anything to hide, Mr. Fountain?"

"As Charles Overlark? No, I don't think so, Freddy. He was obscure, but not much more so than he still is. He was and is wealthy. He's always been a heavy contributor to the party. He's a man of natural status. Beyond that he's known simply as a brilliant amateur."

"At what?"

"Ah, an intellectual, a legend, an amateur of all the arts, and a patron."

"Was he actually an artist in any field?"

"I don't think so. I believe he only collected."

"And as an intellectual, has he actually produced anything?"

"Not that I know of. I believe that here he also collected: intellectuals. It was always assumed, however, that he was incredibly brilliant."

"Always, Mr. Fountain? Or only as an afterthought? Would it be possible that his reputation was inserted back in time a little, and that actually he had no reputation at all before his rise?"

"Yes, that would be possible, Freddy. This sort of thing has happened before. The facts that one has always known were sometimes not really known as late as yesterday. Actually, if I should examine my con-

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science, I'd have to admit that I had scarcely heard of him at all till he was suddenly prominent in his small niche. But there is a retrospect given to him in some manner so that it seems he was always known.

"He isn't a new appearance, though. There have been several well-documented pieces done on him. We can take him back, always in the best circles, to his birth; and we can take his family back as far as we want to go."

"But until his modified meteoric rise he really had nothing but his money to recommend him? He could have been a dolt for all we know?"

"He could have been, Freddy, but he isn't a dolt now. My experience is that dolts are always or ever. . . . I believe that's all you can think of to ask me at this time. But you also wish to ask me questions about another man?"

"No. **About** the same man, Mr. Fountain. What do you know about Khar-ibn-Mod?"

"Hardly anything, Freddy, but I know all that is known about him. I'm surprised that you should even know the name. I didn't know you were a student of the Mohammedan Middle Ages."

"Do you know how he died?"

"No. I don't recall any mention of his death anyplace. How did he die, Freddy?"

"I don't think he did. Have you ever seen the old woodcut of his face that's in the Cambridge *History of the Middle Ages*?"

"Yes. Let me flash it into my mind a moment. I see what you mean, Freddy. He *does* look a little like Carmody Overlark, doesn't he? It's always handy to have good recall as I have. Does the glorious goof consist of this similarity, Freddy?"

"Partly. Recall it again. Does Khar-ibn-Mod have what you would call an Arabian or Egyptian face?"

"Not what *you* would call one, Freddy. But particular

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faces don't really follow racial rules. Besides, the Mamelukes were mostly of Christian European slave origin, taken very young and raised with great selection for their particular duties. I'd say that that face is probably Moravian. So is Overlark's. And the names do chime a common tone, don't they, Freddy? No. I don't laugh at you; I've met such coincidental ghosts before. Anything else about your man or men?"

"Do you know whether Khar-ibn-Mod suffered from asthma?"

"Not that I know of. He didn't live in an asthma climate. But he could well have suffered, and we would still be ignorant of it."

"Carmody Overlark suffers from asthma—these last two years. I found out that much about him myself. Thank you, Mr. Fountain. It's your turn, Biddy."

"Oh. Yes, Freddy, leave us now. Mr. Fountain has some harsh things to say to me and they are not for callow ears. Out, little crackerjack-prize, out."

"I will not. You've witnessed my own bleeding of words, my own great goofing. I'll hear what comes to you. Besides, I'm still a reporter, and you two become momentous people in a very peculiar business that's going on."

"Your little group has killed my favorite nephew and namesake, Bedelia," Michael Fountain said.

"Mikey? Has he died? But he wasn't expected to live. We didn't kill him, he was dying anyhow. Not that I'm callous. Did they call you that he was dead?"

"No. I called them first, to be sure. I had the feeling. He had just died, and I'm not quite sure that he would have otherwise. You and your group are playing a dangerous game, Bedelia, a dangerous and ignorant game."

"Of course we're ignorant. We're pioneers as well as Harvesters and we go into unknown regions. But we're going to set fires in very select persons; we're going to mutate them, with a great psychic wave sweeping over

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them in the evening time when certain rays are most likely for it. And we've done it to you, Michael, we've done it to you. We've made change in you, and now you'll use your great talents in ways you refused to use them before."

"No, you have not done it to me, Bedelia."

"But we have! I was in your mind, we all were. You slipped us, and then we took you from under. We got you, we exploded in you."

"No, you did not. I slipped you, and then I slipped you again, clumsy kids that you are. But you killed Mikey, invoking the same name, and you may have entered another somehow."

"No. You. We were in your under-mind. We reveled there. You don't know it now, but you *will* know it. We've planted you and it grows in you."

"No, Biddy, I slipped you almost completely. I'll have to find out who you did revel in. I will have to see about undoing the harm you've done to somebody. It was not myself, it was not Mikey except glancingly, but it was somebody somehow attached to me, for I felt it strongly. I cannot at the moment imagine who it was. I have no other namesakes that I recall. But it was somebody whose mind has touched mine, who was in a certain accord with me, a young man's mind, and I do not know whose. You're sure you don't know who you bit into, Bedelia?"

"Yes, it was you, you!"

"Not at all. You assault strangers, and at a distance, and perhaps to their deaths. It has to stop."

"It will *not* stop, Michael, old moss-rock. We break new roads. We induce the new human evolution. And you can't even guess what we will do next."

"Of course I have guessed it. You will attempt mutation on yourselves, or perhaps it will be mutilation. It will not work."

"It will work! We've seen the castle on top of the hill.

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We'll climb that hill, we'll be the first people ever to climb it. We'll be the first super-people, the first people able to grasp the vision. And we'll lead the rest of humanity up to it. We wanted you to be our first leader, but you've failed us."

"Don't do it, Bedelia. It is likely to kill one or all of you."

"What of it? Surely the chance is worth taking. Despise us, loathe us! We'll show you. We'll redeem you all. We'll make the breakthrough to intellectualized, celestialized, chthonized, socialized, paranaturalized, cosmosized, one-other-word-that-I-forgot."

"Oh shut up, Biddyl" Fountain snapped angrily. "Freddy, drag her and her drivel out of here."

And Freddy Foley dragged Bedelia Bencher out of Michael Fountain's apartment.

"Twas thus they stoned the prophets!" Biddy sang defiantly as the door slammed intolerantly behind them.

"You're all of you stoned, Biddy," Freddy told her, "and not on honest hooch either. Get off it, Biddy; that's a crazy bunch you're running with."

"You will notice, Freddy, that my feet do not touch the sidewalk," Biddy said a little later. "I am walking on air two inches above the sidewalk. I would walk higher but then I'd be too high to walk with you."

"You're too high to be walking with anyone anyhow. But why'd you just stumble if you're walking on air?"

"Air-pocket. Oh, I am etherealized, Freddy, I'm a new person entirely. I'll go to my own place now and become cosmic. I don't blink anymore, I haven't blinked for hours; I believe that blinking is a trait of mankind in the transitional stage. I will never blink again. I will not close my eyes again ever, not in life nor in death. I am mistress of all worlds and visions. I will go and paint weird pictures on my eyeballs now. Why not? I don't need them for seeing. I can see with every part of me.

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Why are you turning into the alley, Freddy? That's the back door of City Museum down there."

"I know it. The night watchman is a friend of mine. I go talk to him sometimes when I can't sleep at night; and, Biddy, I sure can't sleep at night lately. Not since you snakes spit snake juice in my eye. And now my own girl has turned into one of the snakes. I wish I hadn't seen it happen, Biddy."

"But I am glorious now, Freddy, glorious and glorified. I've already learned a lot of the patter that we Harvesters use. Now if I can figure out what it means I'll be two steps up. I haven't really turned into a snake, Freddy. Good night."

"And find out what you can about Carmody Overlark, Biddy."

"All right, little back-end of a glowworm, I will."

Freddy rapped on an old bronze panel of the back door of City Museum. "One hundred and nineteen long knocks and one short" was the code between the friends, but Freddy never had to knock that many times. The door whispered open. The friend was a young man named Selim Elia, a young Syrian man who loved the museum and faithfully watched over it by night.

"Freddy cannot sleep at night." Selim smiled as he closed the outer door again and led Fred Foley through the dim entry-room. "He sleeps well in the daytime but he sure can't sleep at night. Are the flaming ducks after you again, Freddy?"

"Something like that. Dead ducks keep flopping up in live people, yes, dead snakes and toads. Did you ever look at your girl and suddenly discover that she had toad's eyes, Selim?"

"Mine has basilisk's eyes, Freddy, much more sophisticated. Is it the live things or the dead things that are bothering you tonight, Freddy?"

"It's those that won't make up their mind which they

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are. See, there are these brain folks that Biddy runs around with, three Shes out of Haggard and three Borgia types out of Baron Corvo. They mix up this brain stuff and put it out in psychic jolts. It knocked me to my knees the first time they used it on me. Tonight they tried it on Mike Fountain. He slipped them, but it killed his nephew and bit into someone else. Now they're raising up something that would be better dead, and they've put me onto a man who ought to be dead. I want to wander around the museum a while. *I know the things here are dead.*"

"No, Freddy, they are not. There is not one dead thing here. You don't understand, Freddy. It is not natural for things to stay dead; it sure is not natural for people to stay dead. You can hear them still, all over this place at night, rocks, bones, skulls, whole people. They get tired waiting for time to get up."

"Selim, your mother was a wanton dromedary. Let's go through the dead rooms. Which is the Aztec room, this? Yes. But it's never too peaceful here. Even the stone faces don't seem dead enough."

"Oh, they are not, Freddy. Look at the mean eyes on that one, and his head no bigger than an apple. Don't put a finger near him, you might lose it. That one got crossways with a rock witch over a girl. The rock witch shrunk him first and then turned him into stone but he sure didn't kill him. Do his eyes look dead?"

"No. But they're only mica or rock-crystal set in obsidian stone. There's nothing alive in here except the imagination."

"All right, then *put* your finger near it, Freddy, *try it.*"

"I will not. Let's find something deader than these rocks."

Freddy Foley looked at dolls, at stuffed wolverines and kit-foxes, at Indian artifacts, at suits of Spanish armor curiously boys'-sized. But he had a new lead

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growing in his mind. He avoided a room on three sides of it, going around and looking at other things. Then he went into the Egyptian room and Selim Elia followed him.

"Now, this is dead," Freddy said. "These are things you can have confidence in. The same dead things here forever. Pta bless Egypt!"

"Ah, but we have one new piece, Freddy. It is a life-mask and that is unusual. We have many Egyptian death-masks, but this is specifically called a life-mask. It is a molded portrait made on a man then living, and it is the finest thing we have."

"Whose is it? I don't want to see it. Where is it?"

"Behind you, Freddy. We've had it for only two days. It has been verified and authenticated before we got it. The life-mask is that of a civil servant who served under Akhnaton, the heretic king of Egypt. We don't know the man's exact station."

"Special Assistant to Secretary of State," Fred Foley said.

"Really? You have toad's eyes yourself when you try to be mysterious. It's behind you, Freddy. You can't see it the way you are standing."

"Oh, I can see a little without eyeballs myself. How old is the life-mask?"

"Oh, King Akhnaton lived around 1350 B.C., or around 900 B.C., if you follow the timetable of Velikovsky."

"Well, what's the name of the mask?"

"Kir-Ha-Mod is the translation, but we are not sure of the vowels. I myself believe that it should be transliterated as Kar-Ha-Mod."

"I think so too," Fred Foley said, and he turned sullenly to look at the mask. "Ah, it's yourself!" he jibed at the thing. "And it's my belief that you are only the mask of a mask, sir. Tell me, Car-whatever, do you know who is wearing the mask itself today? Selim, did you just slip a piece of paper into my pocket?"

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"No, Freddy. I'm standing ten feet from you. Tell me what this is, Freddy. Mystery doesn't become you."

"It's the same face three times, it's the same name three times. Selim, how would you say Overlark in old Egyptian?"

"Ka-Ra, which means both the food of Ra and the soul of Ra, is also the word for a lark. I don't know what Overlark means, though, other than a name."

"Neither do I. This piece of paper, Selim, which you didn't slip into my pocket, gives a certain address, and it tells me to go there right now."

"You are a reporter. Go there. It may have been in your pocket for hours, though, and you just noticed it now. You may have put it there yourself and forgotten it. You know how you are. But go there, tonight or in the morning. Remember, you're the boy who never passes up a tip on anything. You told me so yourself."

"I'll go right now. It says right now. It says to come alone. I'm scared of it but I'll go. Say, those guys are talking Mexican-Spanish and they're cooking up something big. They might really jolt the world, that guy and those he's gathered."

"What guys, Freddy? Those of the address where you're going?"

"Oh no, other guys entirely. Selim, I bet I know something that they don't know about their own brain-weave, and they invented it."

"Who, the Mexican-Spanish plotters?"

"No, the Shes and the Borgias, Biddy's group. You get plugged into their brain-weave and you stay plugged in. They plug into someone else, and you're connected too. And sometimes now I'm connected with him and they're not. Well, one snake-pit at a time; I'll go to the address. It's a spooky part of town, especially this late at night, but I knew it when I was a kid and I still know it. Good night, Selim."

"Good night, Freddy. And, Freddy, you aren't the

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only one who's noticed the resemblance of the life-mask to Carmody Overlark. It's been a joke around the museum for these two days."

III: IF THEY CAN KILL YOU, I CAN KILL YOU WORSE

We have gone higher and deeper than anyone has gone before. We have solved problems that were always regarded as impossible of solution. We have reached a certain firm height in material and physical and spiritual being. We have come up in powerful, loose, integrated movement, and with profound freshness and creativity in our group soul; and we have seen the high pastures beyond. We come to the verge, to the mansions of the fourth height, in a moving moment of dizzy expectation and extreme danger, up under a new Heaven with a new Earth in our hands. *Don't drop it!*

Second Trefoil Lectures: Michael Fountain

FRED FOLEY swung along with a jauntiness of expectation. This was a section of town that he had always been a little frightened of, but the frightening elements were from his childhood.

There had been a brick factory here once. The offices of the company were still here, but the hive-shaped baking kilns were now at another location. It had been from the intense fires of those kilns that Freddy Foley, walking in the evenings with his father and not yet four years old, had got his idea of Hell. Should he be probed even today it would be found that

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he had a concrete idea of Hell, that it is hive-shaped like a brick baking kiln and of an eye-burning fire inside.

And with this idea was an early story told him by Sylvester Larker, that they had put a little boy into one of the kilns and burned him up. No reason was given for this. In small boys' stories no reason is ever given for any act, nor is it asked. They burned the little boy all up except his eyes, which turned into agates. These were the same two agates that Sylvester Larker used for taws. They would seek out the marbles for themselves, they never missed; Sylvester Larker had been marble champion. And he had given these two agates to Freddy.

All his life, people would be giving valuable things to Fred Foley unasked: gifts, powers, lives, worlds, secrets.

Also, in this part of town, there had been the brick pit itself, likely the deepest hole on earth. It had a narrow-gauge railway track down in it, and the little cars that shuttled back and forth were wound up from it by cables. There had always been water in the bottom of the pit, however much they pumped it out. And once a little boy had drowned there. He was of Freddy's age, four then, and he was the first dead person that Freddy was ever permitted to see.

There were other elements in that old section which had abiding effect on Freddy Foley. The people of that neighborhood had kept both cows and hogs long after it was forbidden by ordinance to keep them in town. And pigeons—all the families had kept pigeons. There is no accounting for the manner in which pigeons had become sinister to Freddy; it was surely in connection with some story which he no longer remembered. In the early days of that neighborhood, many of the houses still had barns; the barns had lofts, and lofts always have pigeons.

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Hound dogs too. The Stamfords had hounds, the Dugans had hounds, the Collyers had both bird-dogs and hang-dog hounds; and kids who have strings of hounds are just naturally tough. This is fact, whatever the explanation of it.

There were the railroads, very strong in the complex of memories. The district was in the V of two lines which joined forces there before they went downtown, and it was there that they always hit their whistles. There had been sidings to the cottonseed-oil plant, to the brickyard, to a fire-belching foundry, to a boilermaker's. There was the waste land that is always about rail junctions, bogs, weed patches, small pastures, large vacant lots, genuine woods with streams, clay cliffs honeycombed with boys' and hobos' caves, and the Old Show Grounds. The Show Grounds held the carnivals, all the circuses except Ringling's, which was too big for it; and in times between it was always occupied by families of Indians, Gypsies or Mexicans.

Among these was the Larker family. The Larkers could have been any of the three, or could have been something else. Toney, who was Freddy's age, said that they were Indians, that they really owned the whole town-site, that they were going to take it back and make the people pull down all the buildings, and then they would kill them all by putting green rawhide around their necks and setting them out in the sun. This shrank the rawhide and strangled the people to death.

Sylvester, who was two years older than Freddy, said that they were Mexicans, and for proof of this he had a Mexican knife that had killed sixteen men. But Leo Joe Larker, who was the oldest of the Larkers and four years older than Freddy, said that they were Gypsies. He said that they could tell who was going to be murdered and who was going to die that year. He said, moreover, that they could work magic, and that he himself had raised a man from the dead.

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But Freddy's father had said that the Larkers were a black-necked bunch of Irish tinkers, the last of them, and that the world would be better when they were gone. The Larkers had a shack that was clapboards on the bottom and canvas on top.

This was the first time in a dozen years that Freddy had been back to that district where he had been raised. He knew about where the address would be. He was going to a meeting with a person whose name he did not know, answering a summons which he had received in an unknown way. "Walk there, and talk to no one, and do it at once," the note said. "You will barely have time."

The face of this district had changed somewhat, but the feeling of it had not. Freddy knew that it was still occupied by the toughest boys in town and that they were no longer small boys. As reporter he knew that the bars here were dingier and rougher than bars elsewhere, that most of the burglars in town lived here, that crimes of violence in the district had a shamefully high index, that there were stories going around more macabre than those Freddy had heard in childhood.

The quarter had always been built up in tight knots of buildings separated by empty spreads. There was something oriental about the crowdedness of the buildings, something medieval about the high-gabled look of them. There were still the vacant lots, still the woods that threatened to take over the whole place with a sudden rush, still the street lights broken out as often as they were replaced.

The house of the address (it had to be the address, though it could not be read in the dark) was a tipsy four-storied frame building with no light at all except a cigarette in the open door. It was a squat earth-giant winking with a small red eye. But what gave Fred Foley the creeps was that he knew what man was standing there, and he couldn't have. Ah well, a fellow who

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raised a man from the dead when he was no more than nine years old will always have a certain presence about him.

"Hello, Leo Joe," Freddy said boldly. "Is it yourself I am to meet?" It was Leo Joe Larker standing there still unseen, either as blood-curdling boy or as man.

"You know my name? I underestimated you. I'll have to find out how you know my name, since it wasn't told to you," said the black gap behind the cigarette.

"You haven't changed, Leo Joe, except in your voice. I used to know you when we were boys. I can't see you in that dark doorway, though." Nothing was changed in Leo Joe except his voice. But the voice was all that could be encountered of him. If the boy's voice could not be recognized in the man, and if the man himself was invisible in the dark, then what was it that identified him?

"You haven't changed from before?" Freddy added.

"Not changed from what before? But yes, you were the fearful little boy. You had a dog named Popcorn," the voice said.

"And now I am Fearless Freddy," Fred Foley said. "I ask you again. Is it with you that I have this informal appointment?"

"No, Foley, I'm an interloper."

"I'd rather deal direct, Leo Joe."

"I'm putting in first claim on you."

"What for?"

"If you're threatened in any way tonight, and you will be, just consider that I have an override on all threats to you."

"But if my meeting isn't with you, how do you have any part of it?"

"Never mind my part. Upstairs you're going to be threatened by a couple of rough-talking gentlemen. They overdo their threats. But then they also overdo their execution of them. They can kill you, and there's a fair

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likelihood that they will. It's one thing to be threatened in a very heavy and outmoded style; it's another thing to be killed in that same outmoded style."

"What will they want me to do?"

"They'll want you to lay off the line of inquiry you're on."

"Well, what do you want me to do?"

"I want you to stay on it, Foley. Be dumb, blind, blundering, and silly, but stay on it. You may be dumb enough to get to the core of it."

"Well, will you help me with it, Leo Joe? I'm totally in the dark."

"No, I won't help you. And you seem able to see in the dark tonight. No, you have to go on your own all the way with it. I'm just telling you *not* to lay off. If they can kill you, Foley, I can kill you worse. If they can scare you, I can outdo them at that too. Now go up to your appointment. You better not be late."

"What will I do?"

"Whatever they tell you to do, don't. Whatever they tell you not to do, do it. But say what you have to, to get out of there alive. And don't keep any more appointments in dark rooms with people you don't know."

"If the appointments are in the line of my inquiries, I *will* keep them. Ah, do you ever see any of the old kids, Leo Joe?"

"I don't know anything about old kids. I'm probably not who you think I am." The man came out of the doorway still wrapped in dark, passed by Freddy Foley silently and disappeared. He didn't look much like Leo Joe Larker should have grown up to look like; he hadn't sounded like him at all. The dark glimpse had shown a man who might be a Negro. The voice, remembered now, had something of that tone. Nevertheless, Fred Foley believed that this interloper man had been Leo Joe Larker when he was a boy.

Foley entered the dark doorway of the building. He

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felt his way up the stairway. It wasn't too difficult. All these old wooden apartments were built alike. This one, Freddy now suspected, was empty and condemned; and he knew that the only light he would see would be one coming from under the door of a room on the top floor. He knew his appointment would be in such a room, though the note hadn't told him of that.

Freddy saw the slit of light as he shuffled to the top step. He opened the door and went in. He pulled up a chair and sat down at the table with the three men. "It's your move," Fred Foley said.

"You've been asking questions about a man who has been replaced," the first man said heavily. It was pretty dim in there. The light that Foley had seen slitted under the door was from some sort of carbide lantern such as hunters use. The lantern was sitting on the floor and did not illuminate the faces of the men well. Apparently the utilities were off in this building. "Don't you know that you can be replaced as easily?" that first man asked.

"No. If I thought I could be replaced, I wouldn't worry so much about myself. How can I be replaced?"

"By another man named Fred Foley who would be identical to you in appearance. But he won't be going around asking questions," that first man said.

"Actually I wasn't asking questions about a man who has been replaced," Freddy said. "I think I've been asking questions about a man who replaced another. That's where my interest lies."

"Then you're asking questions about the wrong man, Foley. Your own situation is like that of the man who was replaced. You should wonder what happened to him."

"I hadn't given him a thought. All right, I wonder what did happen to him?"

"He ended, Foley, and without a trace. It can happen to you, tomorrow, even tonight. You would not be at

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all. You would be worse than dead. And not only would there be no trace of you, but there would be no one wondering where you went. Another Fred Foley would be walking around in your clothes, wearing your face and your body, living in your rooms, holding your job. But he wouldn't be you. And you wouldn't be anything, anywhere."

"So I should stop asking questions?"

"You should stop even thinking questions," the second man at the table said.

"The replaced man may not be in complete oblivion," Freddy hazarded. "I may follow that line of inquiry by being a replaced man and seeing where it leads."

"We won't be mysterious about it," said the third man at the table. "It leads to physical death. Some of the victims die in pretty heavy agony. Some of the dispatchers get a lot of fun out of it. It's my own kind of fun. You can follow that line of inquiry if you want to, Foley, but it will be hard to get your story back from the other side."

Foley passed his hand before his eyes. There wasn't anything there. It had been as though a strand of gossamer or spider-silk had touched him. Those things aren't very thick. It would take a lot of them to entangle a man. It was an old spider-silk, though, and it dangled out of a web of old memories.

This room, this old rooming house, was on the edge of the Old Show Grounds where the carnivals used to set up. Foley remembered one show where a man sawed a lady in half. What happened, someone had told him, was that the man didn't saw her in two at all; it was a trick. But what really happened, Leo Joe Larker had told him (Leo Joe the boy who seemed to have grown into an altogether different man), was that the man sawed her in two all right and she died. Then they got a different lady to show the people out in front. They used up about five ladies a day with the

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act. Freddy had always believed Leo Joe's explanation of how it was done, rather than the weak silly stories that others had given him. "But what do they do with all the dead ladies?" he had asked Leo Joe at the time. That had brought on another story, for there *was* an unusual disposition of the bodies of the sawed-in-half women. It wasn't very practical, though, and he doubted if these three men here would use the same method. What he had asked then and what he almost asked now was "Why would anybody want to kill all the ladies?"

But what he really asked out loud now was "Why would anyone want to kill Fred Foley?"

"Why *we* might want to kill you is that you have asked too many questions," that third man said. "You asked them of quite a few people. You even asked them of one person who belongs to our group."

"You should wear badges."

"Bravado doesn't become you very well, Foley," said the second man at the table. He was leaner and sharper and more silent than the other two men. "You have little nervous tricks that indicate that you aren't brave at all."

"I know that, men. But I also have sudden impulses that make me so brave that I scare myself. Don't count on me being either way. I don't."

"I doubt that we'll have any more trouble with you, Foley," said the first man. "One way or another, *we will see to it* that we don't."

"Remember, it could happen to you tomorrow," the third man said. "It could happen to you yet tonight."

That was dismissal. Fred Foley left them. The slash of light was under the door for a moment after he closed it on them. Then it was extinguished. They had put out even the lantern. Fred Foley felt his way down the stairs, bumped into a wall at one of the lower landings (those old apartments were not built absolutely alike, and besides Freddy had now lost the illusion that

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he could see in the dark), came finally out of the shanty doorway and into the dark street.

The effect that the men had had on him was submerged somewhat in the effect that the district had always had on him. He discounted the encounter much as he used to discount the stories of the Larker boys. But he was not quite sure that those three men might not kill him that very night, just as he had never been quite sure that Leo Joe Larker had not raised a man from the dead.

He walked rapidly the mile toward downtown and his own rooms. He talked to himself, and then to another.

"Take it easy, Miguel," he said. "You can't get it all rolling in one night. Hey, you're gathering a pretty salty bunch already, though. How could I find you if I wanted to join you?"

He was getting a sort of contact with someone who had also been assaulted by the brain-weave. He called him Miguel and not Michael, but he knew there had been a link between the two.

He wasn't through for the night. He needed to ask more questions of someone. He wouldn't go back to Michael Fountain tonight. That man would surely be short with him on a second visit. Fred Foley needed to talk with someone who knew more things than did Michael Fountain.

But there was no such person, not in his acquaintance.

Well then, he needed to talk to someone who knew sorts of things that even Michael Fountain didn't know. And there was only one such person, a blockish ungainly fraud, but he did know things outside the lines.

And here was his very broken and unkempt street here on the edges of shanty-town. Fred Foley turned down it toward the diggings of Bertigrew Bagley.

The authors of the brain-weave believe that they have

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transmitted somehow through polarized one-way glass; but it is two-way. The return way is open even when the senders are unaware, and all those who have been touched by the weave are themselves somehow in touch, even when the weavers or Harvesters are asleep.

Thus Freddy Foley now sometimes impinged on the entity for whom he had found the name of Miguel. (He still believed it to be a separated fragment of Michael Fountain. But Miguel, raising an army to take over the world, had already enlisted eight men, three of whom knew where they could get rifles, and this all in one night. Fred Foley knew of this part but he didn't know how to appraise it.) Freddy also impinged on the devious mind of Carmody Overlark, but this always lost him in a laughing swamp.

However, one portion of the brain-weave itself was not now completely asleep. She was wandering in a fitful delirium, not frightful (for it was one of the Shes out of Haggard and nothing could frighten them), but puzzling (even to her of the initiation and the strong psychic powers), frustrating, a rambling-in-waste-places delirium. "I have borne a child out of my body," she said, "I expected him to be beautiful and full of light. Instead of that, he is a deformed monkey." (She had not actually borne any child out of her body except Iracema, a girl who was now eleven years old; but this was another sort of image.) "I wonder if anyone else will notice that he is a deformed monkey," she said. "Many babies look like deformed monkeys, and people are polite about it. I could be loud and confident and carry it off, I know; but perhaps it would be better to destroy the child and bear another one tomorrow. A great thing will happen to me before that, and the child I bear tomorrow night may really be beautiful and full of light."

(This She was the ashen-haired, pale or moon-colored slim woman who had been painted by Burne-Jones sev-

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eral times. She was Letitia Bauer, the danger-loving one of the Harvesters; but even she was not sure in her surety.)

Then the slob came into Freddy's mind. This may have been because he now neared the slob's diggings; or the slob himself may have been a target of the brain-weave. The slob was the sort of man that the Harvesters might try to have fun with, just as they had had fun with Freddy himself.

Two crammed and ponderous minds in two such different containers. Michael Fountain was the very image of distinction, urbane, mannered, of regal appearance and voice, respected in the several communities: an elegant decanter. Bertigrew Bagley was fat and ungainly, grown old ungracefully, balded and shaggy at the same time, rheumy of eyes and with his mouth full of rotten teeth, discredited, violent and vulgar: an earthen pot, and a cracked one at that. But he knew some things that even Michael Fountain didn't know.

Fred Foley had been there once before, as a reporter, trying to pin some ugly rumors on the flush-faced old mountebank. He hadn't been able to pin them on him, and he had been treated better than he deserved.

Freddy went down the three steps to the heavy door and pounded on it. He knew (he shivered at the memory of it) that there was another flight of steps leading down inside. He pounded harder and had the feeling that his pounding could not be heard. He remembered that all doors into Bagley's den were iron-sheeted and muffled, and could be barred with series of long steel bars. He remembered something else. He struck a match to see, and it was so. There was still the plaque there: DAMNED DOOR NOT LOCKED. COME IN.

Freddy went in fearfully. Fearless Freddy was afraid of certain small things that had bitten him before. He stepped carefully, knowing it would be no good. He

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avoided one rolling thing and slipped on another. Fred Foley fell down the flight of stairs.

He cursed, but not unhappily. It was always adventure to visit Bagley. The place was dark and empty. Then it leaped to half light, and the big man came in and filled it, laughing with a hooting like hippopotami, slipping into a big chair made of a barrel cut down, ensconcing himself behind a big table built out of freight skids.

"You do it best of anyone who comes to visit me, Foley!" Bagley boomed. "Anyone who falls down stairs like that can't be all bad."

"That was a trap!" Freddy snapped, somewhat elated however and knowing that nothing was broken. "Stairs should be kept clear."

"No, they should not," Bagley told him. "Steps are made to put things on. A man is entitled to store what he wants to on his own steps; there's no better place for sorting things out. A man has to use his eyes, Foley, even in the dark. What's the idea of coming here without an appointment?" Bagley was a crackpot, but it was not an ordinary pot that had cracked. It was a giant grotesque Gothic garboon.

And always at Bagley's just around the corner of eyesight, was the dog-ape, the plappergeist that served Bagley. Freddy could not see the thing directly, but he could see its friendly wink. The thing liked Fred Foley. This spook-animal-person went through walls easily and could be inside or outside.

"You ought to have a light so a man could see where he's going, Bagley," Fred said.

"I have one light in the place; that's enough. I said what's the idea of coming here without an appointment?"

"Would you have given me an appointment if I'd asked?"

"Of course not. Damnation, man! I didn't know you

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had a bottle! You should have hollered that you had it before you started down. You could have broke it when you fell."

This Bagley had a fantastic erudition (though much of what he knew happened not to be so), a fertile mind, a gift for invective that had left scar tissue on the great and near great for a generation and a half, a wanton contempt for all mankind except a few always temporary favorites, and a deep love for a red-necked brawl. You will remember him writing under the by-line of B.B.B. (he was known as Beetle-Browed Bagley) before he was totally discredited.

"Well, what are you after, Foley?" Bagley asked him after Foley had opened the bottle, pulled up a sort of cobbler's bench, and joined Bagley at the big table built of freight skids. "You came as a slippery reporter before and tried to hang me with a raffish rope. And now I believe that you are involved with a group that has tried to burglarize my mind. They cannot do it. I've a series of long steel bars that I can set into the doors of my mind also. What are you after? I ask you. You don't love me enough to visit without a motive."

"I have a motive, Bagley," Freddy said. "You rode an old horse that got you laughed off the public scene: the old Hidden-Hand running through History and Affairs. It's quite a nag. Now I find myself riding the same horse."

"You're sure you know which end of the horse to get on, Foley?"

"No."

"Because I didn't either. It's a double-rumped cayuse. I never did find the head."

"Did you ever really have anything, Bagley?"

"I thought I did. Now I'm not sure. I believe I was close to something, but I may have been mistaken as to its shape, size, color, and motive."

"Did you ever have anything on Carmody Overlark?"

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"Him? No. He rose after I had set. He has all the earmarks of one of them, though. I do not use the phrase as cliché. You have heard of the archaic smile and such. Let me assure you that there is such a thing as the archaic ear. He has it, and most of them have it. The ear is the only appendage of man that has evolved at all during the recorded or pictorial history period. This would be clearer, of course, if the ear left skeletal or bone remains. But the archaic ear has a touch of Pan, and all these repeaters have it."

"When I say this, Foley, I see a look in your eye that is familiar to me; it has been turned on me often enough. When I threw it all over and retired, Foley, I went to a doctor, the least quackish I could find. I asked him to go over me from stem to stern (I told him I didn't know which end my brains were in) and tell me frankly whether I was crazy. He did a thorough job on me, probing both mind and body. When he was finished I asked him for his decision. 'Am I crazy?' I asked him. 'One of us is, Bagley, one of us is,' he told me. That's about as fair a verdict as any man has ever given me."

"I was wondering if there's also an archaic look in the eye."

"Yes. There is, and you have just used it. The ancient skepticism. Which part of the horse are you working to, Foley?"

"The nether ribs, I think. You hinted once that there were certain types of contrary men who occurred so persistently in history that you were double-damned if you didn't suspect that there were certain *individuals* recurring in history."

"Yes, I did hint that, and for that I was crucified upside-down like St. Peter. It's a good thing I didn't say it right out loud. What is your question, Foley?"

"Did you have any theory or idea at all to go with your harebrained hint?"

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"There are several theories. Reincarnation seemed to me to be the most likely. I have about a thousand pages of tables worked out, but they don't really jibe unless I cheat on them. I have even applied what I call my epicyclic adjustment to them. In Ptolemaic astronomy, when it was found that the planets did not act as if the Earth were the center, then it was necessary to plot their courses as smaller circles about points on larger circles. The theory had to be propped up."

"When I found that chronological reincarnation was not the answer to the reappearance of perverse men, then I had to add a grotesque appendage to my theory. An evil man dies; and he is followed by another evil man of startling similarity. But the death dates and the birth dates do not coincide. In my thousand pages of tables, I have only six cases that may possibly fit, and even with these I have to juggle a handful of days, or assume minor errors. So I have posed the possibility to myself that the dead man does not necessarily come to inhabit the boy at his birth, or at his conception (for I also tried to make that fit), but may appear in him in early childhood, or with the coming of the years of reason, or even later."

"At the merging of latest youth with middle age?"

"You mean Carmody Overlark? I don't know. That seems a late entry, but there are others even later. My theory remains a very rickety one, however much I prop it up. Can't you afford better whisky than this, Foley?"

"No. But you're convinced there is something in your theory?"

"I am convinced that certain evil men reappear in history in their own personalities. I am still looking for the explanation of it. I believe you have begun to nibble at the same bait."

"You're convinced that they're evil? All of them evil?"

"Certainly. What need has a good man to return?"

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They are crawling evil. This Overlark whom you are tracking down, you surely see that he is of evil effect."

"Not at all. I was hoping that the returning genii were a benign influence. I've been looking for something to hope in for a long while."

"Foley, man, he's of the old crippling persuasion."

"You know, Bagley, that your views were never popular, even at your peak. And now you've been reduced to a party of one."

"Oh no, there's many of us around, and each of us is worth a thousand of the others."

"Overlark is a brilliant man in the Humanist Tradition."

"At the name of which even buzzards gag."

"I can understand the reason for your unpopularity, Bagley. But now I'm only interested in the reappearances themselves. I haven't attempted to analyze the effect of them."

"My old dog is restless outside, Foley. Someone is laying for either you or myself. I have been beaten up once already this week, and that's par; so I suppose someone is after you. Don't get yourself killed too easily. Foley, you are a slack-eared pup and a disgrace to the Irish. I'd throw you down the stairs if we weren't already at the lowest level. Now sit quietly and finish the bottle, and then you'll have to go. You may not be completely hopeless, however. Once you get your hands onto the thing you will learn a little of its nature. You'll feel the rot of it, the leprosy that will not be stamped out. And you'll see that its face is always respectability. But if you follow it up to the end you will not be respectable yourself. You'll be branded as I have been; you'll find what a tight setup they really have. And you'll see how it is almost impossible that their leaders could have become so astute in a single life. And as you look back you'll come on a man, and you'll come on

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him again and again, and you'll know that he is the same man just as well as you know anything at all.

"Then you'll wonder (Lord how you'll wonder!) how many of them there really are. How wide is that preternatural brotherhood? There've been a hundred points where mankind was frustrated from real clarification and grace. At each of those points you will find one of those evil men. Who directs them? And why do they obstruct while they mouth progress and enlightenment?"

"You believe in preternatural brotherhoods, do you, Bagley?"

"Belonging to one myself, certainly I do."

"Well, I don't agree that they're evil, or that they're plural. I know one man who has lived too long or too often. But you, Bagley, see everything in black and white."

"Say, that's a pretty good phrase, Foley. Wait a minute till I write it down. Oh, I have some men in my collection who've lived a dozen times. I do not see everything in black or white. I see most things in the four or five central colors or forces. In the middle, of course, is that malodorous worm whom we call common man. He is mud-colored. And around him are the four sorts of creatures who assail him while they claim to love him, but mine is the only sort that actually loves him. Foley, did someone tell you tonight to stop asking questions?"

"They did, and I won't. I'll ask questions till my larynx falls out."

"Boy, you're in danger. Myself, I've always been able to counter them or evade them, but you're not that smart."

"I'm as smart as I need to be, Bagley. What are the four sorts of creatures?"

"Oh, it is all allegory and beyond the comprehension of flatlanders. Foley, a supreme word of contempt is

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'flatlander.' Somehow there is the belief that people in the Dark Ages believed that the world was flat. They didn't. But it is the contemptuous ones of today who have made a really flat world that is the sad answer to everything. What is wrong with the world and why is it not worth living in? It's flat, that's what. Foley, I have a little room under this rough floor. It's black and full of water but it has a cot. Go down there, they are after you tonight. I know these things. If they come here they will only work me over and I've been worked over often. But they'll kill you if they find you here. It'd mean that you were still asking questions."

"Dammit, fat man, I *will* ask questions and I won't hide. Now tell me what the four sorts of creatures are. I'm not stupid. That's only the permanent impression I leave."

"Oh, the four sorts of creatures that surround the Castle are the Pythons, the Toads, the Badgers and the Unfledged Falcons."

"Oh what botching! Unbotch it, Bagley. Where do you get your drivel?"

"I have it anciently from my own ancient person and position. And beyond that, there are hints of it in the unguarded passages of Anacharsis Clootz, *who was one of us*. Some of it's from the beautiful things of a lady named Teresa Cepeda, born a little after Columbus died. He only discovered continents; she discovered the Castle itself. Hers also was a Spanish venture and it will be weighed in the final balance. Did you know that nations as well as persons will be judged at the final judgment? She will be judged for Spain."

"If I didn't know that you sometimes have a kernel inside the rotten shell I'd give up on you, Bagley. Get specific. What sort of creature am I? Which are you?"

"You are one of the malodorous worms, Foley, the commonality of mankind, the simplicity. Me, I'm a badger."

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"Damn if you're not, you snap-jawed fool. Well, what are the others?"

"Your meddling friends, the mind burglars, what do you call them? the brain-weavers, the Harvesters, they belong to the pythons, Foley. But always remember that pythons are prophetic. I don't know why this should be. It seems unfair; prophecy should be given to worthier creatures. These pythons sometimes call themselves the intelligentsia, sometimes the gnostics. They are not knowing, though, they are fools. But they are the proverbial fools who rush in; and, rushing in, they take by storm. Remember first that they are snakes; and second that they are prophetic snakes."

"You may be both parts right about them, Bagley. But I'm still interested in a man or men who live more than once, or seem to. Do they classify among your creatures?"

"Certainly. The revenants are the toads. They sleep or they die under stones for years or centuries, and then they come out from under the stones. But there is either a legend or fairy tale of the toad with a jewel set in his head. These returners really have the jewel, and it may be the jewel of knowledge. They have this bright thing, just as the pythons have their prophecy; and I wish we had it ourselves."

"All right. What are the badgers? Tell me about them. You are one."

"Foley, it would take many hours to tell about us. We entrench in the earth and we retain an old empire. I don't joke. Ours is the real; but even if I should tell you all about it you would regard us as a network of lodges or curious societies or comical conventions. Can you not see that it is your apparent government and world that is these things? Foley, there are alternate worlds going on all the time, depending only on the vision. There is a double reflection. I do not accept yours, and you sure would not accept mine. But I say that mine is alive

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ground. His name comes to me as Miguel. Is that right?"

"I think so. I was about to walk out on you. Now I'll wait a minute. You lifted that out of my mind neatly, though I don't know who dropped it in there. Yes, I believe he's trying to raise an army, from the very bottom, but I don't know who he is or where. Do you?"

"No. But I know that the time is due for the reaction, the fledgling. There are probably a hundred such movements starting right now in the world. One of them will take hold and shake the world, in months, even in days. It is no help to us, though. Foley, the whisky's gone. You'll have to go too. I only tolerated you for it."

"I'm going. Tell me, though, fat man, what does Patrick mean, as a title, not a name?"

"It means patrician, both as a title and a name."

"Bagley, you're not normal."

"Not always, but more than most. I try to live by certain norms, squarely as a square. One meaning of *norma*, a norm, in Latin is a carpenter's square."

"I tell you, Bagley, that you vary from that square. Isn't the word for that abnormal?"

"Not the only word. Me, I'm enormous."

"Yes you are. Bagley— Oh, nothing."

Foley went up the cluttered stairs and out the heavy door, leaving the impossible or enormous Bertigrew Bagley who was Patrick of Tulsa in an alternate. He caught again a corner-of-the-eye glimpse of the dog-ape-plappergeist that served Bagley. The thing thumbed its nose at Freddy happily, then made the Levantine gesture, then the African. Plappergeists are vulgar spirits. Only a trick of the light or a trick of the imagination, of course, yet a thing was there and it was in accord with Fred Foley. Less simple fellows would be unable to see the thing, even out of the corner of the eye.

The quick fox leaped through dark streets, superb in his sensing now. Foley was lately a member of a brain-

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and that its more favorable time-track may still be selected. X-ray eyes, Foley, ghost eyes, fish eyes, shadow flesh, and white golden air. Halo. Aura. Corona."

"As your doctor said, Bagley, one of us is crazy."

"You cannot see my world at all, Foley. You see and hear about current states, but have you heard about Greater Armenia and Greater Ireland as political entities? Have you heard of Christendom still living? Do you know who still governs by entrenched right?"

"Tell me, Bagley, tell me. I'll be able to do the piece on you that I was going to do a year ago, and Tankersley won't fire me for the Carmody caper after all. Who rules, Bagley?"

"I do locally. I'm the Patrick of Tulsa. The Congregation of Patricks is a complex network, with Exarchs, Crolls, Autocrats, Larkers, Aloysii, Patriarchs, and so on up to the Emperor himself."

"This is rich stuff, Bagley. Well, who is the Emperor?"

"I regret that the office has been vacant for more than a thousand years. But the authority still remains, though it is held in abeyance."

"Oh brother! All right, I'll eat the whole animal down to the gamey rump! What are the unfledged falcons?"

"Foley, you should know these things without asking. You are a rare combination, with the simple mind and the complex eyes that see on the primary five levels. The unfledged falcon appears more reptilian than the reptiles. But sometimes it grows, it is fledged, it flies. At its best, to me, it is only mediocre: it was the Crusades; it was the Ottonian Empire (an interloper); it is firm but doltish authority. At its worst it is the fascist thing. But it is fledged only as a reaction: I see a present example of it. Oddly, I am getting this from your mind. A young man has been torched with this fever only this past evening. Already he has raised twenty-five men. He may even get the falcon off the

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weave and he had eyes all over him. He had better havel An unlighted car roared out of the street and up on the sidewalk after him, and men boiled out of it when it missed him and half crashed. Through a gap then, down a half-alley, over a fence, up an old outside stairway, across onto a lower roof, on and on. Freddy might be a simpleton but he was an agile simpleton. They did not have him that night.

He lost them, and continued to lurk and sprint for the fun of it. Easy into a trap (they were waiting for him outside his own door), coming so close they could taste him; then into a darkness that he knew, down a quick back block and into the night door of his own newspaper building. Into the night company of his peers, too many of the sleepy loungers and early boys for him to be followed there.

But somebody was after Fred Foley and they weren't kidding.

IV: LIAR ON THE MOUNTAIN

The python is a gentleman,
No common snake uncouth.
He prophesies from a lush divan
In a fortune-teller-booth.

The little naked falcon biff
Bound with intengent tethers!
Beware the dreamy falcon if
He ever grows some feathers.

Till new day come, the toad plays dead,
Down in deep earth unlawful.
He has a jewel in his head
That sets it aching awful.

The badger faces down the dogs
And with the powers wrastles,
A steadfast rock in squishy bogs,
A patrick in his castles.

New Bestiary: Audifax O'Hanlon

TANKERSLEY DISCOVERED Freddy Foley about noon, tilted back in a chair in open-mouthed sleep. The Tank woke him by kicking the chair out from under him.

"Are you still on the Overlark jag, Foley?" he rumbled with kindly thunder.

"Yes. Yes. Still on it." Freddy was a little startled. It

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though, if he isn't too far out. He's some kind of wilderness baron—”

“No, he's a patrick, Mr. Tankersley, not a baron. I'm not sure they have barons in their system. Anything else, Mr. Tankersley?”

“That's it, Foley. Ah, you'd better get up off the floor first thing. Somehow I don't have complete confidence in a man who's lying on the floor.”

“Yes sir,” Fred Foley said. He got off the floor and caught the plane to San Antonio. From San Antonio he flew in a private plane with a young man named Donald R. Clark to Pumpville. Donald R. sold computers and there was a rich rancher near Pumpville who might buy one. In Pumpville, Foley got on an army copter and flew the fifteen miles to Vinegaroon. All of this, from the time of the floor takeoff, was about two hours.

Vinegaroon was full of soldiers. “Hey, boys, why do you not come till they have already leaved?” the Mexicans in Vinegaroon gibed at the soldiers. The Mexicans had liked the invasion of their town. It set them up a little. The Texans of Vinegaroon were merely puzzled. “We can't figure what they wanted at all. They came in, a double handful of them, with old rifles. They said they were going to occupy city hall. We don't have any city hall. They said they were going to occupy the radio station. We don't have a radio station either. ‘Hell, this is as bad as Mexico,’ they said. They said they were going to occupy the telephone exchange and the post office both. ‘I myself am the telephone exchange and the post office both,’ Miss Villareal told them. ‘They are my front two rooms. Come in and occupy.’ She talked Mexican with them then and they went in. When they came out again they shot a few shots into the air and sang some songs. ‘What happened in there?’ we asked Miss Villareal. ‘The leader, Miguel, bought a six cent stamp,’ she said, ‘and he made me Alcalde. Now

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was a sudden but not unpleasant awakening. "I request permission to continue—"

"Let it go for a day, Foley. It'll keep. Get on the plane to San Antonio right now. You should be able to catch some sort of hedgehopper or nonsked to Del Rio from there. Then get to Vinegaroon any quick way you can. Something is happening there that's so simple-minded that I have hopes you may be able to understand it. I sure can't."

"Oh, that's only Miguel trying things out a little," Freddy said. "I think he just wants to take a United States town for an hour or two to proclaim himself, to get his name in the papers. He has only twenty-seven men. He can't do much with them yet."

"Foley, who in peyote-pickers' heaven is Miguel?"

"I don't know exactly; not to tell, anyhow."

"You've been sitting in that chair for eight hours, they say. How could you know what's been going on down in Vinegaroon, Texas in the last hour? *Do you know?*"

"Yes. I told you: Miguel has taken the town with twenty-seven men from Mexico. It isn't serious. He did it just to get people hearing about him, and because it will do him good in Mexico that he was able to capture a United States town. He'll be back in Mexico by the time I get there, though, and I did want to see him."

"Foley, how could you learn such howling nonsense when you were asleep? It just happened, whatever it is, or it's still happening. How do you know about it?"

"I work all the time, Mr. Tankersley, even when I'm asleep. I'll bet I'm the most under-appreciated reporter on this paper."

"Get down there and find out what happened, Foley, right now! I sure can't believe the funny stuff that came over the wire. And while you're down in that bend of the river, see if you can find out anything about that recluse, O'Claire. I'm not sure how close he is to Vinegaroon. Nobody is quite sure where he lives. Find him,

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I am Alcalde, Mayor of Vinegaroon.' She can be mayor if she wants to. I'm the elected mayor and I'm supposed to get a hundred dollars a year for it, but there's never any money in the treasury. We don't have any treasury."

The Texan who told this to Freddy Foley didn't seem very much concerned. "It may be some sort of Mexican holiday we don't know about," he said. "It may have been a sort of pageant or reenactment of something, but our own Mexicans don't know anything about it being a special day. Hey, write it up real big, will you? Make it an invasion! Don't make it sound like a joke. We'll get a couple of tourists if you make it sound like a real invasion."

An army colonel was trying to find out what this leader had looked like. Various of the inhabitants had drawn pictures of him. "I can draw better than any of those," Freddy Foley said. He drew a picture of what Miguel really looked like. "Yes, that's him," the people said. Freddy went in with Miss Villareal to her two front rooms. She was the telegraph office too. He filed his story with her.

"Come on out to my place for a while," a big tawny man told Freddy. "I bet you never saw a place like mine."

"You don't know where I could find a recluse named O'Claire, do you?" Foley asked him.

"I'm O'Claire," the man said, and Freddy got in his pickup truck with him. Things were falling right for Freddy today. They always did when he was out for stories. Freddy Foley was a simpleton, but he was a simpleton that things fell right for.

They were riding through buffalo-grass and sagebrush and mesquite country. This O'Claire was a jolly man who talked away as endlessly as the country without seeming to say any more than it did. He was big, and sandy-colored in both hair and skin. He was either of late middle age or else ageless. The pickup truck moved

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like a little boat, covering wide, rolling distances easily; then there came a change in the motion, a roughness, as though the little boat were in a nipping cross-tide. Freddy noticed that they were no longer on a road, but it was not really rough. The unevenness was cushioned by the tussocks of buffalo-grass. The mesquite grew closer and bigger, the grass grew ranker, it became a thicket country; and the boat was going uphill, weaving and picking its way. The jolly O'Claire suddenly became musky and weird, without ceasing to be jolly.

"I am completely self-sufficient," said the O'Claire. "I don't need the world at all, and the world doesn't believe it needs me. I am everything. I am all I need. I can get along without the world better than the world can get along without me."

"Nobody can get along without the world," Freddy said. This was getting to be heady country. That was probably the first generalized statement Freddy had ever made in his life.

"For my time of waiting, for my time of exile, I am completely self-sufficient," O'Claire said. "I really have to be, to set a model for the rest of the world."

"Just how long is your time of exile, Mr. O'Claire?"

"Oh, all my life so far, and probably all my life for as long as it extends. There is the world huddled there. And here am I camped before its front gate. The world is afraid to look out its front gate. It knows that *I* am here."

"It's possible that you don't understand the world," Freddy said. That was the second such statement he had ever made in his life.

"No I don't, don't understand it at all. All I know is that I am appointed to camp at its front gate and be self-sufficient. I believe that I am to guard it that nobody enters that front gate. Nobody ever does, though. The world is a closed thing, Foley. See the little peccary pigs, Foley. They're running in bigger flocks here

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than they do inside the world. We will take one. *You* will take one. I insist that you have that pleasure." The little pigs were running in bigger bunches, the country had become more thicketed and forbidden, and they were rising much higher.

"How do I do it? I never took a peccary, O'Claire. I'll do it, though, if it's done."

"Here's a little leather lashing. Hold it in your teeth, Foley. Now I'll race up alongside one. Dog it, Freddy. Throw it and tie it. That's all."

"You're kidding."

"No, I am not kidding. I want you to have this pleasure."

O'Claire raced the pickup alongside a little skittering peccary. Freddy dove out and dogged it, just as the darting little boar had given up and broken speed. Freddy landed on it, and boar and boy rolled over and over a dozen times: the pickup had been going at a great rate of speed. The slippery little squawker doubled back on itself and doubled again, like a greased snake, and tusked Freddy horribly. But Fred got it on its back with its four feet together and lashed them tight.

O'Claire backed the pickup alongside. Was it possible that that sandy man was a little white about the edges? Had he expected Foley to do it? Freddy threw the little trussed boar into the back of the pickup. It was about fifty pounds and it sure was mean.

"Do you eat them?" Freddy asked. He was bleeding pretty badly about hand and forearm and cheek. That little pig had known how to use its tusks.

"Oh sure, that's my main meat. I eat it fresh, and I also preserve it. I have over a thousand pounds of it set back in one of my caves. I hole up a while in the winter months."

"It gets winterish down here?"

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"It does when you're high enough, and I live high.
Who wants to live below the frost?"

"You really dog the peccaries from your pickup,
O'Claire?"

"Sure. It's easy. You did it well the first time, outside
of getting tusked."

"Who handles your pickup when you dive out on one
of the things?"

"Oh, I have it under voice control. It backs and stands
like a real dogging pony. I'm serious. A self-sufficient
man has to be good on gadgets. I just flip that green
toggle on the dash and I have it under voice control.
Say, you don't see a house around here anywhere, do
you?"

They had come to pretty high country by now. They
hadn't ridden twenty-five miles, and Foley hadn't
noticed any country this high when he flew into Pump-
ville with Clark. There was a big stream of water boom-
ing down the thicketed hills, and it had been a smaller
stream lower down. That could not be. The place was
unnatural. The earth sounded hollow below them. They
were near the crest. How could there be so much water
flowing down?

"No, I sure don't see any house around here," Foley
said. "And I didn't expect to see such high mountains
around here."

"Ah, those—I make them myself. I told you I was self-
sufficient. I was hoping you'd say you couldn't see any
house. Nobody's ever been able to find my house:
that's why they call me a recluse and a legend. Well,
here we are."

"It's like everything was doubled here, O'Claire," Fred-
dy said.

"Everything that has substance will cast shadow,
Foley. My things have substance. Don't get the things
mixed up. Most people's things are shadow only."

O'Claire parked the pickup where it stalled, with its

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nose pointing up at forty-five. Foley got out with him but he sure could not see any house there.

"We'll string the little pig first and let him bleed," O'Claire said. He pulled three oak poles out; they were already chained together. He hooked on a little snatch block and set it up. He set a little clamp around the hocks of the animal and swung it into the air. He hooked it on. He stabbed it into the throat and it gushed a fountain there. Where had O'Claire pulled this sudden equipment from? It was a little shed there where the mesquite grew close to the mountain. You wouldn't have noticed that it was a shed if there hadn't been a little equipment in it. It was just a little cove of mountain-colored rocks. O'Claire led the way up staired rocks either through the shed or behind it. They were up on a rock ledge that was either ceiling or deck or portico. They went through rooms of a sort that held furniture of a sort, but you would hardly have guessed that they were either rooms or furniture if O'Claire hadn't been with you. There was water running and falling, and the sound of bigger water above.

"What's up there?" Freddy asked. He was losing direction in the several quasi-rooms and could hardly decide which was inside and outside.

"Oh, the fountain," O'Claire said, "one of the primary fountains of the world."

"There can't be a fountain on a mountaintop," Freddy protested.

"A while ago you were thinking there couldn't be a mountaintop," O'Claire told him. "You didn't see it when you flew in. Hardly anyone comes onto one of these fountains unless it's shown to him, but every river in the world begins with one. The cartographers don't know about them and the geologists don't know, but they are so."

"It can't be artesian," Freddy insisted. "Artesian water

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must come from higher ground somewhere and there isn't any. There can't be a fountain here."

"Behold it, though," O'Claire said, and there was quite a fountain there. "This is right at the front gate of the world and the world doesn't know it's here. None of it's as large as it looks. The lake—it's nearly circular—is only ninety feet across, and the fountain in the center gushes up only thirty feet. Even the roaring isn't as loud as it seems. A decible recorder gives a low level of noise. There is quite a bit of illusion on my mountain."

Musical thunder of the fountain. Climbing churning water that was golden or white or green or blue or thunder-color. Height above height of it, fountains bursting out of fountains, castles of water piled on top of castles. Whole nations of spirits living in the towering columns of foam. The living airy shocking sudden smell of fountain water, salt and sulphur and iron, and fresh. And the vast bottomless lake of which the incredible fountain was center.

"O'Claire, how deep is that thing?"

"Don't know, Foley, I've always been afraid to sound it. There's things here I'm not supposed to understand. I'm a patrick and my job is to guard this door of the world. But there are caves below the lake, dry caves. This whole height is like a sponge, full of caves and passages. I know that if I sounded the lake it would sound far deeper than the caves below it and it'd scare me. It's full of fish, though; full of shellies, full of grandpappy frogs and big turtles. I could live on its produce forever."

"It's full of big blacksnakes too," Freddy growled, "big ones, five or six there."

"Sometimes they are seven, sometimes eight, sometimes nine," O'Claire said, "but they aren't snakes. They are all the tentacles of one amorphous creature. I believe that every primary fountain has one. This one

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tries to escape, and if he ever escaped into the world there would be disaster beyond telling. He leaves the center sometimes and tries to climb out onto the shores. Then I beat him back. That's the main reason I am here."

"Oh snake hokey, O'Claire! Who beats him back when you're off in town?"

"There is an oyster that whistles. I hear, and I come back at preternatural speed from wherever I happen to be. Foley, do not look blank at me! You should light up to the magic of the oyster that whistles! And the tentacled fountain-devil has never slipped me once. I believe that a few of them (from other fountains, not from mine) do slip into the world from time to time, though. They are what does the damage to the world. You would not know of any such new seven- or eight- or nine-armed creature wreaking havoc recently, do you?"

"Maybe I do. O'Claire, you're a liar as high as your mountain."

"That I am, little Fred Foley, that I am."

"Miss Villareal warned me of you, I think. She gave me a sort of blessing: 'That you be safe from *cascabels* and their brothers, and toads, and unborn things, and the mountaintop liar.' You are the mountaintop liar, O'Claire."

"Certainly. How about pancakes for supper? Feed a few sticks into the *horno* there and get it hotted up."

Then O'Claire whistled sharply, a whistle cutting through the roaring of the fountain.

"Hey, Peggy, bring the milk!" he called loudly.

"I didn't see that little clay furnace when I came up here first," Foley said. "It looks like it'd heat up quick, though. O'Claire, what are *cascabels*?"

"Rattlesnakes, Foley, but don't pay any attention to Miss Villareal's blessing other than to be protected by it. She is an intuitive person but weak on her zoology. The black creature is not the *cascabel*, but the *pólipo*

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maldito, the misnamed serpent from the beginning. The toads are toads indeed, but they have servitors who will kill to protect their reputations. And by unborn things she really means unfinished or unfledged things. She hasn't quite the words for the four creatures. And neither she nor you need fear the mountaintop liars nor any patricks. We patricks stand ready to serve and to save. I believe that God must be out of his wits that he does not call on us yet. We await that call forever. Yeah, just mix the buckwheat flour and the honey and crush in a little of the rocksalt; it's from the fountain too. A little butter then, and afterward the milk."

"*I knew a liar on a mountain,*" Freddy sang softly to the tune of High Noon.

"*He had a pancake for a house.* Where's the milk, O'Claire? Everything else is here.

"*He keeps a polyp in a fountain.* What will I use instead of milk, fountain water?

"*He gets'um milk without no cowse.* Hey, is that Peggy?"

That was Peggy, a little she-goat who came up to the lake. O'Claire milked her into a wooden bucket, enough for the pancakes, and gave it to Foley. Freddy mixed and poured into a pan and set that into the *horno*. He mixed some more in another pan and O'Claire gave him a very cold sausage to cook with it.

"Is that from the pig we just killed?" Freddy asked.
"How so quick?"

"No, no, it takes four days to get the high taste out of one of those animals even if you know what you're doing. This is last week's pig. Use a lot of it, Foley, I love sausage. Now then, I have white wine and red wine, beer, sagebrush tea, corn whisky, peach brandy, tequila, mead (which is honey-whisky), milk and buttermilk, but no coffee. Can't grow it here and I grow everything that I use. What will it be, Foley?"

"Honey-mead," Foley said. "I've read about it, but

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I've never seen it or tasted it. Were those stone benches there when we first came up? Was the stone-slab table? We're all ready, then. O'Claire, I am the best mountaintop pancake and sausage cooker in the world. What's that fruit and where did you get it when I wasn't looking?"

"It is brother to the chokecherry and half-brother to the sandplum. I grow them, Foley; I grow everything I need. I am the self-sufficient man."

"The whole supper is a mountaintop lie, O'Claire, but it's good. My own touch, you know."

It was really too early to be a supper. It was, as a matter of fact, the first meal that Freddy had had that day. It was very bright sunlight yet, none of the twilight stuff. Whatever Freddy saw on the mountaintop was there. "But where did you get the cheese, O'Claire?" he demanded. "You didn't go down."

"Oh, I get the cheese from goats' milk and cows' milk. I keep three of each. I have a thousand pounds of cheese ripe, and more ripening. I have much more honey than that, whole caves full of it. I run about a hundred hives. I have granaries full of buckwheat and barley and corn and Mexican beans. I have amphoras full of blackberries; they go so good with turtle. I have a mushroom cellar that is directly under the fountain. I have peanuts—you wouldn't believe the quantity of peanuts I have. I have whole vats of cactus syrup. See this shirt? I spun and wove it myself out of yucca fiber. I grow my own flax, I shear my own sheep, I make my own shoes and jackets from my own leather. I grow my own tobacco and make my own pipes. The basin below the fountain lake is my power pool. I close the dam for an hour when I want power, then I let my donkey generator churn and run my power tools. I cut my own timber, I make my own charcoal, I fire my own clay pots, I stave my own barrels. I have a house of twenty rooms, but they are scattered, no two together, the furthest a mile apart.

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This is my fountain room. I have a fortress, I have an arsenal, I have a library and observatory. I know the caves under me better than does any other living person, but there are many others who know parts of them, and there were almost always a few people living in them. These caves are very deep, and they go lower than the bottom of the great river itself. I can duck into a cave entrance five feet from me (you do not see it) and go through eighteen miles of passage dry-shod and come up in Mexico. I could hide armies in my caves."

"I think about a little army now, of one Miguel. Could it hide in your caves?"

"Miguel knows me. Mine is one of the several great minds that had influenced him before he was recently struck by that gaggle-brained lightning. He has visited me before. I expect him to come again. He may be able to line up a dozen such havens. How are you in accord with him, Foley? I don't catch that part."

"I don't know how I am but I read him somehow. I don't even know his last name."

"Fuentes. That is 'Fountains.' You are about to ask whether there is some connection between him and the savant Michael Fountain in your own town? I believe the boy wrote to the man several times, relying on the name coincidence for introduction. I believe the man answered, giving some good advice which is now being ignored. And I believe the boy is presently right in ignoring this good advice."

"He can't get anywhere with his games, of course. Like taking over Vinegaroon."

"No, he can't get anywhere, Foley, not for more than the long hour. He *will* take over the world, of course, but that will be for hardly more than a decade. Even so, he may decide to throw his power to another. For a little while the world has become a vacuum crying to be filled. Miguel is a compassionate boy and cannot stand to hear it cry. That's the way they all start, but they

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all become a little coarsened as they move along that way. It's possible that he will simply back the world into a corner and then give it over to . . . to I don't know whom . . . before either he or the world is too much damaged by it."

"I hadn't noticed the world being a vacuum, O'Claire."

"Yes, it is bankrupt, just when it believes itself doing famously."

"Exactly what are you, O'Claire? You talk so much and you don't say anything."

"You were with another one of us last night, Foley. I believe, though, that you had figured that out. His dog was restless, but nobody has ever seen his dog. You had a story there, a poltergeist or plappergeist story, and you muffed it."

"Bagley? Are you and he really of the same species, O'Claire? Yes, I know the jokes about Bagley's invisible dog, but it was written up years ago. Besides, it isn't exactly a dog and it isn't exactly invisible. I saw it myself. Well, no, I didn't really see it, but I saw it wink and flash happy obscenities, and I know what it looks like if I ever do see it. You are a patrick like old fat man Bagley?"

"I am Patrick of Pecos, Foley, and you guessed it before you started down here. My realm goes from the Glass Mountains and the Santiagos on eastward as far as the Sutton Plains and Eagle Pass, and it includes all the Serranias del Burro south of the great arc of the river. Foley, there are three hunting men below, and they are masquerading as conventional hunters. They will pretend to see a buck deer and they will shoot, but they will be shooting at us. We withdraw now."

And they did withdraw, away from the fountain on the hilltop and into the maze of rock castles, and then into a furnished room. "But they'll find the remnants of our supper, O'Claire," said Freddy. "They'll find everything we left scattered around."

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"No, they won't find a thing. I also have an invisible creature, a plappergeist who serves me, and he'll clean it all up. They won't even find the fountain or the lake. They'll be led astray. They won't even discover that it's a mountaintop. They'll find that it's quite a low hill, as you saw that it was from your plane."

"Well, which one of us do they want to kill, O'Claire?"

"You in particular today, Foley. And myself every day. They have fixed your interest on the reappearing men again, though, since they're warning you away from them. And the reappearing men aren't really very interesting, Foley; not nearly as interesting as I am."

"Do all patricks read minds, O'Claire?"

"Naw. None of us do. We're just smart. You've got a story on Miguel, Foley, if you know what to do with it. And you've got a story on me if you know how to handle it. These are both better stories than anything on Overlark. Myself, I doubt that men reappear. It is only a shape of mind that reappears. Theirs is a Fountain Inside-Out, the Vortex. It sucks you down. Forget it. You'll be a long time getting the story on Overlark. It won't be very good when you get it. Nobody will believe it. And you will be either confined or killed in getting it. I resent him and his. I consider us patricks to be much more important."

"Well, the Overlark story is the one I will have to get, O'Claire. You talk like a friendly oracle, so be one to me. *Is there a conspiracy against the world by certain men who seem to live again and again?*"

"Oh, a few of those things must have got together a long time ago, Foley. I guess they try to run the world. So do we patricks."

"Do they try to run it for good or for evil?"

"If there are such things as good and evil, then their effect is evil."

"In that case, what can I do about it?"

"In that case, there is nothing you can do about it. I

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insist that they aren't that important; but they think that they are, and they kill partly from vanity. I believe that they do not like to be annoyed by the callow."

"How exactly do they effect their evil, O'Claire?"

"In no one way exactly. They do it in such manner that it can hardly be traced to them. There are a few narrow passes where a group can ambush the world, and some of them are always there. They themselves believe that they are the gyroscope to prevent the world from jumping its tracks, from progressing to the next Mansion, as the Lady called it. There was one period, only a few centuries ago, when the civilized core of the world had reached a certain peak—not the highest peak that it was meant to reach, but it had reached a reasonably sound balance at a good level. There was even hope then that the world could make the transition to a still loftier level without disaster. There was present, however, a group of these men or these things which we are talking about. They decided the direction of the world was not to their liking; they believed the world was a bone misset. They broke it, to set it again in their own way. Millions died, and the new setting was in a slightly different direction."

"Was it a great war, O'Claire?"

"No. Not a war at all. It is sometimes called the Plague or the Black Death."

"And they actually loosed that on the world?"

"Indignation does not belong to the historical perspective, Foley. The plague did surprise them by its violence, but be careful that you do not slander the nature of a thing, even a disease. It had a gentle nature. It killed within three days and with no great pain. Its characteristic was a rather happy sort of delirium. There was, besides, a compassionate element to it which I have seldom mentioned. It struck down adults only, seldom children."

"You will not make me love it, O'Claire. What were

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some of the other narrow passages where the Overlark sort interfered?"

"Oh, once there was a country and generation of unusual oppression. The people were ground down by the monarchy, the nobility, and the newly-monied. It seemed that there was no way out of it except a cleansing revolution. And indeed the revolution was begun, and with high hope. Then the members of the group interfered, evilly, as you would say."

"And it failed?"

"No, it succeeded. That's the point, Foley, you will never be able to trace anything to that group. But the revolution succeeded in such a way that it might have been better if it had failed. It was not clear gain at any rate, not a clean turning. And it could have been.

"And there was a later time when sincere men tried to build an organization as wide as the world to secure the peace of the world. It had been tried before and it had failed before. Perhaps if it failed this time it would not be tried again for a very long while. The idea of the thing was attacked by good and bad men, in good faith and bad. The final realization of it was so close that it could be touched with the fingertips. A gambler wouldn't have given odds on it either way. It teetered, and it almost seemed as though it would succeed. Then members of that group interfered."

"And it failed, O'Claire?"

"No. It succeeded, Foley, as in the other case. It succeeded in so twisted a fashion that the Devil himself was puzzled as to whether he had gained or lost ground by it. And he isn't easily puzzled.

"There have been any number of like cases. There was one in particular that is the most interesting of them all. You will be especially interested in it, Foley, for it concerns your prey Overlark in one of his earlier manifestations, one that you haven't stumbled onto yet. Thunder, Foley, thunder, it's late! I must hurry. I'll fly

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you to San Antonio instantly so you can catch the Tulsa plane and be home tonight. Come."

"No, wait, O'Claire. I don't need to be home tonight. Tell me this instance."

"No, Foley. I've got to get you out of here right now. Get in the plane."

How was there a plane there? How had O'Claire fired it up already? How were they airborne so swiftly? How was the mountaintop no more than a low hill when they looked back at it? Why couldn't Foley see the fountain and the lake now? What had happened to the fountain? If we are out of fountains then all is lost.

"O'Claire," Freddy said, "I feel that all the fountains in the world are dried up."

"Naw, they don't dry up, Foley," O'Claire said, "but sometimes their waters must run underground for a while. That's been the case for a few centuries. This does impoverish the surface world. Wit becomes witless and the daily bread goes stale. Both wealth and poverty lose something of their special enjoyment. And I'm told by people of the flesh that even the generative act isn't as much fun as it used to be."

How were they in San Antonio already?

"Wait, O'Claire," Foley begged. "It's thirty minutes till my plane time. You can tell me about Carmody Overlark in that earlier manifestation."

"Foley, the oyster just whistled," O'Claire said, looking a little mad. "The monster is trying to get out of the fountain: I've got to get back there with unnatural speed."

And O'Claire was gone from there with unnatural speed, back into the air too quickly for any clearance or regulation. Gone. Gone.

"I knew a liar on a mountain," Freddy sang softly and grinned. But he wished that he had gotten that last lie out of O'Claire.

V: HELICAL PASSION AND SAINTLY SEXPOT

So they get it into their heads that it is *arrobamiento*, or rapture. But I call it *abobamiento*, foolishness.

Interior Castle: Teresa of Avila

THE HARVESTERS were met again that evening in Mora-da, the home of the Bauers.

Bedelia Bencher brought a red rose to Letitia Bauer—"for your death"—but neither of them understood it.

"We come to the problem again and again," Big Jim Bauer rumbled, beginning on the big thing rapidly, and there was an overpowering medical smell in the room, compounded with the usual odor of mysticity that the Harvesters exuded. "As to the world and the people of it, we have come to a too early perfection more quickly than we imagined, for all that it's taken these thousands of years to bring us here. If there is not to be another cycle of rise and bust we must make a breakthrough right now. The limit isn't set so high as we imagined. The ancients were correct that the limit, the sky, could almost be reached by thrown rocks and shot arrows and catapults. We're pressing against that sky now. Soon we'll be crushed flat between the unyielding sky and the upraised earth. In all our amplitude we now come to the new narrowness. I believe that humans have been at this crisis-plateau many times before and have always failed. This time we will not fail. We will

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break through. We will shatter the sky. We will be free to complete our growth."

"I've always hated that sky and all it stands for," Arouet Manion whined sharply, like a saw cutting through elm-wood. "One of my spiritual fathers swore always that we must first put out the lights of heaven. I agree that we must shatter this heaven-sky completely and forever. It's no more than a filthy membrane that prevents us from being born. Let's use words correctly for a while. The love business is gone and over with. We can now speak of the higher love or the cosmic love, but we all know that it must be a great surge of hatred that will break through the sky. We've climbed up through our puling infancy; we've come into our awkward and disgusting adolescence; and we all know that we've been two utterly different creatures in those two states. Tadpole does not differ nearly as much from the frog as we do from our earlier and later state, except in appearance. But now we'll break through to the third state, to full adulthood. There hasn't been even one fully adult human being from the beginning of the world until now. We'll correct that tonight. We'll finally, the seven of us, become creatures of the third state, adults."

"I feel there's something hellish about it," Wing Manion protested. "Who are we to shatter the sky, even by metaphor? There's a framework and a timetable somewhere for us to follow, I'm sure of that. Isn't it arrogance and dishonesty for us to break that up?"

"Certainly, certainly, arrogance and dishonesty," Big Jim Bauer agreed heartily. "Arrogance and dishonesty are exactly what we need. We'll find likelier words for these virtues in due time, but they're the exact names in the present context. We can clean it up, we can clean it all up when we have the time for it. Oh, it's the easiest thing in the world to move and bend the limits on the local level. I've already done so. I'm not called the bishop's left-hand man for nothing. I

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knead him like a lump of sour dough. I had but to use a few phrases which Arouet lifted from Teilhard, and he made them his own. We become now the Overpeople of the Third Testament, I explained it to the bishop. The father was the type-figure of the First or Old Testament, the ancestral, chthonic, black-earth beast figure, our origin and our animality. The son was the type-figure of the Second or New Testament: that momentary puling thing that was called Love, that momentary puling thing that was called God, the awkward adolescence of ourselves. Now we come to the holy spirit who is the type-figure of the Third Testament. This is ourselves when we shatter the sky and become full and free people." Jim Bauer rubbed his big hands in complete pleasure with himself.

"I explained it to him and I explain it to you," he went on, "that God was the missing link, a weak categorical imperative for a weak interval, but necessary. May that dismal interlude quickly be excised from our unconsciousness when we've become adult. God stood between the beasts and man in the evolutionary sequence: lower than full man, of course. And now we'll be done with that figure forever. God could never be spoken of as holy without laughing, but man may be spoken of as holy after tonight."

"How did the bishop take it?" Bedelia Bencher asked Bauer. "Doesn't he ever get chock-full of you? I do sometimes."

"He took it completely and trustingly as a backward child would, Bedelia. He's even going on television with a presentation of it when I've cleaned it up a little for him. The camera-eye, for him, is the pearl beyond price. For this he's given up and traded all that he owns. 'But what will a man receive in exchange for his soul, or his intellect?' I taunted him a little; but he only grinned vacantly. Both of us know that he never had any soul, or intellect. But we are untouchable

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from that quarter, and also from the legal sector. We've played with our power over others, having good game with it. Now we'll turn back our powers on ourselves, and we won't be playing. Tonight the seven of us will make the big jump. We'll become the first of the privileged mutation. We'll shatter the sky like the dirty glass it is, the unauthorized membrane that has shut us off from life. We'll become the first of the new people, the Third Testament of the world."

"Well, will we be the end of it then?" Letitia Bauer asked. "What if we receive everything ever and I still want to say 'No, no, that is not near enough'? I *will* say it. I hate to be the end of anything. If we break into the last land, I'll hate it, even if it is infinitude. There *has to be* something beyond even infinity for me. Is there no hope of danger beyond?"

"Of course there is!" Jim Bauer boomed. "We'll be the beginning and not the end. Even the little murky half-brained theologians, grubbing into a thing long dead, have speculated that Three as the number of persons in the Godhead was never more than a contingent number. They speculate that there may be as many as five, or seven, or even nine persons in what used to be called the Trinity. Even such little pigs'-eyes as they may look a little ways forward. I tell you that there may be many thousands of stages or person-types in the humanity thing, and we now break intrepidly to only the third. There is hope of danger for millions of years, Letitia, forever."

"We're clear on the medical aspect," Arouet Manion said. "I'm an M.D. I was a general practitioner and surgeon before I became a psychiatrist. And James Bauer was a medical doctor on his way to becoming an eminent biologist. We'll set the stage for the induced mutations now, and each of the seven must give every aspect of himself."

"Will it hurt?" Bedelia Bencher asked cheerfully.

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"Certainly, certainly," Jim Bauer said. "It doesn't have to, as far as the surgery goes, but we want it to. We want to bring out the agonizing awareness of every one of us in every possible way. Begin the inward-turned brain-weave, all of you, while we get ready for the rest of it. Weave it to the ultimate! It is ourselves we are mutating now."

The helical passion of Salzy Silverio stung them all with the strength of it, for all that she was gobbling little cheese snacks and chattering inanities with Bedelia Bencher. The weave needed the passion of Salzy more than any other thing. It was possibly the strongest element in the whole weave.

A strong smell of ammonia had been released into the air. There were two large brass-colored spheres there and they sent lavender lightning dancing between them across the room. They raised a lot of acrid ozone with their eerie sparkling, and also raised all their spirits unaccountably. The pink hair of Bedelia rose up from her head into quivering extremities from the charge in the air and there was a garish corona about her.

"It's all hokus, of course," said Hondo Silverio in an easy voice that seemed to come out of a nest in the rocks. "It's my own arranging. It sets up something of the primitive conditions of the world when life sparked for the first time; or at least something of the laboratory myth of those probable conditions. It was a hoax that first time too, but a primitive glob *did* allow itself to be hoaxed by it and was conned into coming to life. The hoax has been a condition ever since then, and will be forever. And the first glob, you know, was itself a mutation, and against stiff statistical odds. The normal didn't slip in till later, sideways and ashamed of itself, and the normal has never been of any use to anything: not then, not now, not ever. We're tampering with the double-helix centrality of our own body cells, and the helical passion of my own serpentine wife has already

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set it to going. Come with it, all of you! We need show-boats tonight, we need outlandish showoffs! Outdo yourselves! Scatter the ectoplasmic confetti. This is carnival!"

"Throw serpentine, you old serpent," Wing Manion called out, like a laughing fish. "Throw streams of it. It's a water carnival, but we're the seven-headed dog at the bottom of the water. What's the dog doing down there anyhow? Does anyone remember the name of the seven-headed dog?"

James Bauer and Arouet Manion were arranging for the surgery, but they had everything draped in plush purple instead of antiseptic white.

"We disregard all infecting!" Bauer boomed. "We welcome it. How can infection hurt us? We are ourselves setting about the infecting of the world. How can we fear what we'll get from each other? We wish to get everything possible from each other. What can environmental germs do to us? We ourselves are evolutionizing all environments tonight."

"Mighty sloppy medical practice," said Bedelia Bench-er, but who can take seriously a girl with her pink hair standing on end? The contribution of Bedelia to the weave had always been a sort of cosmic hilarity.

And she was into the weave now, pink and pungent, the numinous spook, the cinnamon cookie, the mad anima who had never left off being a kid. Plappergeistic and poltergeistic, the lavender lightning was about her especially, the witch who was no more than a sketch in red chalk. She had really never had a body, that Bedelia, only a chalk sketch of one. This gave her a certain lightness, and there was enough heaviness in some of the others. Summer lightning, lavender lightning inside the walls, and hazel-colored sparks out of her eyes. She had been, perhaps, the primordial mutation—light enough to come to life—and the heavier normal things had not arrived till later.

Hondo Silverio was now into the weave with his mot-

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tled-green humor and his ancient nobility. "You forget sometimes," he had said once, "that the first motley, the first mottled-green clown suit, was a snake suit. We were the original humorists. Our sudden scaring of people, that's the best practical joke of all, and it never wears out."

And what he said now was "We need even the very first types for this induced mutation and don't forget that the original person-type was a double one, and that the nobler and more humorous half of that original father image was the snake."

A noble snake was Hondo, but he seemed to crawl less than the others.

Once more Jim Bauer was projecting his person with big hands as he arranged instruments and vials and needles. He was a joyous rumble, the arrogance and dishonesty that was needed to break the stifling sky-limit on them. He was power, do not doubt that. He was rumbling spirits. He was smashed fountains. He was lightning.

He struck like lightning.

Bauer, with blinding speed and incredible force, smashed his wife Letitia in the face with a stunning chopping knife-blow, felling her. She screamed but once as she fell. He had gashed her suddenly and deeply with the ghastly Harvester mark. She bled deep red as she went chalk-white. Perhaps she was killed by that one blow; her head lolled as though her neck was broken.

Danger!

But was it such a dirty danger she had wanted?

She came strongly into the weave at the instant of her fall, in with the whimper of death but still with that same crying for danger. All the ashen and angular passion that this moon-colored slim woman could give she gave them. But she had broken and died at that moment of first bloodshed, and they all acquired pieces of her. The gouging of the sector out of her head, the long

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needle into her side under her arm where the lymph is closest, the deep rasping and inoculation of the round, were all bloody and botched with her. They were meant to be.

Arouet Manion slid into the brain-weave with his own cool elegance, his chilly passion for these hot things. Arouet loved the blade; he loved the needle; he was a sadist in these things. He slashed and gouged. He had the cold passion for blood. "The old barber-surgeons were right," he whined dreamily. "Bleed the patients, bleed them all, bleed them for everything! It weakened and killed the patients, of course, but it brought such soul-filling satisfaction to the barber-surgeons. I love it, I love it!" There was something almost inelegant in the Arouet elegance carried so far.

Wing Manion, the speckled Klee-fish, the saintly sex-pot, swam into the weave with a billow of underwater excitement. She belonged to the waters that are under the world, and she bled pale but ancient fish-serum instead of blood when she was gashed in head and side and round. Oh, she bled a small bucket of it, though. There was a lot of it in her.

"The mechanism of this is quite simple," Jim Bauer rumbled as he struck Salzy Silverio such a bloody, deep, blinding gash on the head that she fell to the floor stunned. The power was in the rumbling sound of Bauer's words, not in their meaning. "We extracted serum and specimen from each of you some time back," Bauer growled out like a throaty lion, "and little glots of flesh, nerve stringers, samples of every sort of cell. We made living broths of these, and we mixed in the tissues of mutating worms and newts. We shot the broths through with high voltages and frequencies, we bathed them in every sort of ray, we bombarded them with strange particles, we enchanted them: 'Mutate, damn you, mutate,' we enchanted. We took one half of each broth and distributed it among the other six. Now each one of us

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will receive back most of his own, but a little of all the others. There are a dozen triggers inside the broths, the serums. They reenter us. They should produce cellular explosions inside of us. We'll mutate in our smallest cells and in our total symbiosis. Each of us has now received three violent wounds and has received the serums into them. Ah, isn't the pain exquisite? Fainting again, Arouet, and you love it so much? There is an additive to the serums, the most painful known. It harms nothing, but it tortures. We want us all to feel it to the utmost.

"What, two others of you are still conscious? Are there two others here as strong as myself? The men are gone under, and two Shes remain unbroken. Bedelia, you surprise me! I didn't know that you were one of the strong ones."

Bedelia Bencher was not particularly strong now. She was retching violently, and her pinkishness had turned to purple. She had probably lost a quart of blood, and she was blinded by the ammonia fumes and the lavender lightning from the brass spheres. But she was still conscious.

And Salzy Silverio was most certainly conscious. Her mouth was in motion without words; her lips were moving with the illusion of a double-helix motion, a snake-mouth motion; her frame was shaking, her eyes sparked with hate and green laughter at the same time.

This Salzy had not collapsed for long when she was struck down with the gaping head wound. She would be the last to give up, always. She was conscious and snapping with color. She even flicked her tongue out from broken moving lips. She was the twisted passion itself.

Jim Bauer, swaying and falling all over himself, already far over the threshold of pain, opened wall jets to let measured amounts of noxious gas into the room. This would bring unconsciousness to all of them for a half hour.

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But Bauer stayed on his feet by blind last effort, until the blackness or the purpleness should overwhelm him. He wanted to savor the pain and arrogance and hate as long as possible. He deliberately walked on the bodies of all six of his companions as they lay on the floor, heeling lavishly into vital sectors. He trod last on the sinewy, lithe, snake-strong body of Salzy Silverio, on stomach, on breast, on throat, while she watched him with defiant snake's eyes bright with hatred. Then Bauer collapsed in a final spasm, falling heavily atop the firm fish-body of Wing Manion.

Salzy Silverio closed her inner eyelids, her snakes' eyelids, but she could still see as though through mist and she would not give up her consciousness. And the brain-weave itself remained fully conscious.

They all came around about the same time. Hondo Silverio opened windows to clear the room. It had just come on deep twilight while they had been out. They were all new people now, of course; they had mutated. There was truly a stronger linkage among them, a stronger mastery of the world. They had shattered the sky, and now there was no limit at all upon them.

They would have looked disheveled and disreputable to other eyes, but to their own new seven-faceted eye they did not.

"Are we all all right?" Salzy Silverio asked with a certain huskiness in her voice. After all, big Jim Bauer had stood on her throat and ground a heel into it; but it could have been a very elephant and it wouldn't really have hurt her. And, of course, nothing could ever hurt her again, now that she had mutated.

"Yes, all are all right," said James Bauer. "Except Letitia, that is. Ah—she's dead. I somehow expected that, though."

"Isn't that a little bit awful?" Bedelia asked sharply.

"We are all of us consummately awful now," Bauer

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rumbled, "in the real meaning of the word. We are filled with awe of ourselves, and we are completely awe-inspiring."

"Oh shut up that stuff!" Bedelia flared angrily. "Your wife is dead. This should bring you out of your silly daze. For one thing, there's the legal thing. I think you murdered her. You must have broken her skull, you struck her so terribly."

"Oh, possibly, possibly; yes, I'm sure I did. But it's no great matter."

"No great matter?"

"Of course not, Bedelia. You have some carryover, I'm afraid. It's almost as if you hadn't mutated completely. Oh, I can get a new wife easily enough, and I will, within the present hour. As for my legal aspects, don't you realize that we're now the masters of the law and of everything?"

"No, I sure don't realize that," Bedelia protested. "I think it's horrifying."

"A little horror makes the soup taste better, Biddy," Salzy Silverio consoled her. "Don't you just love to come onto threshing monsters in a bowl of soup? I think the new way will be fun. I've taken a liking to the arrogance and hatred bit already."

"I'd marry you, Biddy, on the spot," Bauer said, "but that wouldn't expand the brain-weave, and I believe it should be expanded by one more now."

"You sure as hell would *not* marry me, you final pig!" Biddy swore.

"Of course I would, Bedelia. We're not ourselves now, we all belong to each other. But I believe we should expand the weave by one. Letitia is still in the weave, you know. We can still feel her. We can still talk to her."

That was true. Letitia Bauer was still in the brain-weave. They could hear her ashen weeping in waste places somewhere, they could still feel the moon-color and slimness of her.

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"I believe it might be well to have several dead people in the weave," Bauer mused, but even his musing had the sound of muted thunder. "It will give us better perspective to have several dead people in our communication. Which one would be best? Oh well, I'd better get to the marrying part first and then return to the murder. There's a girl going by on the sidewalk."

Jim Bauer went out and took the girl by the hand. He pulled her into the house, and she came along in dazed fashion. "We're married now," he said. "Your name is Letitia Bauer now. See her dead body there. Look like her. Look like her! I tell you. You cannot set up a will against any of us. We are the will of the world now. Look like her. *More.* That's close, but *more.* I can compel you, you know. Yes, that's about right."

It wasn't about right. It was perfect. The new girl *was* Letitia Bauer now. She had had to age about twelve years. She had to become moon-colored of skin and ashen of hair. She had to slough twenty pounds and become slim. But when one of the new mutated masters compels a thing, it must be done.

"Strip the old one, Wing," Bauer ordered. "Strip them both. Then clothe the new one after she's been properly bloodied and inoculated and introduced into the weave. She'll mutate easily enough now, I believe, and the old Letitia will help her. Hondo, get rid of the body. Go bury it almost anywhere. Nobody will see you. If they do, it won't occur to them to prevent you. We are new people now and no one will interfere with us. Arouet!"

"What of me, Bauer? You can't order me. I'm as mutated and masterful as you are. No one can stand first here."

"Of course not, Arouet. We've all become the same person. But that person is speaking through my mouth now. Arouet, don't you believe it would give our brain-weave more balance if one more of us would be rid of

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the body? In some ways, death brings even closer communion; notice how close the dead Letitia is now, closer than the living. One more, do you think?"

"Yes. Here, give me the .45, James, I'll do it. You mean Hondo when he comes back from disposing of the body?"

"No, I mean you, now, Arouet. And I'll use the .45. No man can shoot himself without being a little clumsy about it. I'll do it."

"No, Jim, no, no!" Arouet Manion ran out of the room, he leaped a hedge, he disappeared.

"He'll come around in a little while," said James Bauer, "or I'll go find him and kill him. We have to expect these spotty starts. We've been mutated only a few minutes, after all. I suggest that we all take our rest this night as did the first chthonic father-image on the seventh day. Our accomplishment, after all, is much higher. Now I have a new wife, or an old wife in new appearance, to bloody and then to bed. Begone, fellow Harvesters. We're in constant contact anyhow. We're all one person now."

"I'll give you a ride into town, Biddy," Wing Manion said. "I'll let Arouet run a while before I look for him. Of course, he'll be easy enough for any of us to find any time, now that we're all the same person. He always was yellow. Now that he's mutated, he becomes ocher. Didn't he turn positively ocher when Jim Bauer was about to kill him, Biddy? Oh, it will be exciting, being mutated and all, don't you think so, Biddy?"

"It may be exciting. It won't be as much fun as I thought it would."

"Oh it is goofy, Biddy," Wing Manion said, "being new and powerful and all that. I'll bet that's what the first primitive glob said when he was hoaxed into coming to life with all that ammonia in the atmosphere and all those high-powered rays barking around. 'Oh it is goofy,' I bet he said."

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Freddy Foley was with his boss Tankersley. He had been getting kind words for a change.

"Those were two very good stories you got today," Tankersley said. "I wonder sometimes why I keep you on, but I guess it's because you often get good stories. You show real empathy with this Miguel. You get right inside him. And you really believe that his movement may pick up momentum, that it will be dangerous, that he'll be unable or unwilling to stop it, and that he'll still be a nice kid when he topples the world? I don't believe he'll really endanger the world, but some of the movements may. Every crooked-neck plum tree in the world may be bearing bloody fruit by next season. And the other story, you did a fine job on that, even if you violated the first item of the reporter's canon."

"How, Mr. Tankersley? I got all my information from O'Claire directly, and I discounted it just as I thought it should be done. What canon did I violate?"

"Spelled his name wrong."

"I couldn't have. There isn't any wrong way to spell it."

"It is A-u-c-l-a-i-r-e. French, not Irish. Sorry, Foley, in a more perfect world everybody would be Irish, but in our own imperfect world they are not. Auclaire."

"Really muffed that one. Mr. Tankersley, do you know anything about the patricks?"

"Hardly anything. Some sort of lodge or society. Pretend to take themselves seriously, like the Baker Street Irregulars. I believe they also use a little esoterism such as may be picked up from the Los Angeles quackeries. They have titles and things. Pretend to divide the world into realms ruled by themselves. Do a piece on them if you want to, anything to keep you off the Overlark lark."

"I'm not off the Overlark bit for good."

"Get off it for good then, Freddy, or your head will roll."

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Freddy went and borrowed some pictures from the morgue. He had collected others here and there. Some he had been forced to steal. He went with them to the lodgings of Michael Fountain. And Michael was distraught.

"I thought there was ritual murder a while ago, Foley. I was sure of it. It came from our mutual acquaintances, who have become vile. I read them back, as they tried to read me. They murdered Letitia Bauer. I know that they did. But then a little later the happening was expunged."

"I got a little of that too, Mr. Fountain. And then a little later I got it that she was all right after all. I put it out of my mind then. I have some things on Carmody Overlark I want to show to you and talk to you about."

"I just talked to Letitia Bauer on the telephone," Michael Fountain said. "No, she certainly was not all right, she said. She had a blinding headache. Yes, she said, there had been insane experiments going on at their place and she had had about enough of them. So nice of me to imagine that she had been murdered, she said, but she hadn't been really. Everything is all right now, Mr. Fountain, she said, and you come to visit us again when we are once more sane which I hope will be soon. Well, there's something there that I don't understand, Foley. Probably it was a very strong mental projection of ritual murder. They do play black games, your friends. Yes, I'll gladly look at anything you have on Carmody Overlark. Anything to get the Harvesters out of my mind."

"Pictures, pictures," said Freddy, and he laid them out on the table. "I have two piles of pictures here, all of them of Carmody Overlark. This stack here has pictures of Carmody that are more than two years old. This second stack has pictures of him that were taken within the last two years. Look at them closely and tell me if they're all of the same man."

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Michael Fountain studied the pictures closely for some time.

"Yes. I'm familiar with all of them except two," Fountain said, "and they're among the less clear. Yes, Freddy, all those are pictures of Carmody Overlark."

"I know they are. But are they all of the same man?"

"Is there a difference? I'd say immediately that they were all of the same man, except that you're the second person who's asked me such a question. How can they all be of Carmody Overlark and not all be of the same man?"

"I can't explain."

"Neither could my other questioner. I can be cryptic myself but usually I avoid it. You stretch it a little far, Foley."

At the side of Foley's face, just out of vision, drifted a strand finer than silk. He resisted the temptation to brush it off, but he felt that a spider had cast on him a second time.

"Who was the other man who asked about Carmody, Mr. Fountain?"

"I won't tell you. You don't know him, I'm sure."

"But I want to know him."

"I won't tell you who he is. He questioned me in confidence."

"So do I. I ask his name in confidence."

"No. You don't have enough of my confidence for that."

"Is it true, Mr. Fountain, that the patricks have invisible servitors, plappergeists, who protect them?"

"Oh, I suppose so. Bagley's invisible dog can be seen, though. I've seen it. It only takes sharp looking. But it's more like an ape than a dog."

"And do the returning men also have servitors who protect them, and are they furtive but not invisible?"

"Yes, that's true. You'll be confined or killed if you

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keep asking questions about Carmody Overlark. I don't know why. He doesn't seem that important to me."

"Mr. Fountain, who would be most likely to know whether the earlier and the later Carmody Overlark are the same man?"

"You might ask his wife."

"I hadn't thought of that. Thank you. I will."

Freddy Foley went to the Scatterbrain Lounge to see if Biddy would show up that evening. The problem remained. There is a truism that things equal to the same thing are equal to each other, but this truism may not be true. The pictures of the later Overlark were also the pictures of Khar-ibn-Mod and of Kir-ha-Mod. And the pictures of the later Overlark were also pictures of the earlier Overlark. Why then were not the pictures of the earlier Overlark also the pictures of Khar-ibn-Mod and of Kir-ha-Mod? They should have been, but they weren't.

When logic breaks down something else should take over. But it wouldn't come to Freddy, it just wouldn't come. Whatever it is that makes a man what he is and not another man, it seemed to break down here.

Then there exploded into the Scatterbrain Lounge the man that Freddy least expected to see of all the men in the world. It was O'Claire, no, no, Auclaire.

"Foley!" the tawny man cried and gripped Freddy and was frantic. "It escaped! It escaped from the fountain! Now it is loose in the world! It is loose in this very city! Where is it? Do you know? It has some affinity to you. Answer me, Foley! Come alive! It's important! The thing is a world-eater!"

"Man, I don't know what you're talking about," Foley sputtered in amazement. "What are you doing here, Auclaire? A mountaintop lie doesn't come to roost here. You're off your head. What are you looking for?"

"The creature from my fountain, the seven-armed

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creature that has snakes for tentacles. *It's loose in the world, I tell you! It's loose in your own city!*"

"You're insane, man. You were only pleasantly crazy this afternoon. Now you're clear gone."

"Foley! Listen to me. *There it is! It's coming to us now!* There is a walking tentacle of the damnable world-eater itself, and nobody rises to kill it or confine it! She's one creature of it, one snake of it! Get back in your place, creature, or I'll beat you back!"

"I will *not* get back in my place!" Biddy Bencher sparked, for she was the walking tentacle of the world-eater. "The whole world is my place now. Why yes, I am one snake of it. What of that? I'm a mutated person now. I'm part of the being that grows and inherits the world."

"Aagh, then I'm too late," Auclaire moaned, and all the fire went out of him.

"I'm wounded, Freddy," Bedelia grimaced, "and the turban on my head isn't the style; but in a day or so I'll unveil the Harvester mark on my forehead in all its brilliance. And your friend here, Freddy? You do have the most interesting friends."

"So do you, Biddy. Biddy, this is Mr. Auclaire, the Patrick of Pecos."

"Oh, I've met patricks before. I love them all, don't I, Freddy? Why don't you go see Mr. Bagley? He's Patrick of Tulsa."

"You refuse to go back to your prison, creature?" Auclaire asked, trembling.

"I refuse to go back to my prison," Biddy said. "I don't even have a prison to go back to. And don't call me creature, little snake-hunter. I am now the essence of uncreated ecstasy."

"I was hoping I'd be able to drive you back to your place," Auclaire moaned, "but I see that I'm too late and you've already fragmented. Yes, I'll go see the local patrick and we will attempt tactics. Oh, God help us

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all! Why didn't you stay in your fountain as God intended you to do, creature?"

"No, no, I didn't leave the fountain," Bedelia protested. "The fountain left me. Oh, I'd forgotten all about when I lived in a fountain. It's like in another life. But now we build new fountains, new upwellings."

Auclaire left them there. He was defeated. All the fire had gone out of him.

"Did you kill Letitia at your gangeroo tonight, Biddy?" Fred Foley asked.

"Yes. How did you know, Freddy? But it was only for a little while. We fixed it up later. I forget just how, but she's all right now. And now I can communicate both with Letitia dead and Letitia alive, so we've added one to our number. But I shouldn't be talking of such things to a sample of non-mutated humanity. Change the subject, Freddy."

"All right. Have you picked up any stories on Carmody Overlark, Biddy?"

"Oh, I'd forgotten about him. Why is he important? I myself am much more important than he is, now that I'm mutated and super. But it seems that I did hear a couple comical things on him. What do you really want?"

"Is there any new oddity that has attached to him in the last year or two?"

"Oh yes. He keeps rats. And he soaks his head in a bucket. He didn't used to do either."

"Soaks his head in a bucket?" Biddy, this is me, Freddy. We're friends. Now what was it that you meant to say when you said that he soaks his head in a bucket?"

"I meant to say that he soaks his head in a bucket. He keeps one in his office always, and there's one for him wherever he goes. I don't know why."

"Anything else?"

"On Carmody, no. On you, yes. I have this information of myself, being now transcendent and super and

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traveling through so many minds at will. You have decided to leave town this evening. Well, there's a man waiting to kill you at the airport, and another at the bus station. There's a third one waiting to kill you if you stay in town."

"Oh well, dead if you do and dead if you don't. Where did they wound you tonight, Biddy, other than the forehead gash?"

"The side, under the arm, close to the lymph."

"And where else?"

"The left round."

"Yes, I thought you sat a little gingerly."

VI: REVENGE OF STRENGTH UNUSED

There is what seems like a regular pattern of excavated cities. From the bottom, three cities, each more advanced in artifact and building, one atop another; then a city of total destruction: following above will be three more cities showing advance and again a fourth showing total destruction.

It is possible, however, that this most common cycle is actually the failed or broken cycle. Much more rarely do we come on the cycle of the full seven cities: at Leros, at Lough Dorg, at Angkor Kong, at Chichen-Ticul. In these cases we find the first three cities of ascending worth, then the fourth or "confusion" plateau which reveals contradictory and exciting values, fragmentary but contained destruction, and grandiose foundations: above this in each case are the fifth and sixth cities, which can only be called marvelous both in their attainments and in their balance and their prophecy: above these are the truncated bases of the seventh cities, which are absolutely unique even in their low remnants.

In each case, the local legend is that the final cities (having become perfect) were taken up to heaven in every stone and person.

The Back Door of History: Arpad Arutinov

"**THERE AIN'T** no way, Charley, there ain't no way we can blow it," one drinking young man was saying to

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another. This seemed to be a catch-phrase born that very day. "There ain't no way, Charley," one woman was saying to another there.

"Boy, I sure can blow it," Freddy Foley said. "There's lots of ways I can blow it yet. Sit here like I'm coming right back, Biddy. I'll see you some other day, some other where."

"Be careful, Freddy, little acorn; you're going to take the airport limousine, and there's a man going to kill you if you show up at the airport. —But why should I warn you? You both belong to unmutated humanity and I'm above such things now."

"You're walleyed and beautiful, Biddy, and you have a fever and you will die in a few weeks. Hey, I can prophesy too."

Fred Foley went around the corner and caught the airport limousine just as it was pulling out. The driver was a friend of Freddy's and Freddy sat in back in the baggage place. But if anyone had wondered, Fred Foley had been on the airport limousine.

There is one dark crossway down under old viaducts, and Fred Foley rolled out of the limousine there. There was a small station of a prehistoric carter service there, and Fred Foley was in and out of it quickly.

Who remembers when they still had passenger trains in this part of the country? Who was the last person ever to ride on one? Now there is a deep secret about this. This prehistoric monster is not dead. Though passenger trains no longer run, yet there is one coach-car hooked onto a Kansas City run at night. Foley got on it. No one, not a fossil, would look for him there. It was one in the morning. There were only five other persons in the coach and four of them were fossils. The fifth one was of that fearsome breed who might want to talk.

Freddy took a book from his bag. It was a rather serious book with which he intended to put himself to

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sleep, *Painting and Reality* by Gilson, but it had one of those false jackets slipped over it. You know the kind, *Safe-cracking for Pleasure and Profit*, *Arson Can Be Fun*, *Care and Feeding of the Polecat*, *Seduction for the Anxious Amateur*. The jacket of this book was *Brain-Surgery Self-Taught*. Freddy read it and dozed till there was a tug on his arm. It was the fifth man.

"I beg your pardon, Doctor," that fifth man said, "but that's a title with which I am not familiar. I am Doctor Jurgens, a general practitioner, not at all a brain specialist. I am interested, however, in anything at all that pertains to our profession."

"O'Claire, Doctor O'Claire, with an O, not an A-u," said Freddy. "It is a real pleasure, sir."

"I sometimes believe, Doctor O'Claire, that we general practitioners get a larger picture of the world than do you more talented specialists."

"Yes, I'm sure that you do, Doctor Jurgens."

"Yet I must make a confession before I proceed further. I am lately disbarred. I am appealing the action. I have done nothing wrong. But there is a penalty for doing things differently. You need not continue to talk to me if you do not wish to."

"I'm quite willing to talk to you," said Foley-O'Claire.

"Thank you. It was for an unorthodox paper of mine that I have been disbarred. 'The Precursors.' You may have read it."

"I'm a little behind in that department, Doctor Jurgens. There's so much literature in our profession that, as they say, it's very difficult for a man to remain abreast. I'm sure there's a copy of it at my home office; I'll make a point to read it. What is the main thesis of it?"

"That there is a Precursor, a forerunner to every great disaster, to every great epidemic, to every high happening of every sort. You will recall that there was a failure of the apple crop the year before the great

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Gothic assault on Rome, a partial but quite serious failure of the grape the year before the battle of Tours, and the pomegranate harvest was far below average the season before the great Persian attack on Attica. We might even couple the crop failures with the great militancy happenings: cabbages and Crecy, millet and Malplaquet, turnips and Tourcoing."

"Watermelons and Waterloo?"

"O'Claire, I'm thunderstruck! That was right under my nose all the time and I never guessed it. Yet it's a fact that 1814 was a poor watermelon year in the United States, in Africa, and in Russia. I had always equated the quince crop with Waterloo, but you have opened my eyes."

"But isn't this a rather odd field of interest for a doctor?"

"Oh, this isn't my field. I only cite these historical commonplaces by way of analogy. You can find Precursors in the field of mineralogy, in literature, in politics, in weather. My field, of course, is Precursors in the field of medicine."

"Ah, now you fascinate me, Doctor Jurgens."

"To every great epidemic, O'Claire, there is a Precursor, apparently unrelated, impossible of connection, yet infallible as to prediction. When the Precursor appears, then the more serious epidemic will follow as surely as season follows season. I maintain that if these were correctly analyzed, then the great epidemics might be prevented. These run in advance, sometimes a year or more in advance, and this gives time for worldwide precaution.

"For an instance, a full year before an outbreak of meningitis in an area, there will be a minor, barely reported, outbreak of cotton-mouth accompanied by quite small irritations on the inner gums. I cannot prove the connection. Medically there would seem to be none.

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But the coincidence is so uniform as to be more than coincidence."

"Yes, I had noted it myself," said Foley-O'Claire, "but perhaps I hadn't assigned to it the significance it deserved."

There are people who do not like to talk to crack-pots, who are bored with boors, who shy off from fools. Foley had none of their reluctance. His profession was gathering information. He knew that fools talk on while wise men hold their tongues, that he could get more information from one fool than from seven sages, that if any man talks long enough he will say something. Besides, he had nothing else to do.

"There is another striking example or coincidence," Doctor Jurgens continued. "Two years before every outbreak of influenza (which always varies as to type) there is a heavy outbreak of erythema, or rash, which also varies as to type. Again there can be no medical connection, but there is some connection."

"It would seem that the Precursors, the predictors, could be crossed up," Foley-O'Claire said. "An epidemic depends on contagion and contagion depends on many tenuous threads easily broken. The Precursor could be made a liar."

"I hope so, O'Claire, for that is my mission. I cannot, however, find where it has ever been a liar. I'm trying to make a liar out of it now in one of its most horrible predictions. I'm going to the capital with my appeal. If I cannot make a liar out of it, then there is something unnatural about the Precursors. It will mean that they are of another realm, that they are real predictors of the future, that the future cannot be altered. I have made a personal adversary out of this Precursor. And such very small blisters they are!"

"Between the fingers, O'Claire, right at the base. They itch a little, and then they are gone. There's not one

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person in a hundred who really notices them or seeks medication for them."

"I had such just last week," said Foley-O'Claire. It was true. He had.

"Half the nation had such just last week, O'Claire, and now they've forgotten them. They've forgotten them so completely that I wonder how it happened to be noted the other times. Yet it *was* noted, and clearly, but in so random and offhand a manner that it seems a miracle. Boccaccio mentions it, Defoe mentions it, the Welshshire Chronicles mention it twice. Everywhere do we find the clear account of this peculiar between-the-finger itching coming about a year before the Thing itself."

"The Thing? What is it, Doctor Jurgens?"

"Oh, the Plague. It'll be here in the present year, you know, unless of course I can persuade the Federal to take steps, just what steps I don't know, to stop it. Well, good night, Doctor. My time is upon me. The natural cycle, you know."

"Oh? What is that, Doctor Jurgens?"

"The thirty-four hour cycle, the natural cycle. I fall into it whenever I'm taking long journeys. You have never noticed why we do not want to go to bed at night? Or why we do not want to get up in the mornings? How can we be expected to adjust to the cycle in just a few thousand years? Wherever mankind originated, we know it was not on this world. It was on some planet body with an equivalent thirty-four hour day. This may narrow the hunt for our original home on that day after tomorrow when we really go looking for such things. Good night."

"Tut, Doctor Jurgens, tut," said Foley-O'Claire. "That's scientific heresy you talk."

"Doctor O'Claire, it has been said that a heresy is the revenge of a forgotten truth. I say that every monstrous appearance or movement is the revenge of a

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strength or variety unused, of a vitality untapped in us. And it looks like a good year for monsters."

Doctor Jurgens flung himself into a deep seat and went to snoozing. Then Foley also napped a few of those quick naps that may be taken only on trains. There was a special element in them for him now, though. One who has been touched by a brain-weave will no longer snooze or dream alone. He will do it out of the vortex.

What the mind of the brain-weave was doing tonight (and it was the mutated Jim Bauer mind that was dominant in it; the rest of them were tired) was killing people, or causing them to kill themselves. Jim Bauer, and the brain-weave through him, seemed to have selective hatreds. He killed a dozen of them. He was killing the thirteenth. "I wouldn't have killed some of those," Fred Foley said to himself, and also said back through the entire brain-weave, "Some of them are pretty good people, some of them are a lot better than Jim Bauer. It's going to be a lopsided world if they keep killing that sort of people."

The thirteenth man didn't much want to go. He sat at a table and scrawled on paper, *I do not kill myself. I have no reason. This is dream-stupid. Even if I wished, I have no gun. And now I have a gun before me, and where did it come from? But I don't know how to shoot it. I never shot a gun in my life. But yes, now I know how to shoot it.* There was a lot of pressure in that brain-weave, icy elegance, green-mottled humor, helical passion, cinnamon-colored dying, ashen weeping of dead Letitia, danger-incitement of live Letitia who wondered in her broken sleep what sort of living nightmare she had been gobbled up by, Klee-fish and the comical death-bubbles, O'Claire's octopus escaped from the fountain and loose in the world, patricks a-

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ltered, and the third stage of the world perhaps beginning.

Something else through the brain-weave that the weave itself didn't know how to monitor, two young men who had become kindred by being touched by the tentacles. Real blood flowing on the border now in savage night fighting. Thirteen of Miguel's men killed in a busted raid, and thirty joining him to replace them. How is a man going to sleep with that stuff going through his head?

Foley had to change trains in Kansas City. He went to the telegraph office. No, he didn't want that stuff to go by wire, though. He phoned Tankersley and got that man up. He gave the names and stations of thirteen prominent men who had just died or suicided.

"You'll vouch for it?" Tankersley asked him.

"I'll vouch for it, Tank."

Then Freddy gave him an eyewitness account of bloody doings on the border.

"You're sure this happened, Freddy?"

"Most of it did. The rest of it will happen momentarily. No use waiting for it to happen to print it, not if it's sure. Rely on me, Mr. Tankersley."

"Where are you, Freddy?"

"Kansas City."

"How come you sound so funny?"

"I'm half asleep. Print it, Tankersley, just as soon as you can."

And Tankersley would print it just as soon as he could. It had to come right or he was dead. And it did come right. It all happened.

A mother put an eleven-year-old daughter on the train at Kansas City. "Don't blow it, kid," the mother said. "Ain't no way, Charley," the daughter answered. So it had become a byword of the times. Everything was coming right up to the point of perfection, rich har-

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vests abounding, pearls beyond price to be dug from every field, all well with the country and the world, no hurry, we were just about there. Any danger of busting it or blowing it finally? Not on the popular level there wasn't. "Ain't no way to blow it, Charley," the people said.

Freddy read two pages, then dozed till there was a tug on his arm, a blue-eyed tug (Freddy, touched by the weave, could now see in all parts of him).

"I beg your pardon, but I was wondering if you were *One of Us?*" asked the man with the snapping blue eyes.

"Possibly, just possibly," Foley said.

"I am a rooted man, sir," said Blue-eyes. "There are those who chop off their own roots in the name of the old 'new' fashion. They wither from that moment. But radix-form mock roots burgeon out of the ground and surround them grotesquely, and these nourish nothing. I say that a man should not allow himself to be surrounded by such weightless weirdness. His own weirdness (that most necessary thing) he should keep inside himself where it is a strength. Beware that you not chop it down or cut it out of yourself. It grows again, externally and poisonously, unsustaining roots. I noticed the jacket of the book you were reading. It is a facetious title, but you do not seem to be a facetious man. Then I asked myself, Why should a man put such a jacket on a book other than for a joke? Why, for concealment, I told myself. What you are actually reading is not for prying eyes. The book (and it may not be a book) does not correspond to the title on the jacket. That is my guess."

"There is a fascination about guesses which must remain unverified," Freddy Foley said.

"I believe that it is a precis, a resume of your own project," the blue-eyed man said. "You may not care to discuss it. I do not care to discuss my own project, but I can always spot a fellow inventor. Every time I

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go up to Washington with one of my new great inventions, and it is several times a year, I see others who are quite unmistakably of my kind. We inventors are a curious breed."

"Ah, we are that. We are not as other men," Freddy said.

"Though I would not reveal the slightest detail of what I am carrying, yet there is no harm in telling you that it is basically an Enervator."

"I surmised as much."

"But perhaps you have surmised that I have only invented one more relaxer? No. If that were the case my *trip* would not be of so great moment. If that were the case I would not be followed and shadowed. There is one man in this coach who sleeps with his ears and eyes open and misses nothing. He is a shadow. His job is to watch and follow someone, and that someone cannot be other than myself."

"Or myself," said Freddy.

"Most inventors have the tendency to overestimate the value of their own inventions," said the blue-eyed man, "and perhaps you overestimate yours. The shadow-man looks at *you* with veiled eyes, it is true, but that is only so he will not seem to be looking at me. No, I'm sure that it is me he is following. What I have is a device that will change humanity completely, that will erase the decades and centuries, that will enable one to span—but I cannot tell you more. My life is in danger as it is."

"Why should your life be in danger for inventing a relaxing machine?"

"I tell you, it is much more. It will enable man to remove death to the incredibly distant future."

"It would seem a boon. Who would prevent it?"

"Those who have already achieved my aims without my machine. There *are* such men. I have reason to believe that there is a small jealous group who will kill

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to prevent their special benefits from going to all humanity."

"I've more fear that humanity will be killed by special benefits going to it unasked," Foley said. "It's a cat that's going to be killed with too much kindness. I wish you'd put a relaxer on all over-kind and over-zealous groups."

"But I will, sir. So many things appear out of due season. I'd freeze them a while. Ah—we both understand that I have been talking nonsense. My machine is not like this at all, but it may be of some aid in integrating the personal and world ego. We both understand that 'Enervator' is no more than a code description."

"Yes, we both understand that," said Fred Foley. That Fred Foley drew some strange ones, but there was a shadow-man on the coach and he was as likely shadowing Fred Foley as the blue-eyed inventor.

The rails were making rhymes to the tune of *Kansas City Star*:

*Piles of money, piles of barley,
Piles of peace, each man a king.
Ain't no way to blow it, Charley,
Ain't no way to blow the thing.*

Really, everything was better than it had ever been before, if you didn't look too closely behind the screen. "Bad news, bad news!" Tankersley stormed sometimes. "What do they make reporters out of nowadays? Can't anybody find just a little bad news to lead off one more edition?" There wasn't much bad news any more. In two more weeks a popular president would be reelected. People were sharper and kinder and happier than they had ever been. All molehills had been leveled. The world was flat and tidy, a perfect takeoff platform for . . . something. Ah well, what are a few bat-wings in the

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night, a few pet hydras escaping from fountain prisons, a few men living too many times? More power to them. And by dusk of the day that was dawning Fred Foley would come to the fine place itself, Washington the Capitol City, where all difficulties are resolved.

"Your creature had *not* escaped, Auclaire," Bertigrew Bagley growled. "What's the matter with you? Have you only one set of eyes? It's back in your fountain now, at any rate. I can see it. I don't believe it ever escaped into the world at all."

"No, Bagley, no. That's a simulacrum in my fountain now. It left it there to fool me. The thing itself is loose in this city and in this world. It has fragmented into seven or eight people but it still has its unity. The arms of it are persons. They always have been. We were wrong to believe that the arms of the polypus were movements. We saw them as Communism and as Secular-Liberalism and as such deadly things, but it is only when they inhabit persons that they are dangerous. That Foley knows the names of all of them, but he has slipped me. The sorrel-snake woman is the only one I know."

"Go easy on the sorrel-snake girl. I've a great affection for her. She doesn't laugh at me as viciously as most of them do. Oh, I know all the members, Auclaire. I can have my dog kill them easily enough, but I'm not sure that I should. We lived with dragons in the earlier days; why are we fastidious now? Every fine castle used to have its own dragon in the cellar. Every fine world has always had."

"This one is deadly, Bagley. It is one of those which has not raised itself, has not broken loose for centuries. It begins to eat up the children now. It killed thirteen good and high men this morning and it has hardly come awake yet."

"Three of those men needed killing, Auclaire. You've

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got to admit that, whichever side of the aisle you're on."

"And the worst part of it, Bagley, is that it won't do any good to have your dog kill the members. They have already set up a real weave. They have already mutated. And one of them is already dead and it makes no difference at all. She comes on even stronger and weirder after she's dead. And the leader, what is his name?"

"Jim Bauer. He's the biologist, but he knew all along that the biology of the thing was only part of the hoax, only part of the trigger."

"He is torn between two ideas for strengthening the weave now. He will either kill himself and go to hell—he believes that he might do better work from there—or he will enlist an actual demon of hell and expend the weave to nine members. He is already playing Demon Lover with both his dead and his living wife—what is their name?"

"Letitia."

"Letitia—Happiness. I wonder if she really wanted it? She got on that danger kick instead. Maybe it is her sort of happiness, but she comes through mighty pale and drawn. Should we contact the Patriarchs of Greater Armenia and Greater Ireland?"

"Oh, I've already done that, Auclaire. They say that they have escaping creatures of their own, much more momentous ones than we have here. And the Patriarch of Greater Armenia reminds me of another thing. God still regards all four sets of us things as exterior creatures, not to be allowed into the castle or the world, not good for the castle or the world. To Him, at the moment, we are not much better than the python-nest things, than the resurrection toads, than the gnashing falcons. Even our sometimes alliance with the falcons, as better than the other two, is not completely pleasing to Him."

"What must we do then, Bagley? Oh yes, I remember

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what the Manual says we must do. ‘Serve faithfully for aeon after aeon, that He may be convinced of our good will. Guard the hydra-pyths that they may not escape into the world. Unravel the mystery of the resurrection toads even if it takes us a million days. Mitigate the menace of the falcons, but use it against any greater menace that might arise. And after long and faithful service, He may admit us into the castle.’ Bagley, I keep hoping that every thousand years we serve may be the last.”

“It would be pretty ironic, Auclaire, wouldn’t it, if the other three sets also believed that they were serving faithfully? That they might also some day be admitted to the castle? You know, there’s a story that we *were* in the castle once, that we set up our own primordial weave, and that we mutated; and that we got thrown out then and became exterior creatures; and that we have to labor like trolls to redeem ourselves. Say, my dog is one-quarter troll by blood. I’ll ask him sometime how hard they really work. We may be overdoing it.”

Odd talk, that, is it not? Not very. Not from patricks. They often talk like that when a couple of them get together. They are some sort of lodge or society. They pretend to take themselves seriously, like the Baker Street Irregulars. And they pick up a little esoterism such as you get from the Los Angeles quackeries. They have titles and such, and they pretend to divide the world into realms such as Greater Ireland and Greater Armenia.

Jim Bauer, as a matter of fact, did not kill himself that day. Neither did he kill Arouet Manion. The sickly fear of death that was on Arouet added a curious and glittering element to the weave. Imagine a man being afraid of a little thing like dying, a mutated man at

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that. But cowardice might be as necessary an element as arrogance and dishonesty and hatred to make a weave really work.

Bauer postponed his own death for a while, regrettably, as he believed there was still much work to be done in generating the weave and he believed he could do it better in the body. Later, later he would do it.

But he did enlist an actual demon named Baubo to join the weave. This expanded the membership to nine. We will see how it works, we will see how it works.

VII: OF ELEGANT DOGS AND RETURNED MEN

. . . For I have written at great length of these Mansions (the fourth), as these are they where the greatest number of souls enter. As the natural is first united with the supernatural in these, it is here that the devil can do most harm.

Interior Castle: Teresa of Avila

IT IS A southern river town with some pretensions of being a city. It is intended to be beautiful, and often it is. It has more greenery than most, and it uses its water areas (both natural and contrived) well. There is grace in the general placement of its public buildings, and it has one quality which only the distinctive cities have: it is never seen for the first time. It is always recognized as something once known and forgotten for a while.

And like every southern river town it has its canker. Every one of them has it somehow, like a beautiful belle with a loathsome disease. There is no point in stirring needless enmity (though it is fun) by naming the names and recounting the venoms. But it's a fact that they are a mean bunch of towns: many of them are likable, but all of them are mean.

Every plain mean town in the land, Kansas City, Natchez, Wilmington N.C., Cape Giradeau, Cincinnati (certainly it's a southern town; it doesn't matter which side of that river it's on), Morgan City, Memphis, Laredo, Baton Rouge, St. Louis, Louisville, Richmond, New

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Orleans, every really mean town in the country is a southern river town.

The capital has its own orneriness, as pervading as the others, but it isn't the same sort. It never was a fun town. It is not a robust sin town. Its fleshpots have no real juice in them. Its vices are effete and heterodox, and its moral rot is a dry one. Though its people have come there from all parts, yet they are not all sorts of people. They are very much of one sort. The ethic climate here nurtures an ancient, evil, shriveled thing. It is of the inhabitants of this city that the prophet spoke:

Of those who do not have the faith
And will not have the fun.

There's an odor about all these southern river towns that isn't entirely due to their dank rivers. Here there is a sense of being in a tightly closed room even when outdoors. Still, it's a pretty and pleasant town to come to in the evening.

Oriel Overlark shouldn't be a hard person to locate. Fred Foley would find her, ask her one question, and then go back home if, of course, he got the answer. There are several thousand persons in Washington whose whereabouts will always be known to everyone. Any-one in the trade will know.

Freddy looked up Mary Ann Evans. She'd know where Oriel Overlark was at the moment. Mary Ann was a casual acquaintance of Foley, but now he must originate the fiction that they were very old friends, and Mary Ann must go along with it. She was a lady reporter, and her stories were entirely of the ladies.

But she looked at Fred Foley with amazement, almost with awe. Nobody had ever done that before.

"Foley! How did you do it? How did you know? You had some of them almost before they happened,

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all of them before or right at the moment when they were discovered. I think there are pickup orders out for you. Your paper denies knowing where you are. You're going to have to answer some real inquiries. *How did you know about them?*"

"About what, Mary Ann? That's the strangest greeting I ever got from anyone. I just blew into town."

"About the thirteen suicides, if that's what they were. Were they? You must be the one who knows all about them."

"Was my name on that story? That was way back early this morning."

"Your name wasn't on it—you'd be torn limb from limb for it by now if it had been. Your boss-image Tankersley is being. But we were able to track it back to you easily enough. What are you following up on now? Six of those suicides were here in Washington, but of course you know that."

"Oh, I'm not doing anything of a followup, Mary Ann. My part of that one is finished with. All I came to Washington for is to see Oriel Overlark and ask her one question."

"What a cover, but who'd believe that? When did you start doing ladies' features? Fred, you're so much older and more mature! I can't believe it. I never saw a kid get over being a kid like that. It's only a year since I saw you."

"It's only a week since Tankersley told me he wished I didn't look so much like a kid. He didn't think I'd ever get over it."

"In one week you've matured and deepened like that? What's happened to you?"

"Nothing at all, Mary Ann. And I sure haven't matured. Now, can you tell me where I can find Oriel Overlark, now, at this moment? I want to ask her one question, and then I want to go back home."

"There are very many people who want to ask you

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very many questions, Fred. Why the Oriel fake? Is she connected with the suicides?"

"Oh no. This has nothing to do with that. I want to ask her one question, that's all."

"For what she's worth, Fred, let me tell you that she isn't worth anything to you. I've done three pieces on Oriel myself, trying to see her in three dimensions. It didn't work, though. She looks brilliant, but she's a flat person. Not even low relief. She doesn't have three dimensions.

"Carmody was an art collector, you know, before he became adviser to the advisers. Oriel is a piece of art. Not profound art, but striking new art for all that. She's a novelty piece. She's been imitated and parodied, but only in a small circle. She'll never be a widespread fad. Why do you want to talk to Oriel? What kind of question do you want to ask her?"

"I want to ask her a question about Carmody."

"Why don't you ask Carmody the question about Carmody?"

"I will, if Oriel doesn't give me the answer. I guess I really want answers from both of them. I may have to add them together. Oriel might not know all about Carmody. I'm sure that Carmody hasn't researched Carmody to any depth, doesn't really know much about Carmody, but—"

"—added to what *you* know about Carmody, you should have it complete. Is that it, Fred? There she is now. And if you have to ask me which she is, then you don't deserve any answers at all."

"No. I don't have to ask which she is, Mary Ann."

Freddy and Mary Ann were dining at Proviant's, and the Oriel party had just entered. Certainly nobody would have to ask which was Oriel, even though several of those in her party were prominent. She didn't take the center. She took a position where it was even a little hard for them to see her. But she *was* the center.

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Proviant's was a Germanish sort of restaurant. Mary Ann hadn't known that Oriel would come here. It is more likely that Freddy had made her come here through some power he had from being brushed by the weave. They could watch but not hear the Oriel party from here, and Freddy's first impression was that Oriel was not so flat as all that: that she might have dimensions that Mary Ann didn't suspect.

"She's isn't really pretty," said Mary Ann, "yet men look at her as if she were. Her eyes are too close together; her hair grows too far down on her forehead; her ears aren't a bit good, but she seldom shows them. She hasn't enough jaw, and her neck lacks only a little of being scrawny. Her shoulders are her best asset above-board, but they're not in it with those of her two friends, and you don't even notice them. She doesn't know how to sit. She doesn't know how to walk."

"But you'd recognize her in a crowd, or at a great distance, Mary Ann."

"Yes. She's too light in the body and too heavy in the legs. Her ankles are good, though, and her feet, particularly the insteps. But honestly I can't give her much else."

"Her hair?"

"Oh, her hair's by Schwob. I thought you'd know that."

"Not the color."

"The color is about ten percent Schwob. He has a way of putting the highlights in. It wasn't exactly that color before, but it was close."

"It's blue-blonde. There can't be a color like that, can there? Or it's like ashen-blonde seen under a blue light, and the light here isn't. Gahh, I've had one too many, no, two too many, ashen-blondes lately."

"Really, Fred? Is that what's matured you? If only she hadn't those washed-out blue eyes."

"At least they aren't green, Mary Ann." (But possibly Oriel's eyes were a bit green.)

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"Fooled you, Fred. I felt that one coming. I didn't listen. She isn't at all intelligent. And she isn't a good talker or a good listener. It's just that she's always had it. She's even richer than Carmody. Oh, there's Carmody joining them now! I didn't suspect he'd join them."

"I did. That stuff is hard work, though," Freddy said.

"Shall we barge over and I make the introductions, Fred? There's really no painless way to do it. They'll make us feel like commoners in any case. It's their only talent that I really envy. Whatever it is that sets them apart and makes them that sort of people and not our sort I don't know."

"Oh, I've been puzzling lately what makes a person what he is, and not another. My puzzle's really the same as yours. I remember now where I met Carmody before. I had a slight notion that I'd known him. He wasn't at all the sort of man one would remember or notice, for all that he was rich and open. But this Carmody has carried over some details from the old."

"Not notice that man? Fred, how can you say that? Everyone would always have noticed him and remembered him. Why, the smoothness is just dripping off him."

"I know it. But he isn't the same man. I've got that part of the answer now, I'm sure. I really had my trip for nothing. But I don't believe that either of them will tell me how he does the trick."

"Is this something that I'm not supposed to understand, Fred?"

"I don't think they want anyone to understand it. They're nervous and unsure."

"Nervous and unsure? Them? Never, Fred."

"Why do they have people everywhere to kill people who ask questions, then? I wouldn't do that unless I was a little bit nervous about something."

So Freddy went over to where the august party was

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settling down again after the arrival of Carmody Overlark.

"Mr. Overlark, I doubt if you remember me," he said. "Fred Foley. I knew you a little at Hot Springs three years ago. You were a cheerful loser at the races and you sometimes stayed up after dark."

"Yes, Foley, I got out among them a little more then," Carmody Overlark said. He had a twinkle on him, but not what you would call a merry twinkle. Something other, of a different humor. And, yes, he did have archaic ears. "I've less time for diversions now, but I still enjoy them. I remember you. A newspaper man, aren't you? And there may be something you want to talk to me about in my and your official capacity?"

"What would be the easiest way to go about it, Mr. Overlark?"

"It's a vicious circle with only one possible solution. I'll have to make an appointment for you with my secretary, and he'll make an appointment for you with me. Here, I'll write a brief note. He'll be able to decipher it, but you may not be. It's the only way you can get to see him, and seeing him is the only way you can get to see me. It may be a day or two; I'm quite busy. Good evening. And good evening, Miss Evans."

They were dismissed, but Freddy had the scribbled note. Freddy and Mary Ann went back to their table.

"Don't be resentful, Fred," she said. "Besides, he really *is* important. He wasn't being rude, just direct. And you do have an appointment for an appointment."

"That's not my resentful look, Mary Ann. Pray that you never see that. But he doesn't remember me. He never saw me before."

"Naturally not. Why did you make up that silly story about knowing him at Hot Springs? Anybody could have found out where such a prominent man as he was three years ago and made it fit in."

"Oh, I did know Carmody Overlark there, Mary Ann.

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I spent part of a large night with him, but I'd forgotten it. He was such an easy man to forget."

"Fred, you're off your noggin. Nobody could ever forget that man."

"He *was* easy to forget, and I had forgotten him, till it came back to me a moment ago. But that man there never saw me before and I never saw him."

"Why did he say that he had, then? How did he know that you were a newspaper man?"

"He said he knew me because he knows as much about Carmody Overlark as one man will bother to learn about another for a special reason, and he realized that I probably *had* met Carmody. And he knew I was a newspaper man because I look and act like one, and because I'm with a newspaper woman, you."

"Tell me about it, Fred. If I were onto anything queer I'd tell you about it."

"My mother used to tell me that lying would make my tongue black. What really made my tongue black was chewing walnut hulls for tobacco, but she always thought it was my lying. You'd no more tell me if you had something live—"

"Oh I know it. My tongue's black."

They ate. It was good. They talked. And once Freddy left the table briefly. It was not coincidence that another person left another table at nearly the same time. It was planned that way, but the way the planning was implemented is harder to explain. Foley had his own way of getting an idea across, especially with his new-found maturity, and he was more capable than most gave him credit for.

And now he had made another appointment, which did not involve a secretary. He had hopes, for the first time, that perhaps the trick would be explained to him after all.

Anyhow, he had a date with Oriel Overlark now.

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Freddy and Mary Ann left Proviant's. They ditched each other. Mary Ann went to make inquiries on whether there was really anything new on Carmody Overlark, on the fifteen suicides, on tip-man Freddy Foley who had now won inner-circle fame for a story he'd already put out of his mind.

Freddy walked not quite at random. He walked rapidly in the bright streets and slowly in the dark ones. "That damned spider," he said and brushed his hand across his eyes, but there wasn't any spider, only a silk streamer out of some web attached to him. He doubled and redoubled. He knew the tricks. He came up behind the man who had been following him and collared him firmly.

It was the inventor from the train.

"Not that you worry me," Foley said, letting him go again when he saw what fish he was, "and not that I care about being followed, but I *am* curious. Why have you been following me?"

"I wasn't," said the man. "It only seemed like it. Actually I was following the man who was following you—ah, this is a little hard to put into words—the man who was following you so he wouldn't seem to be following me. You were just a little pawn we maneuvered around. Then you maneuvered to get behind both of us. You didn't notice him at all, but he's waiting quite near. He's a better shadow than I am. Why was it that you noticed me and didn't notice him, since he was between us most of the time?"

"I don't know. Well then, why were you following the man who was following me?"

"To keep him in sight. And because I didn't quite understand the situation. I still don't. It's almost as if there was something important about *you*. I told you back on the train that there was a man in our car who slept with his eyes and ears open and missed nothing. He was following me to destroy the secret of the re-

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markable invention I carry, and perhaps to destroy the inventor too. That is the same man who is still waiting a little ways off. You had the idea that it might be you he was following, as though your own invention (whatever it is) could be of such import. Now I'm a little in doubt myself. It's a blow to my pride, but it just *may* be you he is following. Are you in danger?"

"Not in immediate danger, I don't believe. I've passed several darker corners than this where it could have happened if it was meant to happen tonight."

"Say, I'm Crabtree, Carlyle S." the man said. "You *should* know my name, but most inventors are uninformed and unacquainted outside of their own narrow field. I except myself. Most don't know their own next door neighbor in the speculative neighborhood. Yet I'm an important man, and possibly you are, since you also seem to be a focus of interest. You may regard me, sir, as a little sawed-off joker with a lot of talk who'd be no good in a showdown. But I boxed at Tech, school middleweight champion. I'm still handy. Shall we go jump him and see what he's made of? We could cut him off both ways from here."

"It might be fun, Carlyle S., but we wouldn't find out anything, and I'd lose a possible lead. A man following you can sometimes lead you to a place you wouldn't otherwise be able to find. Now, Carlyle, I'm going to phone a man from the corner drug store there. He's given me things in the past. Do me a favor and watch my shadow for a little while. I'll be right back. We'll talk some more, then, and you may want to go with me and talk to this man also."

"His name, sir, in case something happens to you, and I may be stubborn enough to follow it out myself?"

"Harry Hardcrow," said Fred Foley. "I don't know his number till I look it up. I don't know his address any more either. He's known in the newspaper business, if you would want to find him."

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"And your name, sir? I don't even know that."

"Fred Foley. I'm also in the newspaper business, but not as well known. Watch my shadow for a while. But nothing will happen."

"I believe that something *will* happen, Foley. I have an instinct for these things and I've never been wrong yet. Something very direct will happen suddenly, but I will try to be ready for it."

Foley went into the corner drug store, looked up the number and phoned Harry Hardcrow. He got him at once. Hardcrow seemed half glad to hear from him. At least he placed him. And suddenly Hardcrow seemed much more interested. Fred Foley had new fame as a tipster going for him.

"Foley, honest, I want to see you and talk to you. I want to ask you about— But honestly, I have something big I have to cover right now. I do want to see you later. You may be able to do something for me, and I'll do almost anything for you. Could you come by my place about midnight?"

"Oh sure, Hardcrow. You still live at the same place? Yes, I can find it."

Foley left the drug store and walked back to meet Carlyle S. Crabtree, the inventor. He thought he might go to the hotel and talk till time for the meeting with Hardcrow. An inventor might have a mind that would hit on overlooked corners of a problem. Besides, Crabtree seemed like a man who would stay with a friend, once he had become a friend. In a way, they had pact between them.

But Crabtree wasn't standing where he should have been. Foley approached the dark spot very slowly. If Crabtree weren't there— But he was there, as Foley saw with the absolute opposite of relief. Foley was always cool. He should have been doubly cool with his new maturity. Cool! What he saw froze him solid for a minute.

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Carlyle Crabtree wasn't standing there, but he was lying there. And the way he was lying, Freddy knew that he was dead. He was lying on his face, dragged back into the doorway of an unlighted shop. He had been knifed deeply and his life still ran out in black blood, but the main bleeding was over with. He had no pulse. He had already begun to go rigid.

Freddy was surprised that he remained calm. But he had been calm in tricky situations for several days now. After all, according to Mary Ann Evans and to his own new feeling, he had achieved maturity. But what now?

The shadow was nowhere to be seen, but he might still be near. He had killed once, he might intend to do it again. But Freddy began to get mad.

"I'll have you for this!" he called loudly. Then he was silent. He had no wish to be associated with the death itself so he worked rapidly. He turned Crabtree over. The man hadn't even been gone through. He still bulged in the same places. Whatever interest they had in Crabtree, it hadn't been in what he was carrying.

Foley took out a very large, very full manila envelope that Crabtree carried inside his shirt. He had known that Crabtree carried his most precious possession there. The chubby little man wasn't that chubby. Freddy also took the money-belt and the wallet, as such things can be handy.

He finished with it. But he had his new instincts and insights, and also his old reporter instincts. They shrilled at him "Plant! Plant!" Freddy had been wrong at first. Crabtree *had* been gone through. Someone had a very great interest in what he had been carrying, to frisk so quickly and completely, and to substitute authentically.

Freddy had begun to like the little inventor, but he left him there and walked rapidly toward his hotel. Two people were signaling his mind. This business of distant people talking to him was something new these

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last two or three days and he didn't attempt to account for it. They had to be people who had also been brushed by the brain-weave, for that acted somehow as communication satellite to bounce the messages. But this was Bencher, Bedelia's father. Had the weave attacked him too? Or had he had some earlier encounter? After all, he did have a great scar on his forehead from some youthful encounter, and it was very like the mark the Harvesters had inflicted on themselves lately.

"Stay there and wait, Freddy," Bencher was saying. "I'll get you out of there."

"Stay here and wait nothing!" Freddy snorted. He had picked up his shadow again after two blocks and he didn't intend to make a mistake. Freddy was very alert now and very angry. Turning a corner, he paused and listened. There was nothing to be heard, though he fancied he could hear another man listening. Foley reversed. He was fast. He thought he could collar that shadow quickly and have him, knife or no knife.

The shadow was faster. Foley couldn't run him down. He followed him around another corner, and the shadow had disappeared completely. But there wasn't any place he could have disappeared.

"Stay there, Freddy, you have to stay there," Bencher was saying again. "I'll get you out, I'll get you over the wall somehow."

"Over what wall?" Freddy asked. Finally when Freddy had neared his hotel, the shadow was there again, but further back.

"Ah well, this is your game," Freddy said. "I'll find a game that I can play better than you. There's no use getting cute now at this end of the trail. If you followed me before, you know where I'm staying." Freddy went into his hotel.

"It's simply diabolism," Bencher was saying. "I don't know why my daughter became involved with it. It isn't that she's brainless, it's just that she's still a kid."

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I'll figure it out. I'll sort out the different powers involved. This simple diabolism I can whip. Stay there and don't worry. I'll get you over the wall."

"Leave it, Bencher," Freddy said. "I'm not behind walls, and I can whip simple diabolism myself. This is more complex."

Freddy went to his room, bolted every bolt, checked windows and such, went into the bathroom to be safe from possible gunfire from outside, and dumped all the Crabtree loot onto the floor. He even sounded the wall between his and the bathroom of the next room. It sounded firm and untampered-with.

But the second voice came now. It had waited politely for the first one, Bencher's, to finish.

"You know who I am," came the slightly-slurred, slightly-accented voice of Miguel Fuentes to Freddy's inner ears. "We have not met but we know each other. We are both brushed by the devil-weave, and we can fox back and talk by it. I want to make proclamation. You will proclaim this for me from the capital of your country. Let me talk now. You will not need to write it down till later, or you can phone it in to someone and not write it down at all. I know you are like me, you have a memory for words, and you will remember all of mine exactly.

"I make proclamation of who I am and what I will do for the world. I was roused to my activity by devils for a devils' game, but I will not do devils' work. This is a mistake that the devils make, that they believe they have the ordering of things. They cannot remember that very often these things turn against them: that they can start a wind but they cannot order which way the wind will blow. This is what I am: a poor man, but a good man at several trades; a man of brains who has never used his brains until now; a bad man very often, but one who was never so dishonest as to pretend that his bad was good; a slob, *un chapucero*, there is no word

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in English to say what sort of slob I was; a strong man, particularly in the arms and back and loins and legs; a humorous man even when the great gash of false justice and misery cuts across the whole world picture.

"Why has this thing come to me? Why, because it did not come to another man, I suppose. The world is in need of ordering, and there is no other man who steps forward and says 'I will order it.'

"I will be called fascist. I and mine will *be* fascist in the old Roman sense, not in the sense of the modern sniveling things that are of the left and not of the right. We will be fascist in the real sense and sign of the fasces. This is the battle-ax bound in with sticks and rods, and the meaning of it is authority by steps. Ax cuts sticks as threat, sticks beat dogs, and dogs (when comes an unusual revolution) eat up ax. This is like the hand and fist game that children play when they put out their hands to challenge each other: rock breaks scissors, scissors cuts paper and paper covers rock.

"As to the last part of my instance, the revolution where dogs eat up ax, I will proclaim it in a moment what elegant and bristling and false dogs those are, and how they are not of the people at all but are vicious prey on the people.

"This is the fault of the world, this is the reason that it needs ordering now: it is bankrupt in the middle of its wealth, and it offers a life that is not worth living. It has stolen their old poverty from the people and given them meaner things under new names. It has brought back a slavery that is more abject than any in history, though its chains are not of iron but of peculiar compulsion. The world has befouled itself and it needs to be cleaned. Think of me as the cleaner of the world. If I use a little blood instead of useless detergent, it is to cleanse it the better.

"I speak good words of Indians, the earth people of earth. I have traveled to countries and continents as

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sea-man and irregular soldier and I have seen that it is the same everywhere. There are always the earth-people (I will call them Indians, though they have other names in other places; there are even blond and red-headed Indians, and fair and black and the color *mor-ado*); and there are the ravening dog- or wolf-people who prey on them. It is the dog- and wolf-people who use revolution and the liberalism-slavery trick and the devil catchwords to disorder the world. In every land of Latin America and in most lands of the world, there have been at least three revolutions by these dog-people (some of blood, some of idea only), and all have been in the name of the earth-people. Now there are the great families and groups who rule and enslave everywhere. They pass the dog-lie that it is the old stubborn rich families, that it is the old stubborn church, that it is the old stubborn ways that are obstacles. This is all lying. It is always the new rich dog-families and groups, the novel church of the itching ears, the ways of new hell that enslave. And it is these dogs who rule always who ask falsely for more revolution; it is they who bleed false blood for the new poor who are their own creation; it is they who preach love instead of law. For the law obliges them and restricts them. But it costs them nothing to use the word 'love.'

"I call them the elegant dogs, and I begin to kill them now. They rule the world but they do not believe that there is another world above and after.

"I speak good words of church who is mother here and also hereafter. But it is for real love of church that I will kill certain judas priests and judas bishops and almost all of judas editors and journalists.

"But for our great compassion, we will not kill so many people as many might wish. Of most of the elegant dogs we will only pull the teeth. 'This is no good,' says an adviser who joined me only today. 'Those dogs will grow new teeth. Kill them all.' We will see. If they

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persist in growing new teeth, then it is time to kill them.

"We will kill only such persistent false voices as can not otherwise be silenced. In all the world we may have to kill no more than one million liberals, communists and doctrinaires. The rest will shrivel, for a time at least.

"I understand, with my new insight, the four powers that are on the fringe of the world. I have now become actionist and captain of one of those powers. I understand the abiding men and the returning men. I understand which support us and which support the dog-faced octopus.

"Am I so sure that I am right? No. I am not. A man who is sure he is right is always wrong. But I am sure that the elegant dogs are wrong. A patrick whose mind I encounter tells me that God still regards all four sets of us things as exterior creatures, not to be allowed into the castle or the world, not good for the castle or the world. I believe that God is mistaken in classing us with the other powers, and I will convince Him of His mistake. But I will do what I have to do, even though I was roused by devils and have not yet the full approval of God. That will come if I do my work well.

"To all the governments and governors of the world: Wait and do not panic. I am coming to relieve you of your governing as soon as possible. Do not abuse anything while you wait. You are on time and sufferance. I come quickly, but there is a whole world to occupy. I will kill only the anti-life people who speak of unwanted people, as if there could ever be too many people, as if there could ever be too much of this highest created excellence. I will kill only unreformable liberals, and elegant dogs who oppress, and the evil returning men who are fine and yellow in toadflax.

"To the world in disorder: Wait. Persevere. I come to order it now.

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"Proclaim that, Foley, proclaim it. It will really come about."

"All right, Miguel, all right. I'll proclaim it," Freddy said. "Yes, I will remember it all. Leave me now. I have my affair with elegant dogs and returned men fine in toadflax."

VIII: THE LINE OF YOUR THROAT, THE MERCURIAL MOVEMENT

What adders came to shed their coats?
What coiled obscene
Small serpents with soft stretching throats
Caressed Faustine?
Swinburne

IN HIS HOTEL ROOM Fred Foley examined the money-belt and billfold he had taken from Crabtree. Finding nothing of interest in them except money and identification, he made a bundle of them to parcel post to the police. He examined casually the contents of the large manila envelope. This, he decided, he would keep for further study.

It was the detailing of Crabtree's latest invention, the design of a cubicle. The cubicle would be the size to hold a man lying down. It would be airtight and nearly indestructible when sealed. The purpose of it was obscure, though the papers said it was an Ener-vator. "Who wants to be enervated anyhow?" Foley asked himself.

There was considerable electromagnetic apparatus, minute controls to maintain conditions and large controls apparently to set up conditions. There were many pages of mathematics and schematics which could not be digested casually; by many persons they could not have been digested at all. But Foley, who had been a

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science feature writer, had a talent of going to the heart of a thing and he soon had the basic idea of it.

"But it's all wrong," he said.

"Of course it is," said Hondo Silverio. "It's a substitution, but an ingenious one."

"It isn't an Enervator, of course," said Richard Bencher. "It's an Hypnotic Dredge. Even in its wrongness I can see that the original is meant to bring up the strengths and varieties unused, the vitality untapped, to awaken the interior nourishing weirdness and so demolish the exterior mock-root poisons. Stay there, Foley; I'll get you over the wall."

"No machine will do it—not this, not the original," said Hondo Silverio. "But they're afraid of it and have intercepted it. They're terrified of our interior strengths."

"I didn't know you two were tuned in," Freddy said. There was a note by Crabtree to the effect that the thing had never actually been tried out. There was writing that Freddy called the "A" or Crabtree hand; there were some that he called the "B" substitution or other hand, but this was so near to the Crabtree hand that Foley did not know how he distinguished them.

There was a feeling about all this that Foley had from the first, a feeling which he knew would persist no matter how deeply he delved into it: that was the feeling that the whole thing was a hoax.

At the same time there was the even stronger feeling that Carlyle S. Crabtree had been in no respect a hoaxer. But can a straight man perpetuate a hoax unwittingly? No, not that man. He might perpetuate some nonsense, or a failure or an ineptitude, but never a hoax.

But this smelled of hoax all through it. "Well, I'll leave it here a while," Freddy told himself. He would go out. He knew that his room and his things would be gone through while he was out. No matter. Whoever they were, they already knew what it all was, and he didn't.

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Freddy went out for his meeting with Harry Hardcrow. He stopped in the street in front of his hotel and whistled loudly. "Coming?" he called then. "Coming after me?" But his shadow was not to be seen. Then a taxi rolled around the corner and stopped to his hail. Freddy got in. He had the feeling that he would be taken to his destination whether he gave it or not, but he was skittish of testing it. He gave the driver Harry Hardcrow's address.

"Not that you aren't, and not that I'm not," said Harry Hardcrow, who often talked that sort of shorthand, "but I'm wondering if your visit is casual or urgent." He shook hands with Foley. "You had a slight tone of excitement when you talked to me on the phone earlier, Foley. And you appear now still more excited. Has anything happened in the meanwhile?"

"Not that I recall, not anything important," Fred Foley said. "Oh yes, there was the murder of a man whom I knew only a little bit. But he had been waiting for me when it happened. It shook me a little more than has come to the surface yet. But it wasn't involved with my main line of inquiry, so we'll let it go for the moment."

"It *may* be involved with your main line of inquiry, Foley. What *is* your main line of inquiry?" Hardcrow asked.

"I'm looking for the answers to a couple of questions that will sound asinine to you, Harry, though not so asinine as if I'd put them in their first forms. The first one I ask seriously, though it sounds almighty trite. What's your opinion of the state of the nation and the world now, Harry?"

"Worse than perfect, Foley—jittery, almost hysterical in certain circles. And nobody knows why. Two years ago it was the best it had been in decades, maybe the best ever. *And everything has improved since then.* Two years ago there was real feeling of hope and trust all

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around the world. Differences had almost disappeared. Health, national, physical, moral, and financial, was good. Crime was down. And there had come that sort of creative gaiety that marks only the very great eras. We had come into one of the really golden ages. It wasn't just the arts, Foley (though they were burgeoning as not since that short springtime in Florence half a millennium ago); it wasn't just material prosperity (we've had that before, though not so solid nor so unmixed); it was just a general breaking into the light after many years of work on all fronts dedicated to the advance. It was a good harvest in sight after a long labor."

"I know how it was two years ago, Hardcrow. And I know a little how it is now, though the worst is kept from us peasants. But how has it become worse while getting better? What has happened in between?"

"It was a series of unprecedented advances that somehow left us far in arrears, Foley; a program of wise and probably perfect moves that left us in a stupid situation; a whole array of undoubted improvements that has nearly reduced us to a shambles. Nobody knows just what has happened. And all are trying, on the advice of the best minds available, to restore some sanity to our position."

"On the advice of the same best minds available which engineered the unprecedeted advances, Hardcrow? The wise and probably perfect moves, and the array of undoubted improvements? We slide back two steps while we advance one."

"It's easy to criticize, Foley, but one doesn't do it in time of crisis. It may be that our position really is improved, so much so that we're allowed to see some dangers now that had been hidden from us. Or things might have been worse had it not been for the careful planning and actions. It may be that these have taken the edge off a terrible debacle that was due for us."

"And it might not be. Who's chopping us down, Harry?

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Hardcrow, you were stitting here right in the lap of the nation's pulse, to turn a metaphor. Have you noticed the appearance of a series of brilliant 'new' men who may have something to do with our backward improvements?"

"I have noticed the new men, Foley, and they're what gives me hope. We may be in a transition canyon when we thought we were on top of the crest, but these new men will lead us out of it. I've been fascinated by them; I've asked myself 'How is it possible that we should be so rich in talent?'"

"You seem hypnotized by this, Hardcrow."

"Yes, I am a little. I believe now that our setbacks are only temporary, or only in appearance. I believe that these new-appearing great minds will advance us along that great road."

"As far along as we were before they appeared?"

"Much further along, Foley, all the way. Our premature flowering may now become the real thing. Oh, I know the snide hints that have been going around the country. I'm sorry to see that you appear to have fallen prey to some of them. I'm not yet ready to believe that our advance has been thwarted deliberately, surely not that it's been thwarted by those who seem to be advancing it most."

"When will you be ready to believe it, Hardcrow?"

"Never, I hope. Tonight I saw a new prospect. I'm on fire with it. Foley, there's expectation in the air, and nothing the stodgy people can do will sour it. Tonight I was present at the unveiling, so to speak, at the introduction to Washington of perhaps the most flexible and curious mind in the country. We can't fail in anything when we have such men as he. I believe that he, as well as other such brilliant men, will get us off dead center, will fill our sails with billows once more—"

"A sail-seaman you're not, Hardcrow. What sort of apple is this new man?"

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"I'd say a crabapple for a joke. For coincidentally his name is Crabtree."

"Not Carlyle S.?"

"It certainly is. How could you have known, Foley? You aren't big enough to have entree to— You aren't high enough in the trade even to know of such a man. Still, you *did* scoop the country on the suicides, and on some of the happenings of the Fuentes fascist fellow. And you do seem to have come along remarkably, Foley. Is it only a year since I saw you? You seem older now, and much more—"

"Mature, Hardcrow. It's my new maturity. Yes, I'm big enough now to hear stories of big men when they appear."

"Well, you've been a science feature writer, and I understand that Crabtree had some standing as scientist and inventor in the hinterlands. You knew he was in town?"

"Yes."

"That's odd. *Nobody* was supposed to know. Still, how perspicacious of you to guess that *he* would be selected for high position, since it hasn't yet been announced. He's a wonderful inventor. Marvelous ideas!"

"Most marvelous. How long, exactly, Hardcrow, is it since this great unveiling of this flexible and curious mind? How long ago was it that you saw Crabtree?"

"Why, I've just come from the meeting. None but us selected correspondents was there. And the officials and dignitaries. It isn't twenty minutes since I saw him last."

"And it isn't much more than two hours since I saw him dead, Hardcrow."

"What are you saying, Foley? Are you trying to fish a story out of me? I'm onto your cracked talk. Don't try it with me. What are you trying to say?"

"That I'm fortunate to be near the actual birth of one of these new men, Hardcrow. It makes me feel a little

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like a midwife. Can you tell me what Carlyle S. Crabtree was wearing?"

"Foley, do you doubt that I was there, just because you weren't selected? I can do even better than tell you what he was wearing; I can show you. Naturally cameras were forbidden. And just as naturally every correspondent had his own pinhole camera. We'll just roll them out. Here. Here's a good one of him on the very first picture."

"Yes, that's Crabtree all right, Hardcrow. Or it's so near to Crabtree as to deceive all except the elect. I'd give a lot to know how it's done. And it's his same clothes, baggy pants, jacket and all. I wonder what they did about the knife-cuts in the jacket and shirt? Hey, I wonder how they got the blood back in him? And if they had a body left over? He was a nice fellow."

"Seems to be, Foley: a plain man as all very great men are. He came dressed just as he arrived in town. But he's absolutely incandescent with ideas. What was that other stuff you were talking, Foley? You seemed to be talking nonsense, perhaps dangerous nonsense."

"Yeah, I know. Crabtree was wrong at the last, though. The shadow wasn't following me after all; he was following Crabtree. Or there may have been one on each of us and they may have been in concert. I still have a little pride in my own importance. Did Crabtree provide anything startling?"

"With the simplicity of the truly great he had carried things of the highest importance in a large manila envelope inside his shirt. Imagine, Foley, these were things that may change the whole destiny and nature of man."

"Crabtree took the manila envelope out of his shirt? You saw him do it?"

"Yes. A pandora's box in a manila envelope. That is what he took out."

"Then I wonder what I took out."

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"It will take years to analyze it, Foley. But it will be wonderful."

"It may be. But Crabtree rather wanted to put it into effect without waiting years. He was even a little in a hurry that it be done at once. He was afraid that certain groups would prevent it. I see that they have. And so a new man is born."

"Foley, there's something about your attitude that I don't like," Harry Hardcrow said harshly. "There are some things you don't have any business guessing if you don't know other things. A newspaper man has got to know when to keep his mouth and his mind shut. You might end up dead."

"Isn't that the usual fate of men, Harry?"

"There have been other times, Foley, when you seemed ready to disassociate yourself from the mainstream. And you've been throwing out insane hints for ten minutes. Unless you explain them you'd better leave at once. You may be too hot to handle as it is. I don't intend to get my hands burned for any unlicked cub."

"There's another question I'll have to find the answer to, Hardcrow. How do they subvert minds like yours? You aren't stupid. You've been here in the middle of it. You do know part of something that's going on. You weren't always servile. You weren't always scared. Is there more than one way of intruding a new man into an old? Are you entirely the Harry Hardcrow who used to be? He could look at both sides of a coin."

"So can I yet. And I know which side is heads."

"You know more than you say. Those are prisoner's eyes looking out of your head. But you've thrown in with it."

"I said that I was one of the selected correspondents, Foley. I'm selected on most things. One must give up a little bit to be selected. But most aren't even given the chance. Foley, before you call anyone a sellout, you just think if you were ever good enough to be

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given the chance. Who ever wanted to buy you? Few are selected, and none of them turn it down. And those who howl at the distant scent of it are those so far below consideration as to make it comical."

"It is comical, Hardcrow, and I'm laughing," said Fred Foley. "But in my way I go on." Foley tried to brush something from his sleeve but there was nothing there.

"Is there any way you could step out of the room for a minute, Harry," Fred Foley asked, "and let me talk to the other Harry for only a bit?"

"I am the only Harry Hardcrow," said Harry, "and I'm about full of you, Foley. Get out of here right now."

"Goodnight, Harry," Fred Foley said to the harsh mouth and flushed face. And then, more softly. "Good-night, Harry," to the prisoner's eyes inside the man.

Freddy phoned the Miguel Fuentes proclamation to Tankersley. That man had become somewhat meek about accepting anything Freddy gave him now.

"Are you sure, Freddy?" was all he asked. "If you are, then I'll print it."

"Oh yes. I've got it right. That's just the way he wants it to be run."

Fred Foley went back to his room. The room had been gone through, but they hadn't been messy about it. "They'll have to open my head to find out whatever I'm carrying," he said to himself.

Freddy looked at himself in the mirror. It was true: he had become a little older, and much more mature. He had a new respect for himself. Then a short night in bed and a rugged one.

Fred Foley had never adjusted to the twenty-four hour cycle of this world, and often in his trade he had avoided it. Usually he did not go to bed till he wanted to and he did not get up till he wanted to. He was strongly on the thirty-four hour cycle of the world from which people originally came. But sometimes he had

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to adjust a little, and he did have an early next-morning date with a woman who was riddled with riddles.

Pungent dreams then, and irritating wakefulness. And a spooky wasteland between. Fred Foley was a message center sometimes with all sorts of froth swirling about him.

James Bauer was being opposed by a strong and intelligent man, Richard Bencher, the father of Bedelia. This Bencher was tough of mind and he had real depth. He was direct. He was smart. He could go to the actual (that which acts upon the ambient) center of an apparatus, so he went directly at the mind of Jim Bauer. Bencher had had youthful encounter with some such thing before. He had come out of it, defiant and victorious, and had lived a concentrated and successful life, but he had been inattentive to many of the small details of his life. One of them had been his daughter Bedelia. Now he would make amends.

Bencher had begun to smash and break the weave; and Jim Bauer, bellowing in his resonant soul, had called the brain-weave to fight back. But was Bauer really the master of the weave? There were some strong persons in it.

Hondo Silverio was arranging his own encounters. He was suggesting to Bencher that they should kill James Bauer and destroy his residue-brain by a method which Hondo believed would work. And he suggested that he, Bencher, should then join them in the weave in place of Bauer. This startled Richard Bencher. "How do you know when a snake's kidding?" he asked himself. "I know so little of their psychology, but I must learn. No, I will not do it," he said. "That's mad."

When Bencher fought a thing he fought it all the way, but this would be harder than he thought. He could tackle Bauer front-on. He was as tough a man in mind and body and spirit as was Jim Bauer. They could battle

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like bulls. But what was he to make of the mottled-green humor of Hondo Silverio which he did not find entirely evil? Inhuman, yes, but not entirely evil.

How of those other psychic athletes in the weave? How of Wing Manion the saintly sexpot and Klee fish? For a moment he thought that he encountered in her the mind of his dead wife. How of Salzy Silverio of the helical passion? She shook him till he was dizzy and half mad. How of Arouet Manion the elegant devil who was so much a concordist that he brought in the slime of a thousand worlds and reveled in it? There was the ashen-ghost Letitia Bauer and the ashen-flesh Letitia Bauer, one dead, one in hypnosis, both in masochistic agony and longing. There was real mystery and cyclonic energy about that strange duality which Bencher did not begin to understand. And there was Bedelia herself, and the real demon who had joined the weave, and these two had become unnaturally close.

"Gad, she's had some odd boy friends," Bencher battled, "but not a real demon before. She's loose in her mind. This one even makes Freddy look good. That such a she should come out of my loins!"

Richard Bencher, for all his scope and determination, was confused in the multiplex thing he encountered. Even his own daughter refused to come out of the weave, but she would not herself attack him. She even invited him to join the weave, as had Hondo Silverio; her own suggestion was that he kill Arouet Manion and take his place in the weave. In her conscious state, Biddy did not know anything about this battle or this offer, however.

Salzy Silverio of the spiral passion was drawn insanely to Bencher, as she was to all strong men. And Wing Manion was trying to explain to him what it meant to be a Harvester; and how, perhaps, the Harvesters were more important than the harvest.

One who battles a dragon must watch that he be not

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ensorced by the beauty of any part of it. Dragons are sometimes iridescent in some of their limbs and appendages. They are curious and arty and there is a sort of rousing music in their bellowing and fire-snorting. Richard Bencher had him a battle; so many parts of the opponent were also parts of his own curious self.

Other messages, other persons and scraps of persons, other flitting souls around other scorchy flames.

Michael Fountain was wringing his hands over a broken world. He knew so much, but he did not know how to fix a world. His latino namesake at least knew that much.

Miguel Fuentes was executing nine men after a night-court sentence in the middle of wild chaparral. It was an unpleasant thing to have to kill these unreformable elegant dogs, so he did it himself. Then he was sobbing disconsolately with his head on the rump of a burro.

"He's even younger than I am," said Fred Foley. "There must be *someone* else who could order the world."

There was the invisible dog of the patrick Bertigrew Bagley, who was more ape than dog, and who could sometimes be seen if one knew how to look. Foley saw him now, and the plappergeist winked solemnly at him. Freddy knew who he was then. He was the island-ape who used to be in the Katzenjammer Kids in the funny paper. But all grotesque funny paper characters have independent and exterior existence, unknown usually to their drawers. It was good to have the dog, the ape, the polter-plappergeist on your side. He was smarter and more mischievous than other dogs or apes, and he could kill effectively.

There was Carmody Overlark, the urbane toad with the jewel in his head. Was it for pain of that that he had to soak his head in a bucket? But this Carmody had a talent in full which Fred Foley had only a little and that only these last several days: he knew when he

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was in anyone's dream anywhere. He became himself in the dream, and not an image of him. He came in astrigent and powerful. One dreamed or thought of Carmody Overlark at his peril.

A short night and a rugged one. It was not the pungent dreams or the irritating wakefulness that was the worst. It was the spooky wasteland between. Did people, when they were still on the world whence they came, when they were naturally adjusted to their longer day-night cycle, suffer from dreams at night, from wakefulness, from wastelands? Or are these only of the present period of adjustment? Take them away and you take away something. Amputate them and we bleed; they are part of us now.

Patricks and falcons, dog-faced hydras with more and ranker arms than one could count, people who popped up in unlikely centuries, castles and mansions, and a house named Morada that had a broken stairs going down from its patio to . . . what?

Finally dawn-morning came.

"Damn, it took you long enough," Freddy told the shining wench.

Freddy Foley rented a rent-a-car in the morning and drove out to the morning-Maryland hideout. He found it more by instinct than by the Oriel description, which had been brainless and hurried. He caught a whiff of it as he came near, the something distorted in the morning light, the unreality and impermanence of the surroundings, a too-shrill music to hear with proper ears, the sick poetry, the paleness of grass and bush as if a great stone had just been rolled away exposing it all. But Foley had been through that choppy and building-pocked countryside before and it hadn't been like that. Lately, however, he had been learning to see with other sorts of eyes, with Harvester eyes, with patrick eyes,

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with falcon eyes, with toad eyes. A man misses so much if he uses only one set of eyes.

The house was nearly hidden by the pale boscage. It was elegant and low—"squat like a toad, close at the ear of Eve"—it was the place, it could not be the hideout of any other creature. Freddy had not known she was like that the evening before. Now he caught it all before he saw her.

Oriel Overlark met him at the door, throat and gills aquiver. She jibbered in silver, she shined like green bronze, she was the most striking and puzzling thing that Freddy Foley had ever seen.

"Did you bring them? Didn't you bring any part of them? Did you bring part of them in yourself? Be open, boy, or I'll crack your brains like walnuts and eat them right now. I want them, I want the two of them right now. How did you attach to it? I want to merge with it! Help me to merge with it right now!"

"The people of the brain-weave, Mrs. Overlark? How did you know about them? Do I have their smell on me? They barely brushed me. We'll forget about them. I want to ask you several questions, that's all."

"Oh questions! I want the spiral passion and the mottled snake humor. I want his body now. More, I want hers! Has anything from them entered into you? I want you then, right now."

Oriel had clasped Freddy and he was shocked by the heat of her. A body heat of a hundred and twelve at least is unusual in an old-recension human. Freddy would have sworn also that she had two hearts beating furiously. And her eyes, they were made to look at, not to see out of. "Throw hither all your quaint enameled eyes" ran through his head. A nameless emotion burst up through Freddy Foley and almost exploded in him.

"Tell me about him," the jewel-eyed creater pleaded. "Has he really two of them? How is she? The writhing, the convolutions—tell me, show me."

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"I barely know the couple on sight, Mrs. Overlark. They are weave people and I *have* been brushed by the weave, but that's all. Hey, cut that out!"

An overpowering emotion still more upwelling in Freddy Foley! It would burst him! And into his quaking breast came certain spoof lines of Chesterton:

Or didst thou love the God of Flies
Who plagued the Hebrews and was splashed
With wine unto the waist, or Pasht
Who had green beryls for her eyes?

The emotion overpowered Freddy completely. It burst him asunder.

"You're laughing at me!" Oriel Overlark gasped in white amazement. "Oh, I am wounded! I am dead! How could anyone be so ungrateful? Don't you know that's the only way we can be wounded?"

Well, it had been that or rupture himself. Freddy'd had to do it. By the time he had gotten rid of the bigger globs of laughter, the torrid Oriel Overlark had turned to ice.

"I'm sorry, really I am," Freddy explained. "Your eyes are like nothing else. Your form is like nothing else. Your passion, perhaps, belongs in the weave itself, and I'm sure you've been in weaves like it. It's only that I'm a boor, one without the true lower feeling, and I don't understand these intense things. Now pout for a moment (you do it wonderfully), and then answer some questions."

But Freddy nearly burst again. "The gold and flowing serpent" ran through his mind, and Oh those lines!:

Scorpion and asp, and amphisbaene dire,
Cerastes horned, hydrus, and ellops drear.

Oriel Overlark was all those things, and pretty be-

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sides, and who was the oaf who would not appreciate this, wrapped as it was in kata-chthonic passion and overly sweet poetry?

"I don't believe at all in asking questions," said Oriel in a sulky and lifeless manner. "Still less in answering them. Both use up time, and time is the one thing we have so little of."

Oriel had been badly wounded by the laughter and was still gasping. She had been mortally affronted and her jeweled eyes had gone dull.

"Mrs. Overlark, kid, green-eyed doll, I've lately been searching for a group of people who seem to have plenty of time," Fred Foley said. "Centuries of it."

"No, nobody has plenty of time," the wan Oriel said. "Almost all have about the same amount of it. Every day we live we get a day older. It's frightening. We look for a way out of it but we don't find one."

"How long have you been in a hurry, Oriel?"

"I've always been in a hurry. I must make every minute count. Every second must be of the highest interest. You somehow gave me to believe that you would be of highest interest. The line of your throat! The mercurial movement of your body! Please don't disappoint me."

"I'll have to; I'm not geared to that at all. Nobody can stay at high point all the time."

"Yes, at high point all the time, every living minute," Oriel insisted. "There has to be variety, excitement, even a new kind of calm, a sharper agony as is mine at the moment, an additional facet. It must be really new, and it must not last long. After a while, real variety is hard to find. Then we must lie fallow to whet the appetite and to save the precious days."

"Well, this won't take too long. What I want to find out, Oriel, is this: was there any significant change in your husband Carmody Overlark about two years ago?"

"What I want you to do is not ask me any questions

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at all. Of course there was! There's always significant change in him—two years ago, two days ago, two minutes ago I'm sure. That's why he's so wonderful."

"I have a curious theory, Oriel, that the Carmody Overlark of more than two years ago was not the same man as the Carmody Overlark of today."

"But of course not. He's never the same. He's protean. He's a chameleon. All of us are."

"Who is us?"

"Please don't ask questions. It's annoying. If you won't be passionate, go away. When you looked at me last night I thought you had more in mind than asking questions. If you want answers to questions go to the encyclopedia."

"You may be one, Oriel. Are you quite sure that the Carmody Overlark you were married to two years ago is the same man as the Carmody Overlark you're married to now?"

"I have been married to only one man."

"For how long?"

"Oh, who knows? It's so hard to figure. You have to subtract so much, and add a little, and who keeps track? That's the frightening part, keeping track. Even figuring it out takes time and I don't have the time."

"I met Carmody Overlark several years back. He was not the same man I met last night, but he sure looked the same."

"No, that was just a little goof we—I never knew him at all; I only saw him once. I don't go in for the details. They're handled. Haven't you been told that it's dangerous for you to inquire along this line? I wouldn't want anything to happen to you. The line of your throat! The mercurial movement—"

"I know, Oriel. Oh, my life's been threatened. Three men told me they'd kill me if I didn't lay off, and one man told me he'd kill me if I did. I figured they canceled out. I believe that the Carmody Overlark of to-

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day is the same man as a Khar-ibn-Mod who lived something over five hundred years ago. Would you know anything about that?"

"A rather humorous piece has already been done on certain coincidences between my husband and that man."

"My piece, if I do it, may not be humorous."

"Your piece, and you will not do it, would not be believed in any case."

"I'm puzzled about one thing, Oriel. I had understood that the Mamelukes were abridged men. Are you sure he's so wonderful? Or does this reanimation that I'm tracking down consist of more than I supposed?"

"Oh, you don't understand it at all. Line of your throat and all, you just don't understand it. The methods weren't at all those which you call by the same name. Actually, there was a thousandfold increase in passion. Perhaps it's a good thing that the uninitiate aren't acquainted with it. It wouldn't do at all for a weak race. And yet some of the contemporaries do have something. Oh, the people in the weavel Oh, yourself if you wished!"

"The man who was Carmody Overlark until two years ago, what happened to him, Oriel?"

"I imagine they killed him. I hadn't really thought about it."

"Don't you care? After all, he *was* your husband."

"He was *what*? How far off can you get? How can you only guess a little bit and miss the rest so far?"

Oriel was fiddling with her hair. She was becoming bored. Even the exquisite agony of rejection had lasted too long. She fluffed her hair out as though to cool herself. Then Freddy saw it and understood a little more about her.

"You don't understand anything about me, do you, sleeping *Adone*?"

"Yes, now I understand almost all about you, Oriel."

"What made you understand?"

"Your ears. Miss Evans said last night that your ears

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weren't at all good and that you seldom showed them."

"She'll suffer for that remark. My ears are excellent."

"Yes they are. But they're archaic ears."

"Of course. Should I get new ears each time?"

"You also are one of the reappearing persons?"

"Certainly. And now that you've guessed a little of it, what can you possibly do with your knowledge? There's a group in one of our finest institutions; they're there just because they guessed just about so much. I can arrange it quite easily that you join them. Insanity is only the refusal to accept facts as they are. That we are unassailable is one of the facts that are."

"Why are all of you so nervous and jittery and guarded? Why do you have to kill or confine to protect your secret?"

"Oh, because we're in such a hurry and passion, and because time runs out so fast."

"What happened to the Oriel Overlark of before two years ago?"

"I really don't know and I really don't care. She may be in one of the institutions for claiming to be me, or she may be dead."

"Don't you use the old bodies?"

"Sometimes, in a way. Again sometimes, in a lesser way. You don't have to know."

"Do you know anything of your group substituting for an inventor named Crabtree last night?"

"The man who became Crabtree last night is an old friend of mine. I welcome him back. He's one of those of the thousandfold passion. I don't know anything about the man who was substituted for."

"How are you able to substitute so well without being detected?"

"Oh, we're mimics. It's an ancient art. And we also force them to mimic us, back in time—you wouldn't understand it. We keep our own appearances, but we also assume the appearances of the persons we re-

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place. You'd have to know more than you ever will know about the old mimicry to understand how it's done."

"I know a little about it by comparing pictures and images. What's the object of all this? Why do you slow down and obstruct the world?"

"I don't make policy. Partly it's just that we intend always to run the thing and we can't let it have loose rein. We do it because we want to do it and for other reasons that are not for you to know. We do it because the world and its people are our footstool and we don't want our footstool to become too grand. Ask my husband when you have your interview with him. He'll elude you much more adroitly than I can. And I imagine that after you've talked to him you'll be put away in one way or another."

"I may have something to say about that."

"Not very much, mercury movement, not very much. The others will not regard you as an ornament, as I do."

"Are there others of your talent who are not of your group?"

"Oh, there are randoms. Have you known some?"

"Maybe. I'm not sure. How far back do you go, Oriel?"

"You shouldn't ask the age of even a reappearing woman. Quite a ways back."

"As far back as Carmody?"

"Oh no. Not nearly so far back. I was picked up much later. We recruit, you know. We must, since we don't generate. And some of us are lost accidentally. We've tried for centuries to outlaw embalming. We've succeeded only locally and for short periods. We leave elaborate instructions and commands for our own disposal, and yet the abominations still have their way with some of us."

"But all of you will die some day. And then what?"

"But all of *you* will die some day. And then what shorter what? All of you alive today will die long be-

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fore we do. And no one of you has come back to bring an authentic report."

"Haven't you any consciences at all?"

"I haven't. No, I don't believe that any of us have. There are signs that you uninitiates are also losing yours. We're both behind and ahead of you in the evolutionary scale, spanning quite a space. No, we've sloughed our consciences completely if we ever had any. And now you've overstayed your welcome. I thought you'd have the passion, would at least be a man, or an animal, or even a reptile. Really I like them best. It's a long time since I've had such a letdown. I could have given you an experience you won't otherwise get in life, and I did expect a little variety from you. We are all of us consummate sensualists."

"I'm sure you are, Oriel. Two more questions even though I am overstayed. Why does your husband keep rats?"

"A hobby. You don't need to know any more."

"And why does he soak his head in a bucket?"

"You ask him."

"I will."

Fred Foley left the morning-Maryland hideaway.

"The line of the throat, the mercurial movement," Oriel said.

"'Or keep it as a cistern for foul toads
To knot and gender in,' " Freddy Foley said.

IX: BUT I EAT THEM UP, FEDERICO, I EAT THEM UP

The ascension, when it comes, will be in the regular sequence, but rising a stage above the old pattern and continuing to rise. We will have had our spring, our summer, our autumn. We will have our winter then, and it is the breaking season: we will break upward into patterned rise, or we will break down.

This must not be the Fimbul-winter, the destruction winter, the wraith winter of the fulminous monstrous unwarming fire laid by the Frost Giants; not the withering sub-tropical winter, the torpidness that brings the four exterior creatures through the gates; not the inanity winter, the loss-of-nerve winter. After such spiritual and psychic frosts we can have only repetitious sick springs.

It must be, in some manner, an evergreen winter, a singing winter "a summer bird which even in the haunch of winter sings" a time of swift sanity, of right ordering and careful law, of interior handicraft and joiner-work. "Who are these spectral forms coming with pale sickles? The year's harvest is already in. Begone, pale harvesters, it is another season now."

It is only after our winter of swift sanity and steely nerve that we will have our second spring. It will not be repetition, it will not be beginning again in the old way. It will be a tumultuous springtime higher on the helical, the ascending spiral; with birds more

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songful, colts more clattering, earth more burgeoning, spirits more exalted, sky more eternal. It is only after we have broken the wraith winter that we may have our helical springtime, that we may finally enter our Fifth Mansions. And then the rest is all sheer and joyous ascent.

Prose Poems: Maurice Craftmaster

FREDDY FOLEY was putting his affairs in order, inasmuch as that can be done in a short time. He had a happy head on him while he did it even though the fuliginous Harvesters were romping and wrecking through its inner channels. He discovered, as had Richard Bencher, the iridescent limbs and rousing music of parts of their dragon.

The manila packet of Crabtree was now consigned by Freddy to a responsible man, Michael Fountain, even though Fred was now convinced that it was a hoax and the original packet had been put to other use. Michael Fountain would be able to guess much of the original thing from the false shadow of it.

And he met Salzy Silverio in the middle of his mind. "The snakes are shedding their skins early this year," Freddy said. "It means an early and auspicious spring."

Freddy phoned the lawyer back home and instructed that man to consider his Will Number Three as his only last will and testament, and to destroy wills one, two, four, and five. Freddy hadn't many tangible things to will anyone, and yet there were some things in that which were worthy and almost tangible.

And Bedelia Bencher was on the edge of his mind, impudent and exasperating. Pink sulphur, scented rosy fire and all, he would not give his girl over to any secondclass devil. This part was not over with.

Freddy had made up several packages and large envelopes. He went out to mail them, sending the big heavy envelope to Michael Fountain by registered mail.

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Then he went to get a shave and haircut so he would be his best under scrutiny.

"I have born other children out of my body," said an ashen ghost in Fred Foley's cerebellum while he was in the barber chair. "They are all of them deformed monkeys, or snake children, or elongated toads, or queer fish, or specter children. Fortunate that they have already perished! I am lost, I am confused. But I will still go another way. I will not go the way they have set for me. Tonight, if it is night, today, if it is day. I will bear another child who is beautiful and full of light. They cannot dominate one who is indomitable."

Fred Foley gave himself a pep talk and then went directly to the doctor's office. He did not go to just any doctor. He went to the one doctor of really solid reputation. There was one thing he wanted to be sure of and to have the proof of.

"Be careful, Freddy," said an intelligent and superior and noble snake out of its coiling passion and great center of compassion. This was as Freddy came into the anteroom at the doctor's. "Think, Freddy, who directs your steps there. Should you not turn and leave as rapidly as possible? This kind of doctor you do not need."

"This kind of doctor I may well need," Freddy told the projection of Hondo Silverio. "With you things romping in my head, I have to have a guarantee of my sanity before I go on."

"Go right in, Mr. Foley," the appointments girl said to Freddy's outer ears, and Fred Foley went in.

"I'll state my reason for coming as quickly as possible," Fred said to the doctor of solid reputation. He couldn't see the doctor's eyes, only the glint of light on his glasses. But there had to be eyes of solid reputation behind them. "I want to be certified as sane. Is that ever done, Doctor? I want you to go over me very carefully and

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then give me a written opinion that will stand up legally."

"Well, no, it really isn't ever done, Mr. Foley, not quite like that. A man doesn't ask for such a legal certificate without a legal threat. Has your sanity ever been questioned?"

"Oh, a little bit, here and there, you know how it is, Doctor. It's usually in a kidding mood that people tell me that I'm crazy. Ah . . . some of them are serious, though. But I have reason to believe that my sanity *will* be questioned, and that quite soon. I believe I may be railroaded, and without recourse. I'd like to have the opinion of a competent doctor on record before that event."

"Most committed persons believe they're railroaded, Mr. Foley, but most don't suspect it before it happens. Are you given any alternative to being put on the rails?"

"I was once given the alternative: to shut up. I didn't do it. It's probably too late for that now. Well, go over me and tell me how sane I am."

"You must be prepared for the possibility that you *are* a little off, Mr. Foley, and that if you are sent up it will be for a reason. You seem to have delusions of persecution."

"They aren't delusions, Doctor. Two sets of threats have been given to me, one on my life, one on my freedom. I was awake and not suffering from hallucination both times. My hearing is better than normal, it's acute. My knowledge of people is sound. I've been threatened to make me lay off a peculiar line of questioning."

"Then lay off. That's what a sane man would do. A sane man solves his problems in the most direct manner. Laying off would seem the most direct manner for you."

"But I don't want to lay off."

"Then you probably *are* insane, to an extent, on this one subject. Why don't you want to lay off the thing that threatens your life?"

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"I have a certain amount of stubbornness. And I have my principles."

"Neither is a sign of sanity, Mr. Foley. More often they're the opposite. An insane man will always have a considerable amount of stubbornness, intractability. And he'll have *very* strong principles, though usually for very weak reasons. A sane man bends to reality, and his principles die a little as he gets older. Yours should at least have begun to weaken. You aren't a child. Children, you may not realize it, are never sane. But sanity should have begun to develop by your age."

"We may not mean the same thing by sanity. I was sane when I was a boy, Doctor. This is one thing I do know. And other boys were mostly sane. Some of them have lost it, a little, when they come to be men. I don't believe I've lost very much of mine."

"No, we certainly don't mean the same thing by sanity, Mr. Foley. You have a backward idea, an insane idea of it. Sanity is adaptability to the world as it is, even though that world may be a little insane by ideal standards. You seem to be in fine health, and I'm sure that your senses are acute. Your attitude isn't truculent, so far. If committed, you probably wouldn't make a difficult patient; that's one thing to be thankful for. The difficulty of adaptation is always harder on the patient than on the overseers. Now then, Mr. Foley, let's examine your attitude toward reality, taking into consideration that your profession is based largely on fiction. When you fictionize in your reporting—do you realize it?"

"Certainly I realize it."

"And you're never carried away by it, never to the point where you can't see the difference?"

"Certainly I'm carried away by it, or I wouldn't be any good at it. But I believe it's the same way an actor is carried away. And I do see the difference between the fiction and reality, where it's necessary to draw a dif-

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ference; most of the time it isn't necessary, it doesn't matter."

"You think it doesn't matter what you reject and what you accept, and how you handle it all? Mr. Foley, suppose you interviewed a very magnetic man who said that he had ridden to other planets in alien space-craft? Would you be immune to his evidence?"

"I sure hope I wouldn't be immune to anyone's evidence about anything, Doctor. I wouldn't reject any evidence for anything without examining it, not as reporter. And your question isn't merely a supposition. I *have* interviewed *three* such men who said that they had ridden to other planets in odd craft. And all three of those were magnetic. They projected the stuff, they talked the stuff, and they said that the crafts were driven by the same magnetic stuff. Two of the men certainly didn't convince me, though they did make good copy. But that third man had my mind wide open for quite a while."

"Oh. What closed your mind to his insane ideas then, Foley?"

"He told me he'd arrange for me to take one of those quick trips to another planet. But he never showed up for the appointment."

"I see. And if you *had* taken such a trip, would you have believed it?"

"Certainly I'd believe it. If I had actually done it, then of *course* I'd believe I had."

"Even knowing that it was impossible? That's bad, Mr. Foley, bad."

"If I had done it, Doctor, then I'd know that it *was* possible. He shouldn't have stood me up. That shook my trust in him. He did send me a postcard, though, from Ganymede. He explained, not too implausibly, that their takeoff was hurried and that they'd been forced to leave without me."

"A postcard from Ganymede, Mr. Foley? Do you

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realize what you're saying? Ganymede is one of the moons of Jupiter, or at least one of the large planets. How could you believe—"

"Actually the card was postmarked from Pueblo, Colorado, Doctor. It was one of the disappointments of my life."

"You wanted such things to be true?"

"Oh yes."

"Bad, Mr. Foley, very bad."

"Bad that I should want the marvelous to be true? I would think that normal."

"Only for children, Mr. Foley. You have a decidedly immature attitude toward the world. That isn't completely damning in itself, but let's go on a little further. If you were told that a new race of giant snails was going to take over the earth and abolish mankind, how would you react?"

"I'd react by considering my informant and questioning where he got his information. If he had even the slightest snail-horn of information, I'd follow it out. I'd try my mightiest to find out whether there really was a new race of giant snails trying to take over. I'd examine all the evidence my informant could give me, and all that I could invent myself, always with an eye as to how I could turn it to account. I'd consider the treatment—quizzical, facetious, sensational, or who-knows-after-all?—even before I had anything to treat. If there were real evidence, Doctor, I'd really follow it out. I can see the banner on my feature piece, *On the Track of the Giant Snail*, in my mind's-eye now. Believe me, I'd try to be the first to interview the snail leader."

"You would actually spend time on such a report, Mr. Foley?"

"Yes. I may *spend time* on that very thing whenever I'm through with what I'm on now. There's bound to be an interesting story in it: if not of the giant snails

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themselves, then perhaps a story of a man who believed in giant snails."

"Worse and worse, Mr. Foley. Now then, what would you do if you had the report that there was a race of superhumans secretly ruling the world to the detriment of normal mankind? Would you credit the report, Mr. Foley? Would you examine it? In a way, this is the test. There *is* a pattern of such belief in a certain form of insanity."

"Oh, is there now, Doctor?"

How many strands would it take to bind a man, and each of them so much thinner than a hair? Would you believe a report about secret spiders? Or would you refuse to believe it even after they had tangled you in their webs?

There was an abnormality about this doctor. It bothered Foley while they talked. What it was slipped away from him, but he hovered over it. He would have it in a minute.

"You don't answer me, Mr. Foley. *Do* you believe in a race of superhumans? Now then, what if it was reported, or it came into your mind somehow, that this race of superhumans had one slight peculiarity which distinguished them? Would you see this peculiarity wherever you looked and would you imagine a conspiracy? Would you imagine you saw this peculiarity on people in the streets? That you saw it on someone following you? That you saw it on someone you came to for advice? That you saw it on a doctor whom you came to visit?"

"Such as archaic ears, Doctor?"

"Such as anything, Mr. Foley. Is archaic ears one of the forms that your delusion takes? Do you imagine that a race of men with funny ears is out to dominate the world?"

"Either I'm imagining it or it's happening. Yes, I believe that certain old people with funny ears are out

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to dominate the world. It does make me sound as if I were a little off, especially since nobody else seems to see such things."

Foley was tempted now to doubt his own sanity, the doctor had put it all so smoothly. He was tempted, but he didn't really doubt. He had evidence before his eyes now, if his eyes were still good. The doctor had the funny ears, no doubt about that.

"Bad, Mr. Foley, very bad," the doctor was saying again.

"Doctor, how did I come to seek you out?" Freddy Foley asked suddenly.

"How would I know, Mr. Foley? I suppose you came to me because I'm a doctor of solid reputation."

"Well, who *told* me that you were a doctor of solid reputation?"

"It could have been almost anybody, Mr. Foley, for I am."

"How did I even learn your name and address?"

"I don't know, Mr. Foley. It was probably given to you by someone who thought you really needed a doctor. Or you could have had it from the phone book."

"I could have, but I didn't. Doctor, I don't *know* your name and address. What brought me here?"

"Your feet, perhaps. A vehicle? I don't know."

"I never heard of you. I never heard of your solid reputation. But I never even thought of going to any other doctor. I didn't ask any of my acquaintances the name of a good doctor. I came directly to you without asking directions or anything else. I came directly to a man I had never heard of, already convinced that he was a man of solid reputation. How was this put into my mind?"

"Ah, now you believe that the super-people can control your mind? Bad, Mr. Foley, very bad."

"How did you know my name was Foley? How did

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your appointments girl 'know it? How did you know I was a reporter?"

"Have you suffered these gaps of memory and information before, Mr. Foley? Is it that you become a little excited now? If you will allow me, I'll give you a sedative, and then we'll delve a little deeper into this."

"You come out of that chair and I'll knock you back into it, Doctor! You're not giving me any sedative!"

"My, aren't we violent! The symptoms continue to unfold."

"You can stow that, Doctor. I know when I'm being taken. You're one of them."

"I am one of them? Soon, Mr. Foley, as your mind weakens, everybody will be one of them. You'll see them everywhere you look. It will be the whole world in conspiracy against you."

"I considered that once before, Doctor, but it didn't hold up. It isn't the whole world in conspiracy against me, it's a small bunch of you in conspiracy against the whole world. How was it done to me, Doctor? By subliminal or subvocal suggestion? How?"

"Your suggestions follow a pattern of a familiar dementia, Mr. Foley. You can believe any or all of them. I'm not sure that it will be well for you to be walking the streets. You *have* shown signs of violence."

"I'll show more signs if you try to stop me."

"I can have a pickup order out for you within seconds, Mr. Foley."

"Why bother? I still have an appointment in the parlor of a bigger spider. He's at least a little curious about me or he wouldn't be willing to see me. He's at least a little nervous about me or he wouldn't have detoured me here. And I have the feeling that I'll be watched by archaic and many-faceted eyes when I go to his parlor."

"In the parlor of a spider, you say. Sheer infantilism.

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Yes, Mr. Foley, I would be willing to give a certificate concerning your sanity, but it would be the opposite of the one you came for. But you're right, you will be closely watched wherever you go. There's really nothing you can do in the little time you have left."

Foley left that doctor of solid reputation. He came angrily and alertly out into the street again, careful of ambush, careful of everything. But there is a danger in being too careful, and he knew it; it makes you too tight.

And now Foley was tempted again to doubt his own sanity. He *did* see the distinguishing mark, those damned odd ears, on people in the street: newsboys, shoppers, loitering messengers, hurrying tourists. Either he was going crazy, or another galloping suggestion had been implanted into his mind. Those ears were on the shop-girls, on the policemen, on little colored kids no bigger than toys, on kind old ladies. He thought about post-hypnotic suggestion and such rubbish; he thought how an ordinary thing will sometimes appear extraordinary as though seen for the first time; he thought *This is it, Freddy, this is it.* But for all that, he decided that if he had gotten into the state he could get out of it.

He squinted his eyes. He could make the strange ears appear. He could make them go away. He could see the snakes. He could cast out the snakes. He had once learned this from an old snake-watcher.

The snake-watcher had told him how to stop seeing snakes. This was when Freddy had been on the jail beat. One *can* stop seeing snakes: it takes great strength of mind, intense concentration, deep resources of courage, and a blind denial of the obvious. But the giant effort to make the snakes go away can be made. The difficulty, the snake-watcher had said, is that it takes so much out of a man that he is left weak and shaken and has to be restored. And the handiest restora-

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tive is just what made him see snakes in the first place. "Learn to live with them, learn to live with them," the old snake-watcher had advised.

But if hallucinatory snakes can be made to disappear by giant effort, so should archaic ears be capable of being modernized. Foley made the giant effort, and then the people in the streets no longer had peculiar ears. Or rather, they no longer had the archaic ears of the reappearing folks. They still had peculiar ears; Fred hadn't noticed ears much before; he saw now the thing that many people never see, that ears themselves are forever peculiar.

Having seen this much, Freddy went further with sudden insight: he saw that people themselves are peculiar by nature, that there is no norm. But this didn't help much.

"What I need now is one rich and powerful friend who'll be faithful to me to the end," Freddy told himself. "I need a foul-weather friend. There has to be somewhere at least one person who cares what happens to me, one who has a gracious way with money and no fear at all of embarrassment or danger. There has to be one person who'll stand by me whether I'm crazy or not, one who'd enjoy a battle. If I had such a friend I'd communicate at once and give a hint of what just might happen to me. But do I have such a friend?

"Yeah. I do. Besides, it might shake her loose from that demon she's stuck on. She likes to be needed and I need her now."

Biddy Bencher, whatever else was wrong with her, was such a friend. She had a gracious way with money (her father's), she certainly had no fear of embarrassment or danger. She was more likely to stand by a crazy person than a sane one. And she did love a battle. She was a foul-weather friend all the way. So innocent and yet so foul. She was the one. Nobody was more loyal, to more things. She changed loyalties like

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coats. Well, it was time for her to put on her Freddy-coat again.

Freddy called her up, not by phone. Other forms of communication had come onto him lately almost without his noticing them. He got her but could not get her attention. She was lounging on subterranean beaches and wild dogs were tearing her apart. "You're missing pieces, you're missing the best pieces," she kept calling at the tearing dogs. "All you're tearing off is the legs. Don't any of you like the white meat?"

Freddy couldn't get her attention that way. Finally he called her on the telephone and she answered on the fourth ring. "Hello, Freddy," she answered at once. "I was playing the record-player and I couldn't answer until that movement was finished. Sure, I'll come there if you need me. Where will I come? Where is there? Is this Freddy or have I answered a dead phone?"

"I'm in Washington, Biddy. I'm fine, as fine as one can be in Washington, temporarily fine, but possibly I won't be free by the end of this day. If I am confined, in all likelihood it will be at the Asilo Santa Eliza, and they'll deny that I'm there. Come get me out if you don't hear from me again."

"Freddy, little short end of the stick, phone me at home late tonight if it hasn't happened. If I don't hear from you, I'll fly there and be there in the morning. I understand, dear, I know what kind of people they put in Santa Eliza. I always knew you were a little, but I don't want other people thinking it, and I sure don't want it made official. Are you on the same jag, Freddy?"

"Yes, the same jag, Biddy."

"There must be something to it, then. If it was just a crackpot idea they wouldn't lock you up. They don't lock up crackpots. I know they don't. Shall I bring Papa?"

"Yes. He said once to wait and he'd get me out. I wasn't in yet then, but I think he had a futuristic insight."

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"I'll come either on bat-wings or by commercial flight, Freddy."

It is good to have one rich and powerful friend.

An hour and a bit to the west another young man found himself circumscribed and threatened with confinement. Hasty army units of two nations had him nearly in a pocket. United States forces, with plane and copter overhead, with radios sputtering back and forth and up and down, mobile with jeep and track, toothed with rifle and automatic rifle and bazooka and machine gun, covered both sides of Canyon Creek to its nearly dry mouth and spread out both ways along the Rio Grande itself. Mexican forces had worked out of the wild and rocky mountains of Serranias del Burro and covered most of the near south shore of the same big river. Little armed river boats stood ready with roaring power barely muted, and ripped here and there in the chocolate colored water.

Miguel Fuentes and his one hundred men; no, his sixty men; no, his twenty-five men, were nearly in the bag. But their numbers and grouping dwindled as streams sometimes dwindle into the sand in that region. Half of them had merged into the roving Mexican patrols; many of them actually belonged to those patrols, but now they had a new loyalty.

Fifteen men and a leader. Where had the rest escaped the closing net? Then three men down with gunfire. Twelve men and a leader into a canyon between rough bald-headed hills, and the covered mouth of the canyon was right on the river. Got them from both ends, got them from sides, covered them from above, harried into the last turn; shouts, warnings, expectations, rattle of hard weapon fire. Final caution, and the converging troops came together.

The bag was closed, but there was nothing in the

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bag. Every way out still closed. Most minute search. Counsel and cursing. Air to ground to air communication in two languages. Flame throwers firing every thicket. Where were the twelve men and their leader? They had gone into the short bare canyon, they had not come out of it, and they were not in it.

"Federico, Federico, hey Freddy," a voice communicated from cave via weave to distant city. "Do you watch the trick? Hey, is that ever a trick!"

"Go away, Miguel, I have no time for you," Freddy Foley communicated. "I've got a noose around my own neck and I'll have to learn to like the feel of hemp."

"Noose I'm talking about," Miguel exulted. "*Hombre*, was there ever a noose around me! You have watched, I know you have watched."

"I watched you but I had other things on my eyes," Freddy communicated. "Anybody could do it with a setup like that. But how will I do it?"

"You know where I am? In the very middle of the earth I am."

"You're down in the complex of caves that Auclaire the patrick told me about, Miguel. You'll get lost in them and never get out. They're thirty miles each way and nobody but the patrick knows their windings."

"And can I not compel the mind of the patrick Auclaire? Now I give you statements which you will proclaim."

"I haven't the time for you, Miguel. You're taking things by the wrong end of the stick. You're as vile a thing as the other creatures."

"I may be so, Federico. If it is so, then I am called to be vile; it is my mission which I may not question. If I am as vile as the other creatures, yet I am *not* the other creatures. I beset them, I cut them down. I am the snake-eater. What, is the snake-eater not as vile as the snakes? But I eat them up, Federico, I eat them up."

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I come soon to my hour. Now you will proclaim the statements I give. I compel your mind to this.

"I have loosened more than eighty men, more than eighty seeds. They are scattered even now. They find quick places to root. They are completely instructed by me, even if only for short hours. They will root, they will grow, they will form other groups immediately. Tell the world that I am down in the middle of the world now, that I am under the ground in a grave. And tell them that I will emerge on the third day as a sign and a wonder. Is that not a blasphemous way to put it! Hey, it is fun to cut these holy corners sometimes and shake the elementals. Proclaim it for me, Federico. I compel you to."

"I know you do, Miguel. Rot your brown bones anyhow! I'll proclaim your stuff and then I'll be shed of you. Emerge on the third day as a sign and wonder! Oh brother!"

"A tip, Federico, a tip. You also will go underground, be hunted into a hole, be trapped underground inside a confinement and inside yourself within that. You will be invaded, you will be dead, you will be buried underground in a peculiar grave. And on the third day you also will emerge. Don't knock it, Freddy, it's a good trick."

"Get out of my head, Miguel. I've had enough of you."

"But you will proclaim my statement, Freddy. I compel you to."

"I know it. I'll do it. And then we're quits. Gah, they're worse than reptiles before they're full-feathered!"

Fred Foley phoned Tankersley and gave him the statement of Miguel Fuentes.

"He really has the Messiah fever, has he, Freddy? Say, there's a group in Norway came out for Miguel today, and one in Indonesia. And about all they know

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about him they have from our own dispatches. Sure, I'll run it, Freddy. You've kept us ahead of the world on it so far."

Then Freddy started out toward the office of Carmody Overlark. He didn't know where Overlark's office was any more than he had known where was the office of the doctor of solid reputation; but his feet would bring him to it.

Something clicked in Freddy's head. The appointment he had been wanting had come through. Overlark had given the word that Foley was to be admitted at once, and Foley was coming at once.

X: ARE YOU NOT OF FLIMSY FLESH TO BE SO AFRAID?

Ere Mor the Peacock flutters, ere the Monkey People cry,

Ere Chil the Kite swoops down a furlong sheer,
Through the Jungle very softly flits a shadow and a sigh—

He is fear, O Little Hunter, he is fear!

Kipling

OVERLARK's secretary had a rough, white, unfinished face that seemed to Foley to express cruelty and cowardice. "You are his dog and you mirror him," Foley said softly to himself.

This may have been Foley's imagination. The secretary might have been a nice enough fellow but he wasn't the jolly type. He had smoky eyes that almost made it appear that he was blind.

"I have no idea why Mr. Overlark is willing to see you," he said, "but I must write down your reason for visiting him. What is it?"

"I want to give him some advice," said Fred Foley.

"He is hardly in need of that, from you at any rate," the secretary said.

"Since that's the commodity he deals most in he might want a new line of it," Foley said stoutly. "Mine is a little out of the ordinary and it's given freely."

"He has sent out instructions that you be admitted,

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Mr. Foley. I had just made attempts to reach you but I failed."

"No, you succeeded, smoky-eyes, you succeeded. You reached me nicely."

"Go in then. But I beg you not to take any more of his time than is necessary. His time is very limited."

"So is mine, but I haven't learned to budget it so finely."

Oh it was a plush place inside, but a different plush than Freddy had imagined. It looked like an office where a great amount of work was done, and this surprised him. It was large but still crowded, containing files (files which were themselves works of art in their haunting ornamentation), two very large tables that could have been conference tables if only the piles of bulletins were ever cleared off them, several desks that were almost cockpits with the amount of instrumentation about them, and a variety of taping and viewing and communication equipment. And there was Carmody Overlark himself, an ornamental man.

"You were intending to ask me questions, Foley," said Carmody Overlark (he didn't ask Foley to sit, but Foley did, and it seemed to irritate the man), "but I imagine I'll do most of the talking. First off, and naturally, we are not alone, in case you have any wild ideas."

"Why are you afraid of little Fred Foley?" Freddy mocked him.

"I'm afraid of nobody, Foley. I'm physically capable but I seldom task myself with the duties that belong to subordinates. I hear you've been acting oddly today. Why?"

Carmody's eyes weren't those of a prisoner looking out; they were those of one who had taken refuge within. He didn't want out. He wouldn't come out.

"I went to a doctor this morning, Mr. Kar-everlasting-Mod, to get an opinion on myself. I don't know

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whether that's odd behavior or not, but the doctor was odd. He tried to get me to doubt my own sanity."

"He tried to get you to recognize your own insanity, Foley. That's the first step toward a cure, and we have cures for everyone."

"There's a proverb about the cure being worse than the disease, Mr. Overlark. I want to ask you some questions about a strange movement. I believe you're near the center of it," Freddy said, and Carmody looked at him with eyes like shattered glass. They were disconcerting, those eyes. One couldn't look into them; one bounced off their facets.

"What you want is to startle me with how much you've guessed, Foley, and to force a full revelation from me. That's pretty childish. Don't you realize what a nonentity you are?"

"No. I've never admitted to myself that I'm a nonentity. I have always believed that every man—"

"—is entitled to his mete of human dignity. That's really a very late idea and there's nothing to it. You're here without any advantage at all. What possible circumstance would impel me to tell you everything or anything?"

"The circumstance that I'll soon be put out of the way and won't be able to use the information. And the sort of pride that holders of tight secrets take in revealing such secrets to their captives."

"I have no such pride, Foley. Oh, maybe a little. No, that's not at all the circumstance that would impel me to tell everything or even nearly everything to you. But there is such a circumstance."

"Is it present?"

"Oh yes. But barely. It seems to me, from what I've heard of your activities, that you've already discovered the essentials about us. This is: that we live when we want to live, that we go into a non-aging state that is very near death when we want to do so, and that

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we live again, and then again: that we try always to live at most heightened experience and to spread ourselves out for as long as we possibly can; and that we do not permit interference. What else do you want to know about us?"

Fred Foley understood in a sudden glimpse that Carmody Overlark was mad. What, "The Sanity of the Centuries" (that had been one of his titles when he was Khar-ibn-Mod) was mad? Absolutely. He lived in a different world entirely. He didn't see the world before him, not even with his multiplex eyes. *That* was madness.

"Why don't you live and die and live again without bothering the world with your doings, Overlark? Why do you impose a deleterious effect on the world?"

(*I've been wrong about him*, Foley thought. *What I guessed, what he himself believes to be the way of it, isn't the truth of the matter at all. There's much less here than meets the eye.*)

"Let me go back to the beginning, Foley, or a little before," Carmody said. (There was always laughter just behind his voice, but it had no real merriment in it.) "You'll see that one man's deleteriousness is another man's delectation. The world is for ourselves and not we for the world. Anything we do to the world is right, so long as it gives us pleasure. You believe you have some sort of standards, and you haven't. Most of the things that you believe are eternal are really very recent. We of the older recension aren't bound by them. We've been in combat with you for a long time. You believe, in one of your theories, that we're in control of the world. We aren't. But we have been, and we will be whenever we wish. It's a day you will fear to see, that we come fully awake again. And we do come awake now. We will regain the world. Certain later interlopers have for some time ruled heaven and earth. Now we come back—ruthlessly."

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"Don't you believe the others also have rights?"

"The others have had the run of their rights long enough. They are the interlopers, and it's time that the ancient line is restored. —Oh, Foley, I misunderstand you completely; that's always the difficulty of conversing with infants. You mean *people*. You mean do people have any rights? Oh no, I don't believe that people have any rights."

"Are you and yours not people, Carmody?"

"No. Not in every sense. Our apotheosis was effected very long ago." Clear mad, this man with the edgy eyes, with the complexion that was sometimes ghost-highlighted and sometimes dead-fish color, with the laughing tainted cruelty and the sick fear. If he was on top of it all, why was he so scared?

"A man doesn't become a god, Carmody, except for purposes of rhetoric," Freddy said. "I assume that your apotheosis was like that of the Caesars."

"Foley, the next time you skim through the *Lives of the Twelve Caesars* (for you will be allowed books in your confinement) see if you can guess which three of those emperors were of us—for three were. They were already gods. Their confirmation in public godhead was only that the public be appeased."

"You're giving an ironic twist to the words, Carmody. What real effect could your auto-apotheosis have?"

"It was an act, an utterance, a statement that became true as it was uttered. Let me say simply that this is always a possible development of man. Oh, not of every man, but of many. Many more than you'd suppose. There's the one man in a thousand, perhaps the one man in a hundred, who is capable of turning into a god. This is as true as that many bees could turn into queen-bees, should the proper historic surge be present. You find it extravagant that I should speak of historic surge as applying to so small a thing as a swarm of insects? But it's also extravagant that we should apply

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it to so small a thing as a swarm of men. The point is that a small hive of bees has more claim on you to importance than you have on us. We're much further above you than you are above the bees. You'd feel no compunction in the destruction of the bees of a region if for some reason it worked to your profit or ease —let's say that the bees of a region bore what seemed to you to be a disease. And we would feel no compunction at destroying most or all of you, if it should be necessary or convenient to us, and it may well be."

"Yes, I do find your ideas a little extravagant, Carmody. When you speak of being gods you actually mean an elite group of demagogues, a bunch of supermen (in your own opinion)."

"You don't know what I speak of, Foley. I was once a tribal deity, literally and actually. All of us were."

"How many is all of you?"

"The first clutch of us, the first dozen; and it was many times that many millennia ago. I was a true tribal deity, Foley. I exceeded even the rest. I was deified, and as a deified one I had access to the several veins of secret knowledge. We were all of us remarkably intelligent in what was a very intelligent age, one that didn't yet hobble on the crutches of literacy and compilation. What we knew we knew directly. We formed a confederacy and established Olympus. We destroyed the Titans, and we ruled. I beg your pardon, Foley, but I caught a country expression going through your mind: something 'as a peach-orchard boar.' It seems I've brushed this expression in minds of men talking to me before. What is it? Even in our earliest mythologies there's nothing about a peach-orchard boar."

"You've forgotten your mythology then, Carmody," Fred Foley told him. "I assure you that the peach-orchard boar is there strongly, early and late. But when you speak of destroying the Titans and ruling, you don't speak literally."

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"Oh, but I do! Olympus is actually a phonetic equivalent of the name of our old high mountain lodge. We were gods and we lived there as gods."

"And you interfered in the affairs of men like the Homeric gods?"

"We did, and we still do. We *are* the Homeric gods, though much older and more crafty than Homer supposed. We're also the gods of wilder epics. Like all epic gods, we had our twilights and resurrections, and we— Foley, I warn you! *Don't do it!* *You're dead on the spot if you do it.*"

And Carmody Overlark had risen to his feet in pale fury.

"Don't do what?" Fred Foley protested. "I'm honestly puzzled. I'm unarmed and completely without a plan. I really don't know what you're talking about."

"Don't laugh at me, Foley! You're dead on the spot if you do! I will not tolerate it. You laughed at my poor wife, but I will not tolerate being so wounded. You're brainless if you try it. I'll have you killed at once. I mean it."

"Continue, Mr. Overlark. You were telling me a good story and I wouldn't break it up, even though I nearly break up myself. I'm properly quelled by your threat; I don't want to be killed on the spot. That's no laughing matter for me. Continue."

"I will. Perhaps you don't know that laughing at us was the offense of the Titans themselves. For that we slaughtered them, and no such battle has been seen since. We're not only tribal deities, Foley, but also national heroes. There's one element common to all national heroes: that they disappear, and that they will come back. We're the thing behind that archetype. It's part of every national lore that the national hero will awaken again and lead like a Messias. There's even a variant Jewish belief that the Messias has lived before,

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that his appearance will be a returning rather than an advent.

"Now then, behind every legend is fact, and behind these legends is solid fact. The national heroes, under their own or other names, lived and seemed to die. But they only slept. And they will return. Most of them, most of us, have done it several times. I was such a legend myself long ago, and the last written traces of my own legend have now nearly disappeared."

"Your ears twitch, Carmody," Foley said. "Is that a property of archaic ears?"

"Foley, ours are the itching ears mentioned in scripture. They itch for novelty; we're not ashamed of that. And they do twitch physically. Oh how seldom are new things heard! So often they itch in vain! I was saying, Foley, that the last written traces of my own legend have nearly disappeared, so now I set about renewing my own legend."

"I'll have to take all this with a kilo of salt, Carmody," Fred Foley said, "being under death threat not to laugh and all. But I simply don't accept it."

"Why not? You had already convinced yourself that I was a returnee."

"I had, Carmody, and you've just now unconvinced me. You're a wraith that settles on a man and alters him. You're an insane spirit with no real substance, an influence flowing through. But you aren't a man, and you never were."

"I am a returned man as you first believed. I and my group are powerful enough to rule the world. Being so powerful, would we not be in legend?"

"Possibly, Carmody, but not so neatly; not with all the known names."

"The neatness is a modern accretion, Foley. Often the legend-cloak is draped over an unworthy dummy."

"Not as national heroes, not as peoples' heroes. You're against the people."

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"No. It's they, in their ingratitude, who sometimes turn against us. We began as people of a sort, as men. After we were men we were tribal gods. We each have our tribe that we sometimes inspire and that we follow with interest. My own is a diaspora tribe that's older than the Jews and has forgotten its name; sometimes it's called the Intelligentsia. This is a people and a race, though it's forgotten that it is."

"It's no wonder that the Intelligentsia is inhibited from becoming intelligent."

"And when our tribes follow false gods, then we visit our wrath on them—as did a certain neologist among the tribal deities."

"This is like something out of Freud or Jung, Carmody. It isn't real."

"What is, Foley? We ourselves have always been puzzled as to what constitutes reality. We even have a sort of bet among ourselves as to who'll find the valid answer."

"But if you aren't real, what sort of visiting wraiths are you? Are you like winds blowing on a man and making him look a little bit like another man? Are you thin spooks influencing by fear and yourselves fearful?"

"We do influence by fear, but we deny that we are fearful. But how could you be if you had no— Oh, there are some things that can't be explained! It's so much easier to obliterate than to explain."

"And you really have no morality at all, Carmody, and you regard all our ethic as man-made?"

"Certainly. And *you* have no morality, Foley. You have only the memory of a morality. There are so many of these memories and nothing that is origin to them. Where were these original things? I was there. Where were they? It's always been in the past tense. Man has never been moral, but he's always remembered that he had been moral. It's a sort of backward aspiration. But you wouldn't understand it, Foley."

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"I begin to understand some things too well. But when all is said and done, you're men only, or less than men, not more."

"But all isn't said and done yet, Foley. We are still men, in a way, but we are not *only* men. It wasn't a mere empty gesture, the rite of our assuming the god-head. It meant something."

Carmody Overlark was no more than poltergeist or plappergeist like the dog-ape of Bertigrew Bagley. He was even inferior to that sometimes invisible creature. He worked the fear trick; it was the only trick he knew. He came out of nowhere, a wraith frozen with fear, and he communicated that fear. By means of it, he seemed to have his way, a little bit, over the fearful. And there are always plenty of fearful.

"But you're not eternal or all-powerful or all-knowing or all-kind," said Freddy. "You're certainly not all-kind. What does your godhead consist of?"

"But we are the nearest things to the eternal. We are, at least, very powerful and very knowing. Oh, there have been marches stolen on us, we don't deny that. Here and there we weren't as astute as several others. But we'll see how it finally comes out. And to ourselves we are all-kind, Foley. We give ourselves all precedence, as is right."

"Who stole the marches on you, Carmody? You have me curious there."

"Oh, once there was a traveling man from Ur, and one made a promise to him at an oasis. The promise wasn't strictly kept but the memory of the promise abides. There was the Galilean thing. There was, what partly combined with it, the Grecian thing. We'd seen many come and go, and we were too complacent. But we're not content to run behind for long. We've bled it near to death in half a dozen drawn battles; it can't get even a draw any longer. Our old enemies are all

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dead, and it's only the parasites growing out of their bodies that we must subdue now."

"And you really regard us as no more than bees, or perhaps ants, Carmody?"

"Oh, as a little more. But if our planned ecology demands that you must go, then most of you will go."

"And you believe you can't be prevented?"

"Of course you can't prevent us. You could no more prevent us in anything than bees could prevent the removal of one small hive where men wished to build a building. Oh, it's possible that some of us may be stung a little, but that won't prevent your removal."

"Why are you so scared, Carmody, if you're so powerful?"

"Why do you keep referring to me as being scared? Anyway, haven't you known men who were scared of bees? But our planned ecology does demand that most of you be removed, so you will be removed."

"How you going to do it?"

"It isn't hard. Not after you've done it a few times."

"Why do you keep rats, Carmody?"

"How do you know I do, Foley? I keep rats like I keep people, to play with."

"Do your rats have any connection with your plans to remove most of mankind?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Do you intend, by means of rats, to reintroduce the plague for the destruction of mankind?"

"Oh yes, we'll use the rats, among other things, for that introduction. And we'll use the plague, among other things, for the destruction, but only as a sort of secondary tool. The plague is a dull weapon and not to be depended on; it needs a very dry tinder and ideal conditions for a sweeping spread. We don't have those conditions now. You're a damnably antiseptic generation, a seven-times-washed abomination. I don't know where you get it—certainly not from us. The plague will be

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only one of the secondary aids. We have a primary tool that's never failed."

"What's that, Carmody?"

"Hysteria. Fear."

"My father used to say that if I repeated 'This is only a bad dream' three times the dream would go away. My father was wrong there. When I said it three times it always caused it to solidify into a very bad dream indeed. I have most of your pieces now, Carmody. I only need time to put them together."

"You'll have plenty of time during your incarceration, Foley."

"I *do* have one more question, though, about a thing both abrupt and silly."

"Ask it then. But I warn you, if you laugh, you're dead."

"Why do you soak your head in a bucket, Carmody?"

"Ah, Foley, I'm glad you asked that, I really am. Because, before I tell you about it, I must do it. It's past my time for it, and I'm gasping like a fish out of water, which is what I am in a way. I was afraid I'd have to have you taken away before I was finished playing with you, Foley. But now that you've mentioned it, I'll do it. If you're looking for something grotesque about me, this is surely it. There's nothing so grotesque as a fish out of water, and you may as well watch."

Foley followed Carmody Overlark into the next room. The "bucket" was a large crystal ewer or bowl, transparent, and the water in it was still astir as though it was freshly poured. Foley recalled the sound of gushing water in the background as he had talked to Overlark. Well, let the toads have their fountains too! Even the patricks have fountains.

When Carmody Overlark took off his shirt, Foley was surprised at his remarkable musculature, for he had seemed a slight man. He was tanned, but there was something else. There was a very fine graining to his skin that reminded a little of fish skin—though that

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thought would not have come if fish had not just been mentioned.

Overlark breathed out deeply, emptying chest and collapsing his whole upper body in the expelling. Then he plunged his head and neck and shoulders into the large bowl and began to breathe the water deeply. If this was fakery it was good fakery, and it hadn't been rigged just to impress Freddy Foley.

The man, if he was a man, was breathing very deeply under water—if it was water. His eyes were open and they had a new snap to them. He grinned, a not altogether man grin, a not altogether fish grin. It was the grin of a tribal deity full of rogue power and eternal youth, one at home in all the elements. Something false about both the power and the youth, though.

Fred Foley scooped water and tasted. It was half salt—brackish, like tide-turning estuary water, or water from the sea very near the mouth of a great river. Or it was like water from an ancient ocean, one with less salt in it than have the oceans now. But why did Fred Foley think of that?

There were minute plants in the water, and small fish. It was not tap water. It was either drawn from a particular source, or carefully mixed. Foley had a sudden belief that there might be an upwelling of that water in that room, even though it was an upper-floor room, just as there was an upwelling of water on Au-claire's mountain, though there were dry caves below.

Well then, this was something that did not explain itself at all. Carmody Overlark had had his head under water for more than five minutes, and the water itself was in constant change or parade. There were schools of small fish that passed through it laterally. They did not follow around the curve of the bowl, they disappeared. And other sorts of fish appeared, all traveling a parade in the same direction, coming out of the glass itself (for all that could be discerned of them), travel-

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ing across the bowl in a straight line and disappearing into the glass wall again. There was optical illusion or there was strong current flowing through that bowl.

Was the underwater breathing of Overlark somehow the key to suspended animation? It was a funny key; it didn't seem to fit any of the locks. It was plain that an ordinary man would be dead, as it was now ten, now fifteen minutes that Overlark had his head and breathing below the surface. It was plain that he was not an ordinary man.

Then the water went out of the bowl. It could not be said that it drained out, for there was no drain. Air followed water in the current-parade across the inside of the bowl, and then the inside was dry. Overlark pulled his head out. He was beaming and greatly refreshed.

"Wonderful, Foley, wonderful. You should try it. There's nothing like it to set a man up."

"You almost convince me that there's something to you, Carmody," Fred Foley told him. "It makes you seem a little more than a man."

"Oh, not on account of that am I more than a man. It really makes me a little less, since I'm not a complete master of the air element. At one time I was somewhat ashamed of my need to return to water, but I've since talked myself out of that shame."

"After all, a tribal deity has no need for shame."

"Exactly, Foley. But you still don't understand, do you? It isn't really a mystery. It's just that I go back a very long time."

"Why doesn't your wife soak her head in a bucket, Carmody? If she does it, I haven't heard of it."

"She doesn't go back nearly as far as I do, Foley. She's a recent acquisition, a recruit of only a few hundred decades back. But we very old ones came from the sea and we're not completely free from it."

"I don't understand it at all, Carmody. I had some

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theories worked out about this suspended animation business, but this head soaking doesn't tie in with them at all."

"I was born in the deep sea, Foley, before there were either monkeys or men upon the earth. I have the need to return from time to time, as those born on the land do not. I was one of the first to come out onto land, into the middle of that sky-beach, one of the first to learn to live above the water. And our first Olympus was in such sky, but still the ocean tide rose over its floor. You won't find traces of it on mountaintops, Fred Foley. Its palaces were sea-level caves (the top of the sea was then our sky) and they're now below the water. Ah, it was a long time ago, hundreds of thousands of years."

Fred Foley had a sound grasp on time. He knew the difference between hundreds of thousands of years and hundreds of millions of years, as many laymen do not; and he knew that the time before there were either monkeys or men upon the earth was impossibly distant. What then? Carmody Overlark apparently believed all that he said about himself. But was he not an impossible poltergeist, visible only for his borrowed body? And are not poltergeister really simpleminded creatures, for all their oddments of knowledge and false knowledge? Do they entertain superstitious beliefs, about the world, about themselves? Have they their own ghostly mythology? "You think people are silly to believe in ghosts?" an old man had asked Fred Foley a long time ago. "Boy, you should hear some of the things that ghosts believe in!"

"Oh, I led them up onto the land, or up into the sky," said Overlark. "It's all a question of viewpoint. We're sky-fish, all of us, and I was first."

"You're insane, Overlark," said Fred Foley, "but we'll let that go for a while. You said when we started that there was one condition (which I hadn't guessed) under

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which you might be impelled to tell me everything. And now you've told me almost everything. What is the condition?"

"That we might want to recruit you. We do recruit, now and then, to keep up our numbers."

"You have no idea how quickly I'd refuse, Overlark."

"You have no idea how quickly you'd accept, Foley, if it were finally offered to you. It hasn't been yet, but it may be. In any case, you'd first have to serve your period of incarceration. Then we'll have a look at your state of mind. But no one ever refuses. We're sensitive and we don't risk refusals. We ask only those sure of accepting. I believe you'll be sure of accepting in several days. Now I'll have them take you away."

"But why, Carmody? Why are you afraid to let me go? And you not of flimsy flesh to be so afraid?"

"I'm of flimsy flesh, yes, and now I need a quick snack, and I'll be rid of you first."

"And in this case you're still a little ashamed of being seen? Do you eat them live, Carmody? The rats, do you eat them live?"

"I do, yes, like kids eat popcorn." (This gave Fred Foley an uneasy turn, and the belief that Carmody was reading him a little too deeply. Whatever had happened to Popcorn, his little dog? Had the Larker kids really eaten him as they said they had?) "The second reason for having them take you away, Foley," Carmody Overlark continued, "is that you're crazy."

"On what evidence?"

"On the evidence of a man in your own profession, Foley, a man named Harry Hardcrow. He'll testify that you talked insanely last night. On the evidence of my own wife, who's stated that you were like a man with no mind at all. On the evidence of a certain doctor of solid reputation; he's a true expert in the field. Or on the evidence of myself.

"Or, if you don't really want to be taken away as a

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lunatic, you can be taken away as a murderer. A man was murdered last night. He was last seen in your company. This unfortunate man was traveling under the name of Carlyle S. Crabtree, but that wasn't his true name. Carlyle S. Crabtree is an eminent man well known to us. The derelict who was cruelly murdered was a poor deluded fellow who had somehow picked up this name. The light was poor last night, in the doorway of that shop, and perhaps it can't be proved directly that you killed the man. But it can be proved that you handled him dead, and that you didn't report it. A fairly tight case of murder could be made against you. It was an especially cold-blooded murder."

It may not take too many of those spider-silk strands to bind a man after all. And the spider never leaves off working. Ah well, maybe Fred Foley was crazy. He was talking on the upper floor of a building on a sky-beach with a plappergeist, a mere troubling wind or wraith, who was visible only because of occupying a body not his own. The spook, with all his other disabilities, was insane, and lived in terror. And yet by transmitting part of that terror in which he lived, the spook might just have enough leverage to affect the world.

"Yes, that murder *was* a little cold-blooded, Carmody. It made me mad then and it still makes me mad when I think about it. Well, whistle up your buckoos—but I'll chop a few of them down before they drag me off."

"Curiously, my feelings are with you in this," Overlark said. "I don't love my buckoos; I enjoy seeing them chopped down, so long as I have plenty of them left to carry out the task. I tell you, Foley, when *I* am in such a spot (and I have been), I take the first one high, the second one low, and the third one dirty. After that, it usually turns into a melee."

Freddy's thoughts were along the same line. He didn't

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hear any whistle, but Overlark had somehow given the signal, and buckoos boiled into the room. Freddy took the first one high and clean and sent him staggering. He took the second one low. But there it ended. The third, the fourth, the fifth, the sixth, came over him in dead heat and near killed him. The melee had been brief, and Fred Foley was trussed.

He raged and raved a little but they took him away. They took him, and they buried him in old buildings. This was the first day of that burial.

XI: "I DID NOT CALL YOU," SAID THE LORD

—and one fears heights, and he shall be afraid in the road . . . before the silver cord is snapped and the golden bowl is broken, and the pitcher is shattered at the fountain . . .

Ecclesiastes 12, 5-6

THEY WERE a very intelligent bunch at the Bug, but Foley realized after a while that some of them had a faulty orientation. It was in the emphasis they placed on various things, in their center of interest which seemed sometimes a little off-center, in their serious treatment of the comic, in a distorted sense of proportion. Yes, there was something a little wrong with many of the inmates of the Bug.

The Bug was sometimes called Old Central, or The School, or Little Eli, or The Chambers. It was called Happy Hollow, and the Paddock. It was called the Bat-Roost, the Bughouse, the Boobyhatch. One of the inmates called it the Nutcracker Suite, and one of them called it The Long House ("long and lazy" is "crazy" in Australian rhyming slang, and you go to any nuttery in the world and you will find one of those gentlemen from the south). But those of Fred Foley's new circle referred to Old Wanwit on the Potomac simply as the Bug.

The Bug was the institution of old buildings to which the buckoos of Carmody Overlark had taken Fred

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Foley for his incarceration and burial. Here were kindred souls, likewise buried: Bophry, Moyer, Framble, Bryant, Sloan, others, very nice fellows, and each one with a great jagged crack the whole length of him.

The first afternoon of burial is always a time of loose ends. Foley walked the lush lawns of the Bug and talked to himself. There was nothing wrong with talking to oneself in the Bug, even with talking out loud to oneself.

"Now here is the problem," said Freddy. "Nobody has examined me, and yet a complete report is filed on me showing that I was minutely examined. The report was already prepared before I was brought here. This is known as efficiency. To how many of my companions has the same thing been done?

"Many of my companions are disoriented. They have a fine jargon but they've lost touch with reality. They can seize on an isolated point and treat it interestingly from many angles, but they can't relate that point to the world. They can take a joke as the point of departure of a thesis, but they can't understand that joke as a joke. But I'm here as one of these, and the world can't tell the difference between us.

"There are people here for the same reason I'm here: because they believe there's a group possessed of either very long life or returning life, and because they believe that this group conspires against the world. How do I differ from them?

"Is the only difference that I can recognize a joke and they can't? But what if it's all a joke about the returnees and I can't recognize it? Then am I also insane?"

And Fred Foley walked straight into a tree.

"I'm at least getting careless with my wits," Freddy said. "Normal men don't get so preoccupied with their thoughts that they walk into trees. But there's one consoling thought: it may be that those of my type

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weren't insane when they were committed here, that they've become a little odd from the atmosphere of the place, or from those constant shots they give us. But that thought isn't as consoling as it might be. How am I to avoid the atmosphere of the place? How am I to avoid the constant shots? And how am I to avoid being here a long time?"

And one other detail made Fred Foley doubt his sanity a little. Leo Joe Larker might be there in the Bug. And he repeated an earlier warning:

"Whatever they tell you to do, Foley, don't do it. Whatever they tell you not to do, do it. Be dumb, blind, blundering, and silly, but stay on it. You may be dumb enough to get to the core of it. You're on your own with it all the way. I'm just telling you *not* to lay off. If they can kill you, Foley, I can kill you worse. If they can scare you, I can scare you double. Now, go to your appointments. Oh, I forgot! You've already been to your appointments. You're in here with us now. A lot of good it did you to be dumb and blind and silly. You didn't come any closer to whipping the thing than us smart ones did."

"Are you all right, Leo Joe?" Foley asked him. There was a puzzle about this Leo Joe Larker. He was a Negro now. There was no doubt about that. But he hadn't been one as a boy. Mexican, Gypsy, Indian maybe, or dirty-necked Irishman, but Negro, no. He didn't grow up to look anything like himself as a boy, his voice was not anything like that. He was, however, the same man who had spoken to Freddy from the darkened doorway one night. Yes, and he *was* Leo Joe Larker who had raised a man from the dead when he was a little boy. You're sure of some things, even after you're crazy.

"Why do you call me by that name?" Leo Joe asked. "That isn't the name I'm committed under."

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"Foley isn't the name I'm committed under," said Fred, "but you called me by it immediately."

"I know it. But that Leo Joe stuff wasn't the name I had been going by either. I'm not even sure that I remember it. Are you sure that's my name? I'm probably not who you think I am. Say, why's that fellow so afraid of heights all of a sudden? He didn't used to be like that, did he?"

"What fellow, Leo Joe? Oh!" The fellow was James Bauer. He wasn't there, of course. He was back at home sitting on his own sometimes chilly patio. But a weaver, a Harvester wouldn't mind a little thing like it being chilly. In the lake down below, Wing Manion had been swimming every evening, and very often Hondo and Salzy Silverio swam with her. It doesn't get too chill for Harvesters, not even in mid-winter.

Rather odd that Leo Joe Larker should follow Fred Foley into the weave, though. Well, who can say what was odd about Leo Joe Larker?

James Bauer, thirteen hundred miles away, was trembling. He was the master of the weave and he was trembling. He went to the edge of the patio, to the concrete and iron stairway that led down to the lake. He put his hand on the iron rail and he shook.

"It isn't as high as all that, Foley," Leo Joe said. "It's only twelve easy steps down to the water, and the water there isn't four foot deep. I never did see a fellow so scared of heights as he is, though. You know it, he just got that way. He wasn't scared of them before."

This wasn't a projection like a viewing screen. It was being there with a piece of each of the senses. Every person brushed by the weave could read back into it, and sharp persons who brushed those brushed-ones could also read back into the whole apparatus.

"Arouet, Arouet Manion!" James Bauer was thundering from his far-away patio, and Arouet entered there from the house, frightened also, but not of heights:

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"You compelled me so I'm here," he said. "You're in a passion. What are you going to do?"

("The heavy one is going to kill the other one, Foley," Leo Joe Larker said in the Bug enclosure. "You know that, don't you? Is there any way to stop it? Is it real?" "It won't happen for hours, or days," Fred Foley told him. "No, I don't know any way to stop it. No, it isn't completely real, Leo Joe, but it almost is. Pieces of it are real.")

"It's intolerable, Arouet," said big Jim Bauer. "The heights! How can anyone abide such heights? The highest mountains of earth aren't even anthills before these heights. One who falls here will fall through black space for eons. Is there no protection?"

"Your fear is of depths, not of heights, James; and like my fear of death it strengthens the weave," Arouet said. "You mock me for mine, I mock you for yours. And our anger feeds the weave."

"There's one thing I must do while on this pinnacle," Bauer rumbled. "I kill you this time. Crawl on your belly, Arouet. You'll grovel for many hours, and then you'll die. Grovel, man! I compel you!"

And Arouet Manion was on the stone floor of the patio. He was black with fear.

Foley caught something of a plappergeist just around the corner of his several senses. So, there was a patrick in the Bug! The creature-familiar was there.

"Can you change it to some other scene, Foley-Smith?" Bryant asked as he joined them. (But Bryant was not the patrick.) "That sure is a funny set you have. It doesn't have any chassis, and you can see it with your eyes closed. Why don't you let the fellow that's putting the speech together come in? I like to put speeches together myself."

"All right, Bryant," said Fred Foley, "if you're interested." These inmates of the Bug were some of them

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very psychic people. One has to be very psychic to hook in so easily on a brain-weave twice or thrice removed.

This was Michael Fountain, a sixty-year-old lean and lined man, craggy featured, with only a fringe of pinkish hair around his pate, with a hook in his nose like a Plains Indian or an Armenian, and too pale to be either

Michael Fountain was lecturing into the dictaphone. Such first-draft lectures were then transcribed for him, and from them he prepared his fine final renditions. He was dictating sequences for a superb lecture which he would name *The Golden Glass Bowl*.

"I will posit a student questioner of the intelligent but naïve sort," Michael was dictating, "and I will answer his questions. It is no matter that the questioner is at the moment imaginary." (That was in error, but Michael did not understand it. A real questioner would send a question into Michael's mind now by means that Michael still did not accept. The first questioner was a man named Greyhorse, who was intelligent but not in all ways naïve.) "Any lecturer worth his salt and salary," Michael Fountain was continuing, "can call up whatever questions he wishes from the students sitting before him. He can pick out the most unlikely student for it, and he can elicit from that one just the question he wishes. This is done by gesture, by expression of expectation, and by the dropping of key phrases. It has always been known that an intelligent lecturer or teacher could do this. I explain the tactic to you since you here present are all destined to enter the intellectual elite. One sign of that is simply that you are attending my lectures. Were you not of the potential elite, you would not be here. But the students, even the students of the elite, who speak and think entirely in the prescribed catchwords (especially those who believe themselves the most independent), will sometimes grow angry at themselves for this, will sometimes feel them-

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selves frustrated and insufficient. And yet they cannot deny that the trends and the questions come out of their own mouths and minds; out of the shallowness of their minds, however, while leaving the depths troubled but uncontributing.

"Ah, the questioner asks why there are still pockets of poverty and misery in the Golden Glass Bowl that is the world. There are these remaining pockets, my young friend, because there are still pockets of stubbornness and pride. 'Is not a poor man still entitled to his own measure of stubbornness?' I hear my young friend ask. No, he is not, I answer. Nobody is entitled to even a small measure of stubbornness any longer. Beasts may be stubborn; men may not be. 'And are not the poor entitled to even the crumbs of pride?' my phrase-mouthing questioner asks again. No, my friend, they are not! Not even the crumbs of pride can be allowed, not to the lowest of men, not to the highest. This would be apparent to you if you considered words in their real meaning. Birds and baboons have pride, perhaps; men may not have. It has never been a part of true men. The rich have had to give up all vestiges of pride long ago. They stuttered and protested, but they gave it up. It was a good bargain for them. Wealth and ease are better than the old vestige. And the stubborn poor can also enter into wealth and ease if they give up that old cumbersome burden. It were easier for a camel (*camelus camelops*) to pass through the eye of a needle than for a man burdened with pride to enter into the golden heritage, as an old prophet said. Ah, do we have another questioner?"

("Let me have at him once, Foley," said Loras who claimed to be an alien. "Have at him, Loras," said Fred Foley.)

"Ah, this questioner asks why we have given up the stars and the outer space," said Michael Fountain easily. "I always smile when I receive this question.

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We have given them up, and all plans of further studying them, of ever visiting them, because we must set a limit to ourselves. It is very curious the persons who ask this question. So often it is those who might be called moral. Is it not ironic that those who believe that one wife is enough do not believe that one world is enough? How is it possible to reverse things so? We become free by a restriction. We restrict ourselves to one world so that we may enjoy one world fully. Our total freedom here is our compensation. Blot out the skies! There is nothing beyond our one sun. There is no world beyond our one world. The Golden Glass Bowl which we hold in our hands is singular and unique. Do not go whoring after strange worlds!"

(“Let me have him, Foley,” said the man who was possibly Leo Joe Larker, or who was possibly not the person they thought he was.)

“Ah, the questioner asks why we made it so small and why we are throwing it away,” Michael Fountain lectured into the dictaphone back there in the south midlands of the country. “And I understand what he means. And the answer to the second part is that we are *not* throwing it away; at least I believe we are not, not at this time.

“What we are talking about are the world and the lives which we are given to fashion as our tasks. These are in the form, as I see it, of a large, fine, precious, crystal bowl, the Golden Glass Bowl, which we hold in our hands. True, it is not nearly so large a bowl as we once wished to fashion, but now we have come to understand that it is as large and as heavy a bowl as we are able to lift and hold.

“And here I have no patience with those fossilized and unregenerate persons who accuse us of being ‘anti-life,’ no patience at all. They point their grubby fingers to the figures of older scientists showing that the world could be brought to support one hundred billion

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persons (or, in extreme cases, double that), but they do not point to the plain fact that special effort and ingenuity might be required to bring the world to such developments; and to the further plain fact that special effort and ingenuity are no longer possible to mankind as presently constituted.

"That these things were possible to mankind in the past we acknowledge, but we have refined them out of ourselves in our advancement. The world we have built and which we hold in our hands is a world of proper size and adjustment and enjoyment. The 'troubling of giant effort' has happily been left behind us. We are not dinosaurs to aspire to great size, nor yet swarming insects to aspire to great numbers. We are people. We have now had fifteen consecutive years of decrease in world population and we have ordained decreases for another fifty years. We will not be crowded or pushed, we will not be stirred to unusual effort for anything. We are the lords and we require lordly room. Ah, and here is a thing that only we of the elite know. We did *not* bring this about at all, though we take the credit for it. We need credit standing to our account. Perhaps we triggered it a little early, but that also I doubt. There are these biological swings and it swung. What we do now is set up safeguards so that it may never swing back again in the other direction.

"Nor have I any patience with those who speak of the 'loss of nerve' of our world. 'Nerve,' in this sense, is a property of animals or of animals in the process of becoming men. It is *not* a property of finalized man. Yes, we *have* lost our nerve, at least I hope we have. Let it be buried with other prehistoric monsters. Let it never trouble our world again. Does that answer your question, young sir? Ah—he is a little confused, he is a little resentful. These were not quite the questions he meant to ask, and yet they are the questions that

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came out of his mouth. There are questions that we of the elite cannot allow to be asked, and they will not be asked. The young have not the words for these questions yet. They have no words except the catchwords we give them. And when they come to an age to have the words they will have forgotten the questions."

("Let me go at the old gaffer, Foley," said one named Croll. "Who are the monsters who still trouble the world, now that you fine-haired dudes have it all fixed up so fine?")

"Here is a question," said Michael Fountain. "It's as though it came from a live and not an imaginary listener. This is odd, that it is a real questioner but not a real question. The thing to grasp about the monsters of my questioner is that they are not exterior but interior. They neither guard nor assault the world for the reason that they are not there. They are but unconscious remnants in some persons. It was once believed that we had need of these symbols. If we had once, we have not now. These were the four menaces that stood on the four forbidden roads that pre-man has already traversed. The *Toad* symbol is the loathsome origin, and death, and rebirth. And the alternate and sublimate of the Toad symbol is the Ox symbol (which is also the Worricow), possibly because both the toad and the ox have such bare staring faces (and possibly there is a trope with the horned toad). The jewel in the head of the Toad is the life-spark itself, which was first generated in cold flesh.

"The *Python* symbol is illicit wisdom; the python is a man-image as seen by pre-man (hairless, unnaturally mobile-appearing man was somewhat snake-like to the more hairy and less supple and less articulated pre-men, even when pre-men and man were combined in one person). Alternates to the Python symbol are the Octopus and the Hydra symbols (free-walking and tool- or weapon-handling man seemed, to pre-man,

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possessed of extra members or arms); and also, unaccountably, the Lion symbol is alternate to the Python.

"The *Falcon* symbol is the air-hunter, the bird-murderer, the taller authority, the tyranny, the force-rule of the first mounted men (man-on-horseback was, to some extent, man given the power of flight, Falcon-Man.)

"The *Badger* symbol is the cave or burrow symbol, the stubborn holing into the earth, the rear-guard defense of all rear-guard things. The alternates to the Badger symbol are the Bear symbol, the Man-in-the-Animal-Mask symbol, and finally the Man symbol. There seemed no confusion, to primitives, between the Man symbol and man himself.

"These four symbols are not proper symbols for modern men. They were symbols used by animals in the process of becoming men. Some, however, believe that these *are* valid symbols in our unconscious, and that by them our unconscious is trying to tell us something: as though we had cut some needed element out of ourselves and these symbols were warning us to bring it back in. I do not accept this view. Nor do I accept the easy explanations: tentacled liberalism (the python-hydra) opposing snap-jawed conservatism (the stubborn badger); and each abetted by its preternatural under-form, Communism, from underground (the toad with the tantalizing jewel in its head) opposed by resurgent Fascism (the hunter-falcon, full-feathered, preying). There is polarity in the world, but it isn't so storied and allegorical as that. No, my young questioner, there can be no answer to no question. There are no exterior monsters who trouble the world either in attacking it or in defending it. They are not real."

("Old Gaffer, we *are* real," Croll said, giving the hissing growl of a very badger. "We are the abiding men, we are the abiding monsters, and we are real.")

Then Fred Foley knew that Croll was the patrick, a

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more-than-a-patrick, a Croll: that he had been committed by his title, not his name. He knew, as a matter of fact, that Croll was Patrick of Baltimore and Washington, that he was Over-Patrick or Croll of the entire continent. He also understood that Croll was a little bit simple and inept, for sign that the office was more important than the man.

But a new force, a new man, entered the projected play now, one who could enter anywhere that Fred Foley could enter. The other inmates who had gathered around the communication felt this new person strongly.

(“Here’s another of the monsters,” Croll bear-growled. “Don’t tell me *he’s* not real.” The new-appearing monster was Miguel Fuentes and he *was* real.)

Michael Fountain, dictating privately in his own rooms thirteen hundred miles away, had become highly nervous but he still composed brave words for his lecture:

“We come to apex, and it is no way elevated or outstanding; we come to perfection, and to perfect simple means to finish; we come to climax, and it is beautifully flat and undistinguished. We have completed the world. Behold it!”

And in some manner Michael Fountain *was* holding a large, fine, precious, crystal bowl, The Golden Glass Bowl, in his two hands. It was pretty. It was almost substantial.

“This is the world,” Michael intoned in a self-induced trance. “This is our lives, this is our final achievement. Worry not that it is small: it is the largest world ever, if we will not allow a larger one. Worry not that it is flawed: we ourselves are the flaws: and if we say that we are not flaws, then who is there to contradict us? Worry not that it is fragile, so long as we are very careful not to drop it.”

“*Drop it!*” the thunder-clap voice of Miguel Fuentes

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exploded. Everybody in the entire communication jumped at the cannon-barking violence of that command. And *Michael Fountain dropped his world.*

It tinkled into a thousand tinny pieces. It shattered and all the light flickered out of it. The face of Michael Fountain also broke and shattered and the light went out of it also. He cast himself down and was racked by dry sobs.

"How did we go wrong? What did we forget?" Michael moaned.

"You forgot that there is One who will not be mocked," Miguel Fuentes said in a voice like curling smoke. The falcons, like the patricks, believe strongly in things like that.

"That spik sure queered him," said Leo Joe Larker. "Do you know that spik, Foley?"

"Yeah, I know him."

"I know him way on back," said Leo Joe. "I was a Mexican one time myself."

"That one was real," said Croll. "He's as real as I am. The old gaffer isn't quite real, though. He had a good spiel going but he couldn't hold onto it. He came right up to the still, past the grinders, and then dropped his molasses jug."

"The funny thing about the old fellow," said Loras who claimed to be an alien. "He had known where the fountains were once. But the last time he went to them he busted his pitcher."

But there are also formalities in the life in the Bug, in the tomb. There was interrogation after a while. There was separation. There were more of those shots, tranquilizers. But Foley had been tranquil ever since he was buried here. There was even a little cleanliness lecture. And there was supper.

There was supervised recreation. This is the original

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contradiction of terms. It was for making suggestions about supervised recreation that the devil was cast into hell; any other account you have heard is false. The inmates were crazy, but they weren't crazy enough to like that stuff.

Then to the beds. Even the sleeping was supervised, and honest darkness was not allowed in this tomb. Stubborn sleep then, and appearances that were not supervised.

The brain-weave was in tension and exhilarating unnatural agony. James Bauer and Arouet Manion were locked in lawless death passion, very much like snakes trying to swallow each other. It was not absolutely certain that Bauer was the master, for all that Arouet groveled before him. Bauer was in the grip of his own terror, that of horrifying height (and he was sitting on the ground-level patio of his own home), mind-blinding height, and Arouet knew of the terror and knew how to heighten it.

The arena became crumbling sand then, on the edge of cliffs of immeasurable height, and James Bauer and Arouet Manion were the two bulls who fought to death. Bauer was the heavier and stronger, he was the old king bull who had never been defeated: longer and more massive of horn, more humped and knotted of neck, bulkier of body, more iron of hoof, and altogether fearsome. But Arouet became the challenger, even though it was Bauer who had commanded him to the battle. Arouet held the high ground and could charge downward. He could regroup and charge again. But Bauer was trapped on the very edge before it started. He could not lunge without the sand further crumbling and sending him over the edge. He was hunched together, and all support began to slice out from under him. He dug one great horn into the steep turf for anchor, and dug more emptiness beneath himself as his sand base cascaded down the cliff-sides. He

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bellowed, and it caved beneath him still more. Arouet punished him from above, brought him to his knees, raked him and slashed him, but he could not turn that heavy armored head or come to the flank.

Bauer tangled horns with Arouet, hunched mightily, and broke Arouet's neck. But now the lighter bull was down on Bauer, twisted on his horns, quivering and screaming, and Bauer had no firm stance to pitch the thing away and back from his horns. Back legs pawing air, catching sand again, crumbling it with the effort, and pawing fearful empty air again. What great bull can stand to all charge with a crumbling foothold?

Arouet dying . . . let him die then, but how to get rid of him? And Arouet, though frantic with the fear of death, would go if he could take Bauer with him. The king bull feared no death except the falling death, and bull Bauer with the burden on his horns began to run like the sand itself over the edge of the cliff that had no bottom.

The arena became a pit then, green rocks and green shadows. Two great snakes, each trying to swallow the other. Bauer was the stronger and more massive, but Arouet Manion was perhaps the longer of jaw. Gaping mouths spread, unhinged, and spread again, wider, more mucous, now clinging and gaining like bird-lime, now sliding and slavering like very snake oil. Arouet had his longer jaws over the snout of Bauer, obliterating nostrils and eyes, closing over the great gape with extension that was drawn as thin as blue bubble, suffocating Bauer in the wide-spread translucent jaws.

Bauer grappled and won in the writhing snake-wrestle, breaking Arouet's back again. But in death spasms Arouet gained and gulped, swallowing Bauer's head, inching down the length of him, blistering and murdering him with blazing gastric and psychic juices, spreading his own Arouet-death over Bauer like a clinging plastic

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sheath. And, suffocatingly, Bauer knotted himself again and again to try to burst the killing sheath.

Bauer, on his own patio, was breathing with a rasping groan that would not leave him for the rest of his life; and Arouet Manion writhed on the stone floor, frantically afraid of death, frantically avid for killing.

The arena changed to—obscene interval—that is too degrading to contemplate even in a brain-weave. The arena changed again and again while the double death battle tallied off all its aspects one by one. The other members of the weave were brought to continuing psychic orgasm by the strong and musky play of agony and death. And it would be played out for many hours yet.

Hondo Silverio was shaken with waves of disgust and loathing. That noble snake found himself revolted to his depth. It was then that he decided either to master or to break the weave; but that isn't done in a minute or an hour, nor even in a day.

Another arena, and another. The dead wife of Bauer waited in agony in an uncontinued place for Bauer to fall past her into hell: ashen anguish, ghostly torture. The living-aspect wife, caught in deep catalepsy, waited for the hypnosis over her to be broken by death, if indeed even death would break it. A saintly sexton and a cinnamon cookie (the cookie for Cerberus) were caught in the passion, the passion that would break the weave.

Bedelia Bencher would come for Foley, either late that night or early in the morning, either on bat-wings or by commercial flight; but she would have a very deep draft of this passion first.

So would they all. They were the psychic athletes and this was their game, the sounding evil of it, before they broke it in final disgust. But the horror-gulping gusto would reign a long reign before the disgust overwhelmed it.

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In another place, a young man was having evil fun in his grave in the caves underground. Miguel Fuentes was the hunted there, but he also ran with the hunters. Indeed, he was the bright young Mexican boy, guileless and glib, who told certain army patrols that he knew the caves better than anyone in the world, that he could find anyone in them. And he led the patrols in to their loss and murder, and them hunting for him all the while. This young man would be a falcon full-feathered when he finally came out from underground.

And in still another place (and it could be any one of many, as they of that species are so much alike), a patrick was experiencing a waking night-dream out of Samuel, the saddest verses in scripture:

And the patrick answered: "Here I am, Lord." And again he said, "Here I am; for you called me." But the Lord answered him: "I did not call you. Go back and sleep."

Well, why did the Lord never call the patricks? They had been waiting, oh how they had been waiting for the call! It was given to others. It was never given to the patricks, and they waiting so ready for their thousands of years.

"Smith, Foley, whatever your name is, turn that thing off, whatever that thing is," protested Loras who claimed to be an alien. "We want to sleep. How can we sleep with you dreaming that bright-colored stuff?"

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That I be one to catch the hard truth hurled
And fight soft lies that have the world for span!
I know the Ox, the Eagle, and the Man,
The Lion—and the schism of the world.

I feed on elementals like a cloud
Though buried in constraining earthy room
Where now I harvest lightning in my tomb
And integrate the monsters for a shroud.

Here in Fourth Mansions which is Death or Life
Is rooted world that it is worth to live:
The Giant Troubling and the Giant Brawn.
Though I be dead a while I bite the knifel
In monumented earth I grow and give
While I predict and manufacture dawn.

Broken Cisterns and Living Waters:
Endymion Ellenbogen

“**THERE IS A** holiness in a whole person or a whole world,” the patrick Croll said. “The veriest monsters inside us may be sanctified. They were put there by Him who is ‘Father of Monsters’ also. What right have we to cut them out of us? Who are we to edit God? We cut strong things out of ourselves and suppress them, and the rocks and clouds will give birth to them again. We dry up our interior fountains and they gush out again,

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exteriorly and menacingly. We cannot live without monsters' blood coursing through us. Only to the whole person is life worth living and death worth dying. Here in Fourth Mansions we must be whole or we must be nothing."

"Where do you get those curious phrases, Croll?" Freddy Foley asked him.

"From the manual. As patrick, I must recite certain passages every morning."

"But aren't the patricks themselves monsters?"

"Yes, I believe so. But we're the monsters under the man-symbol."

This was the morning of the second day of the burial or incarceration of Foley.

"A man and his daughter were here looking for you earlier this morning," an attendant told Foley now, "but they found no trace of you. They're nearly convinced that you're not here. You *aren't* here, you know."

"Well, but who is this here then?" asked Freddy.

"You're in the records as Julius Smith."

"That explains why so many call me Smith. Did you tell the man and his daughter that I was carried as Smith on the rolls?"

"No. I just hinted enough that they might not be gone for good. They were very generous with me this morning. A little later they may be even more generous. They're wealthy, aren't they?"

"They may be, but don't run it into the ground."

"I'll have to be the judge of that, Foley-Smith. Oh, I miss out entirely some times when I shoot for too high a figure. But I make it up, I make it up, I often do quite well. I have a good judgment of what the traffic will bear. That girl—those eyes—are they real?"

"Not entirely. But you saw her and I didn't."

"I swear she has eyes like nobody has eyes. She has pictures painted on her eyeballs, weird pictures, snakes and monsters and fountains and upheavals. I never saw

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anything like them. But she gets around all right. How can she see with those pictures painted on her eyeballs?"

"She's a clown, but she's more than that. She's mutated and she can see with every part of her. So can I. I just now realized it. Who needs eyeballs? Is there a tattoo artist here in the Bug? I'll have him tattoo my eyeballs. I'll be the first one here with tattooed eyeballs."

"Yeah, there is one here. If you pay me—you have money to your account here and you can release some to me—I can tell you which one he is, and we can—Nah, you're joking."

Oh well, what can one do in a grave except wait for that last trumpet to blow, or perhaps an intermediate trumpet in special cases? But for an inquiring mind there are interesting questions cropping up everywhere, even in the grave. Fred Foley asked one of the doctors about one of the questions that was bothering him.

It wasn't that he was reconciled to the doctors here. He believed that they also were tilted, though perhaps not to such an angle as the boarders. Those doctors had trouble with jokes too. For answer to a joke they were likely to gaze at you with steely eyes, and then pull your record and make cabalistic marks on it. Doctor Decker was better than the others, but only a little.

"Doctor, what I wonder is whether group delusion is common," Fred Foley asked him.

"Quite common, Smith, quite common," Doctor Decker told him.

"Then there are other groups like us who share a common delusion?"

"At least a dozen groups in this very hospital at the moment, and there have been hundreds."

"What were some of the more unusual—ah—obsessions?"

"A few years ago there was a group here that believed that very low musical notes caused their teeth

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to loosen. They campaigned strenuously against all low-down songs, they lobbied against them, and some of them smashed and destroyed those coin-operated machines which I believe are called goop boxes. They also tried to have the Army 'Taps' changed, to eliminate several low notes."

"And what was the outcome?"

"Oh, the group split up. It had no real cohesion. Some of the patients were finally released. Some went on to other obsessions."

"No, I don't mean the outcome like that. I mean the tests. *Did* it show that low musical notes caused their teeth to loosen?"

"Sizzling sandburrs, Smith! What are you talking about? There was no such test."

"Then who was to say that it was an obsession? It might have been a shrewd observation that wasn't acted on. There was no test at all? What were some of the other groups?"

"There was one quite small group, three. This is the smallest possible group by our definition. All three of these men were locomotive engineers, and they all believed that their lonely night whistles were answered by giant flying creatures. They believed these creatures were not large enough to carry off an entire train, but that a locomotive running alone might be carried off; and they swore that this was the answer to several disappearing locomotives. They said the giant flying creatures believed the night whistles were mating calls."

"And were there actually cases of disappearing locomotives? And were there any attempts made to pursue this explanation?"

"Smith, are you kidding?"

"Not entirely. As a reporter I *did* hear of cases of locomotives disappearing when running alone at night. I'll follow this up when I get out and when I settle other matters. What were some of the other groups?"

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"Oh, there was a bunch who all believed there'd be a terrible earthquake in the Great Lakes region on the morning of June 19, 1979, that the southern shore-lines would sink, and that thousands would be drowned."

"But that was the very date of it! They were right! This proves that some of the groups can be right and you can be wrong."

"Of course that was the date of it, Smith, and their insistence that the area be cleared would have saved thousands of lives if it had been timely. But the obsession occurred three years after the event. All the afflicted believed themselves living several years in the past, anterior to the happening. All had been eyewitnesses and near victims of it and it had deranged them. Then there was the group that believed that all red-headed women were creatures from outer space sent here to intermingle with mankind to cause trouble and destruction."

"I could give you instances that would seem to prove them right," Freddy said.

"So could I, Smith," said the doctor. "Some of the red-heads do seem to come from way out. Then we had a clutch of odd ducks here who believed that the messages and mottoes in fortune cookies form a sinister code of instructions sent by an evil mastermind in high Tibet.

"And there was a clique with the belief that the white oak tree is a man-eater, and that persons who have unaccountably disappeared will invariably be found to have disappeared in the neighborhood of a white oak tree. They believed also that the wood of the tree had certain dangerous properties, and that a certain furniture factory that makes much use of the wood should be enjoined from doing so. We still have some of the white oaks here.

"The majority of the coteries, however, have beliefs very similar to the group you belong to, Smith. This is

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the belief that the world is ruled by a hidden-hand group of men who may be known by such and such marks, that these men plot against the world, and that their plot against the world is about to succeed; they maintain that it's absolutely necessary that their warnings be hearkened to and acted upon. You're really a variant of the world-is-ending societies."

"What if one of our groups is right, Doctor?"

"Why then, the plot against the world would succeed, since your warnings are most certainly not going to be acted upon."

"Do you really believe I'm insane, Doctor Decker?"

"Yes, on one point you are, Smith. One point of insanity is about par for the never-quite-normal human race. I actually believe that it's a healthy sign for a man to be clearly insane on one clear point; it gives him balance and otherwise keeps him sane. The normally insane have a point of eccentricity that's minor, private, and of no threat. That's where you go past it, Smith. In an involved society the eccentricity must be a minor one. It must not annoy or harm your neighbors. And it plainly must not lead you to vicious slander of persons in high places. Yours has led you to that."

"Then you don't believe it possible that the world is being plotted again?"

"Likely it is, Smith, and in thousands of plots. The world is a fine apple and we all want a bite. But I don't believe in an effective plot any more than I believe that the white oak tree is a man-eater."

"What's the very latest thing here in group belief?" Fred Foley asked.

"Your own was of yesterday and the day before, Smith. There's a new one today. It's the belief in a new disease. This is a death-wave to come and be characterized first by nasal itching, then by a tiredness and certain irritability, later by drowsiness, and eventually by death."

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"That sounds like the normal life story to me, Doctor."

"Yes, but this is all to take place within five hours, according to the addicts. And according to them it's caused by germs carried by gossamer, or by drifting fluff from cottonwood trees (but there aren't any of them here, and this isn't the season for them to cotton), or more probably by a drifting medium similar in appearance to these but which may come from outer space. The warners give very clear and detailed description of the disease, considering that it hasn't yet appeared."

"Five hours isn't a lot of warning, but for what it's worth I may as well take it," said Foley-Smith. "My own nose itches. That should mean that I'll be dead by dark."

"You have a delusion of your own, Smith, yet you can joke about the delusions of others. Oh that damn drifting stuff, like spider silk, it's been settling on me all day! Wonder what it is? But there is real terror among the addicts, Smith, and it begins to spread. We've had to isolate those of the cult."

"I wasn't joking about it, Doctor," Fred Foley-Smith said. "I believe that a complex of sudden and fatal diseases is part of the ordeal in store for us. And it does itch, Doctor. And I'm a little tired and could become irritable."

"I wouldn't worry about it, Smith. You aren't the sort to panic, though you may be the sort to cause panic. Nasal itching can be brought about by suggestion easier than almost any other phenomenon. But it's curious that the members of this group (we haven't been able to establish any previous relationship among them at all) should all come up with this odd notion at one time. And they've all come up with it violently, calling out loud in the streets for massive efforts to destroy the floating cosmic stuff."

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"But it's just as curious about your own and similar groups. I've tried very diligently to discover how it all comes about. It's part of my business to discover how these things come about. Do *you* have any idea how they might happen? I'm asking you, Smith, because you might be able to give me a lead. You aren't the most intelligent of your group, but you're the most open, the most communicative."

"I don't know about the other groups, Doctor. But with my own group I know exactly how it happened."

"Then tell me, Smith. I've been studying it for years."

"It's as though an elephant were standing in the middle of the street, Doctor. One man sees it and announces it. Then another man sees it (and there's been no previous relationship between the two men at all) and the second man likewise announces it. And a third man sees it (and he's a total stranger to the other two men) and he announces it in his own way. So the three are locked up in the strong house for believing that they see it. The reason that they all believe they see the elephant at the same time is that the elephant is there at the same time."

"To follow your analogy, if there is one, Smith, why can't the keepers see the elephant too?"

"Because they, you, are too stubborn to look out the window, Doctor. Because they believe it's impossible for an elephant to be standing in the street."

"Then the facts of your delusion are really that obvious to you, Smith?"

"The facts of the case are really that obvious to me, Doctor. I finally saw the whole conspiracy standing as plain as an elephant in the street: also the conspiracy was admitted to me in great detail by one of the princes of the conspiracy."

"Bad, Smith, very bad."

"If one of the inmates should come to you right now, Doctor, and tell you that it was raining outside, you'd

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say 'Bad, very bad,' and make damning marks on his record."

"That's probably true. It's an automatic response with me. I do wish you'd get over this, though, Smith. You're a likable young man."

"Why was the name Smith hung onto me, Doctor? And Julius? There hasn't been a Julius in our family since two generations before Adam. Why wasn't I committed under my own name?"

"You were. Your own name is Julius Smith. You were wandering and amnesiac when picked up, and you were proclaiming that men long dead had returned to plague the world. We solved your identity by routine methods, and we hope you'll soon remember your own past life. That would be an important step to your cure."

"Are you in on this cover job, Doctor Decker?"

"No, I'm not in on any cover job, Smith. I'm not at all related to the political angle of this place, though there is one. I accept the data that's passed on to me and I work sincerely with the patients on the basis of it."

"But my name isn't Smith."

"Oh well, neither is mine. And stop rubbing your nose. If this keeps on it will become a national pastime. I believe it will really be a disappointment to you if you don't die tonight from this nonexistent new disease. Damn that drifting fluff anyhow! It's everywhere. You'd go through with it, I know, Smith, just to prove that one of the alarm groups was right."

Doctor Decker had been rubbing his own nose, and Foley-Smith left him then.

The disease was not imaginary. It *had* appeared. So had half a dozen other new diseases. Though still unrecognized, this nonexistent disease had already gone into its second and third stages with many that day; and by nightfall about thirty persons in the capital city would have died quietly of it.

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And then the first tremor of the hysteria would come.

It was a curious day. Things were shaping up, just as the clouds were shaping and tumbling overhead. It was a warm day for the season, but the sign of chill had appeared on the edge of those clouds. Familiar things looked unfamiliar. Unfamiliar things looked familiar. The ice cream man looked familiar.

The ice cream man, selling ice cream bars to the inmates through the iron fence, was Leo Joe Larker. But wasn't Leo Joe Larker still an inmate of the Bug? No he wasn't. He had escaped that very morning, they said, and he would be recaptured within an hour, they said. And nobody else should try the thing, to break out into the world from the safe place where they were understood.

Well, why didn't they recapture Leo Joe then, since he was right outside the Bug? Since they were looking for him everywhere? They didn't capture him because they didn't recognize him. He did **not** look anything like what he had looked like inside the Bug. He was a different man entirely in appearance; he had been several such different men; only Freddy Foley could recognize him. And Leo Joe had turned into an ice cream man to pass a message to Fred Foley. Why had he not given him the message when he was inside, when they could talk freely? He had not because that would not have been grotesque enough for him. Freddy did not know what the words or details of the message would be, and yet he already knew their meaning. It was "Goof gloriously, Freddy. Goof gloriously again. It is required that one man should goof gloriously for the people."

Leo Joe Larker was humming the old tune *What Kind of Fool Am I?* when Freddy Foley came up to him on the other side of the fence.

"You, Leo Joe, or I?" Foley asked him.

"You, Foley, you're the fool. Little Freddy Foley who

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can see in the dark and was trapped like a coney in broad daylight. Even a coney has a hole or a rockpile he can get to. He isn't taken in the open as easy as that."

"Little Leo Joe, the man who changes faces and never gets a very good one. What are you doing with an ice cream pokey?" (But this Leo Joe wasn't a clown. He had told Foley. "If they can kill you, I can kill you worse. Whatever they tell you to do, don't do it. Whatever they tell you not to do, do it." This was Leo Joe Larker who had perhaps raised a man from the dead when he was only a boy.)

"I'm not Leo Joe. I'm no one you ever saw before. The ice cream pokey gives me certain vantage points."

"So does this Bug give me," said Freddy.

"Just exactly what good can you do on that side of the fence, Foley?"

"I'm not sure."

Leo Joe Larker sold a French lime bar to one of the inmates, and a strawberry revel bar to another one. Then a keeper was coming to the fence to chase him away.

"Here's a grape sherbert bar for you, Foley," said Leo Joe. "Digest it well."

"I'd rather have a French lime."

"I'm telling you not to get cute. Take it. And digest it."

Freddy Foley took the grape sherbert bar, thrust it quickly into his pocket, and disassociated himself from Larker. The guard came and chased the ice cream man away, to the whimpering of inmates who were coming with their allowances in their hands.

This was ridiculous, to be trapped with a melting sherbert bar in the pocket, to know that it contained a message, and to know that it was all grotesque. How low and laughable must a man be brought before he is born again? This was ignominy beyond even death and burial.

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And immediately there was a summons for Foley. Grown now very suspicious, he was sure that his short rendezvous with Larker had somehow been discovered and reported, and he was embarrassed as to what to do with the melting grape sherbert bar in his pocket. It wasn't a dignified place to carry it. It was cold there, but he didn't want it to get warm. And suspecting that there was more to it than grape sherbert, he didn't want to throw it away. Still less did he want to have it in his pocket if he was subject to any sort of interview.

It was Bedelia Bencher and her father, and Fred Foley was allowed to visit with them, though guards and attendants were present.

"Poor little sour pickle," said Biddy. "Have they treated you all right?" That Biddy and the eyes of her Landscapes, hellscapes, monsterscapes painted on her eyeballs, and she laughing all the while.

"With every care of my body, Biddy, and none at all of my soul," Freddy said.

"Just what is this nonsense, Foley?" Mr. Bencher asked sharply. His name was Richard but nobody ever called him anything but mister. But he was looking at Foley on two levels and understanding quite a bit.

"Part of the nonsense, Mr. Bencher, is that I'm Smith and not Foley," Freddy said.

"You persist in that, Freddy? We very nearly didn't find you under the name of Smith. But Biddy was certain you were here, and she wouldn't leave town without you. You do remember us, don't you?"

"Remember you? Certainly. I'm not crazy. It's the people here who are crazy."

"And what was your name when you knew us back home?"

"My name has been Fred Foley all my life except for the first two hours when it hung in the balance between

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Fred and Ronald. I've never been sure I got the best of that deal."

"Then why the Smith now? I'm trying to ask you clear questions," said Mr. Bencher. But Bencher was reading Foley while he played this game with the guards. Perhaps he had even read the message in the sherbert bar.

"I'm trying to give some clear answers, Mr. Bencher," Freddy said. "I don't know *why* the Smith now."

"You mean that you don't know why you told the authorities your name was Smith?"

"No, Mr. Bencher, I mean that I don't know why the authorities told *me* my name was Smith. I guess they've tried to hide me here."

"Freddy, it's in your record that you insisted your name was Julius Smith," Mr. Bencher said evenly, "and that you don't know any Fred Foley nor remember ever being such a person."

But really Mr. Bencher was talking all of this for the benefit of the long-eared attendants and guards. His eyes were saying other things.

"Papa, don't press him so hard," said Biddy. "He's sick." But what were the landscapes on her eyeballs saying? There was lots of evil laughter still there, and perhaps a little concern.

"Mr. Bencher, if that's in the record, then it's in the record wrong," Freddy said. "There's some dirty work here. Get me out of this place, will you? You have influence."

"Freddy, what's that leaking out of your pocket?" Biddy asked.

"A sherbert bar, Biddy. A grape sherbert bar."

"But why, Freddy? Why do you carry it melting in your pocket?"

"Where else?"

"Do you often carry them there, honey?"

"Quite often. All the time, Biddy."

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Freddy felt that he had slipped with them, and he had no idea how to recoup. He was compelled not only to goof gloriously but to goof grovelingly. Something had hold of his mind and it would force him into this insanity role. But Freddy did not want an attendant to get that sherbert bar, though he hated to look like a total fool when the possibility of his really being a total fool was under discussion.

"Well, take it out and throw it away, Freddy," Biddy was saying, "and then let me clean you up."

"No, Biddy. I couldn't possibly throw it away. I'll just keep it there. I could never find a better place for it, and it keeps me cool."

"Ah, Foley, I have been trying to get to the bottom of this," said Bencher. "I heard a little from Biddy of the crazy jag of a story that you seemed to be on. I thought it was just something you told her to put her off and that you were working on something confidential that couldn't be discussed prematurely. Biddy thought so too. But now I find you actually have been trying to prove that five-hundred-year-dead men have come back alive and are meddling with our lives. Is that true?"

"Yes sir. It's quite true that they've come back. I have most convincing evidence, which somehow doesn't convince anybody. If I could persuade you of it, Mr. Bencher, then you might have more weight than I at getting the warning taken seriously."

"Foley, I always liked you. I felt rather safe for Biddy when she became attached to you. I still feel safe for her with you in that way. But, Freddy, you're quite sick."

"I believe I'm the only one here who isn't."

"I'll see that you get everything you need," said Bencher.

"I need out," Freddy Foley insisted.

"No, not that, Freddy," Bencher said. "You're in no state to be out."

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"Please let me throw that melted bar away, Freddy," Biddy begged. "It isn't nice to have it in your pocket."

"No, I'll keep the bar there, Biddy. I feel somehow that it contains the key to the whole world difficulty. Besides, I like it there."

Biddy began to cry. Or did she? There was a lot of suppressed hilarity behind that crying, but with eyes like hers who could tell?

"Oh, Freddy," she said, "you never knew how much I liked you. We never did anything but kid. Oh, Freddy, I hope you get well."

"Then you think I'm sick too?"

"Oh, Freddy!"

"You really should take that mess out of his pocket," Bencher said to an attendant.

"It might upset him," said the man. "They become attached to things and notions. It could set him back. Besides, they get fresh-laundered clothes tomorrow."

"Goodbye, Foley," said Bencher, "and if there's anything at all you want—"

"I want out."

"God willing, and soon, as quickly as you're well," said Bencher.

"Be real good, honey," said Biddy, "and you'll never know how much."

"But you don't believe in me?"

"Oh, Freddy!"

The Benchers went away and left Fred Foley-Smith there with the attendants. He felt like a fool with the melted sherbert running down his leg and his pants, and his girl not believing in him, and gone. And the world about to be taken over and frustrated by the returnees.

And yet he had been brought strangely up to date by the pictures painted on Bedelia's eyeballs. They changed, you know, they changed. And they conveyed messages.

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Loras (who was alien), Croll (who was patrick), and a man called Boneface by all, came up to Fred Foley when he was ready to inspect the lavender decay that was the sherbert bar.

"You're standing in the way, Foley-Smith," Boneface said. "There's two shows going on and we can't watch either of them with you standing in the way."

Oh! Michael Fountain was dictating lectures again this day. And James Bauer and Arouet Manion were still locked in death ordeal. The men wanted to watch these shows, but they were not yet adept enough to watch them apart from Foley. He had brushed the weave. They had only brushed him.

The highly refined Michael Fountain seemed a little shriveled today in his ultra-refinement. There was not as much to him as there had once been, or it had turned inward on him. His fine voice had become a little cracked and thin, his fine features a little masklike and amateurish. But had his fine words changed?

"Are there events in the world?" he was lecturing into the dictaphone. "Are there events in the world at the present time? We hear rumor, we see signs; surely there is some shadow play going on which one might call 'Events in the World.' We of the elite, however, do not need to be overly concerned with these. What we do desire is a refinement still more refined, a nobility still more noble, an elite still more elect. We draw in on ourselves. There is a vulgarity of numbers. We reduce the vulgarity and the thing. A thousand gross units goes into one essence. And then we refine the essence again and again."

("This man is wrong," said Loras who was alien. "It's been tried in other places; it doesn't work. You reduce it and it dies, it dies every time. You narrow the grove too much and even the noble trees die." Loras the alien had sought for his Earth visit a place like the Bug, knowing that his sanity was not the sanity of

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this strange world. He had had no real trouble gaining admittance. He had simply gone to the attendance official, declared that he was a visitor from the stars, and after less than half an hour of lively discussion he had been accepted as a member of the Bug. He wasn't a handsome creature, but he had a pleasant and outgoing personality. And such little physical peculiarities as he possessed—a slight caudal appendage, a triple Adam's apple, opposable great toes—were not held against him. He was intelligent and he adjusted well. Only once had he eaten his plate after eating his food. Only once had he given the astral caress on being introduced to another. Only once—)

And Michael Fountain lectured on. "We will, of course, abandon large sections of the world as soon as we can phase them out. The entire old world, I believe, can well be abandoned in the present century. There is no need of it, really. The new world is ample for the people. 'Is it not well that all the members of one family should dwell in one house?' And many attitudes and mythologies of the old world will likewise be allowed to die. In a way, the old world has already become something like the disordered unconscious of the new. Discard it, I say! And then the southern continent of the new world may well be abandoned in a further generation. One continent is enough for mankind. For a refined and elect mankind it is more than ample."

(The sherbert had melted and dried in Freddy's pocket now, leaving only a stain, a slight stickiness, and a tightly rolled piece of paper. Freddy took it out and read it as he listened with exterior ears to the distant voice of Michael Fountain. *You aren't a whole lot of good in there*, it said. *Don't you know that things have already begun? The day before yesterday there were twenty deaths of the new diseases. Yesterday there were fifty. Today there will be two hundred when the*

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count is in. And tomorrow three still newer diseases will appear, one of them being the old disease named panic. I know that you haven't any plan, and I haven't much of one. I have a few men. I need a few more. At sundown you will take three good men and go over the fence. That was the sticky scribbling of Leo Joe Larker on the lavender-stained paper.)

"Ultimately, all mankind will be lodged in a single town," Michael Fountain lectured on. "The dross will have disappeared. Only the many-times refined gold will remain. And more finally still, all of mankind will be lodged in a single house. This is most important to the closing and diminishing of the circle. We support, as expedient, all cyclic Orphism; and so we must support the effort of the returnees. But they were only shadows of ourselves. Their concern that the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth be repeated has been a good one up to this time. The returnees must at all cost keep the world in this cycle. They cannot permit the world to ascend. They cannot even permit the cycle to become a helix, a spiral. We support them in the one direction, but we do not support them in another. The cycle, of course, cannot be permitted to become an ascending or outgrowing spiral. Neither can it be permitted to remain a simple cycle forever. It must become a diminished concentric with each turn of it smaller and more refined than the last. We will diminish to a point. We will concentrate in one point."

("The patricks and their castles will stand against him in that," said Croll who was a patrick. "We've stood for the open way even when it was stagnant; we won't accept the closed way even when it's in movement. Theirs isn't the eternal symbol of the snake with his tail in his mouth, forever repeating. That snake eats a little of his own tail every time he goes around, and he becomes a much smaller snake. We'll stand against them and their diminishment!")

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"The final human race, at its finest hour (and I see it as an hour not more than ten seconds long) will surely have diminished to no more than three or four exceptional men," Michael Fountain lectured on. "And then is the synthesis, the diminished finale: the world will one day dissolve into the original Great Man. Is it not a most quieting and peaceful concept? But what is that silence? The roaring had gone down to a gurgling in the last few years. The gurgling had softened to a mere dripping in these later days. Now it no longer drips. How has it become so shallow and dry?"

("Hal! The old man's fountain ran dry," said Bone-face. "I knew it would." This boney-faced man was a madman. He was intensely mad, a killer. If he ever said something that seemed to make sense—and often he did—it was a slip. He was mad. He always insisted on that point.)

(But will you be ready for it? asked the note from Leo Joe Larker that Freddy had taken from his sticky pocket. Ready or not, you will have to come. I am prepared to visit some plagues of my own; but only on the returnees, not on the world. You may already have guessed that I once joined their company. But I was a very recent recruit of theirs and I have broken away. To make up for the part I have had in it I will try to stop the thing. Now, here is what you will do—)

("Let's look at the other two, Foley-Smith," said the patrick Croll. "There's a lot better stuff in them than in this dried-up old man. Sure, he knew where the fountain itself was once. He went to it with his pitcher. But that's all gone with him now. Let's get the other bunch. Those two have a real fight going on, and some of the sideplay from the others in the show is so strong that it takes you right up into it.")

James Bauer and Arouet Manion still continued their teetering on the edge of the world battle. They fought through arena after arena. Bauer still sat, ponderous

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and purple-swollen and glassy-eyed, breathing like thunder. Arouet still stretched dragonlike on the stone floor, shuddering with final sickness, poisonous to the last. They were two arms of the deadly hydra, tearing and killing each other. It is only for this reason that the abominable creature, recreated so many times, has never demolished the world: it mistakes its own tentacles for other things and battles them to the death.

Hondo Silverio had come in. He was breaking the brain-weave, tearing it loose, slicing it up. His green mottled humor had become death gray with the new concern, but he moved easily, helped himself to a drink from the sideboard and flung himself onto one of the scatter-couches.

Wing Manion came in, wrinkled her fish-nose in many-layered disgust, and stood over her sick-dragon husband Arouet. She also had sworn to break the weave. The Harvester mark was still livid on her forehead but she would no longer be a Harvester. She picked Arouet up in her arms ("This fish gets pretty strong, after a couple of days out of the old pond," she had once said of herself), carried the awkward length and lug of him over to the most distant chair, and deposited him there with worried concern. But Arouet, still showing no more life than a dank quivering, poured himself like quicksilver out of the chair and slithered the width of the patio to lie again before Bauer in his attitude of mocking adoration. They still had several arenas to battle through. Letitia Bauer (the dead one) came and stood wraithlike and worried. Bedelia Bencher also came and watched a moment in her wraith-extension. And Salzy was there. Ah, she was revolted and fascinated at the same time by the struggle. It was as passionate as she could have wished it, but it was not at all the right shape. She had so hoped that it would be helicall

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Meanwhile, back in our main context, Foley-Smith had finished reading the note from Leo Joe Larker. There were some straight specifics in it. That Larker was a real strategist, a poor man's general. He knew how to go about a street fight, a town fight. And the last words of the note: *Now eat it. Chew it up and eat it. It should have a pleasant sherbert flavor. A determined man can swallow paper. It does not really bulk larger for the chewing. It only seems to. Now swallow it.*

And Fred Foley swallowed it.

Foley was to take three of the inmates over the fence with him. Larker had written that more would be useless. Foley thought that the three would be useless. They were Loras who was alien, Croll who was patrick, and O'Mara who was Irish. But the boney-faced man insisted that he would go also. He knew every word that was in the note, though he had not read it with his eyes. Boneface had spooky powers. It was better to have him on your side than against you.

In town people had begun to die like flies. They became drowsy and died, without really being sick. Actually most of them weren't sick, but the suggestion to die was implanted in them.

Overhead the clouds were gathering and tumbling. They were touched with sudden silver and (now that it came near sunset) they were also touched with that color that is called *morada* which is a mulberry or violet or purple. Foley gathered his four men. There was no leaving Boneface behind. That man had sensed and entered his element.

"I used to be a pathological killer," Boneface said. "They say they've cured me of that and I'm no longer dangerous. They *think* they've cured me! Men, just give me a target and I'm a butcher all over again. Oh, you can't shake me. You have to take me along. And for one of your squeamish jobs I'm just the man."

There *were* events in the world and the city that

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afternoon and evening. The plague itself appeared. There was a clear case of it truly verified. But a curious aspect of the appearance was that it was widely reported on the air and on paper several hours before it came. Manipulated panic was all the thing.

And at almost the identical time two men were murdered. One of them was a Great Liberal Statesman who was actually a shoddy phony, and one was a Well-Beloved Conservative Leader whose own family couldn't stand him. There was a further distortion. The reports of both murders were out slightly before they happened, and partisans of both men had begun to gather.

And just previous to the riots, an army detachment had crossed over from Virginia to put down the riots. The military could not find the reported corpses strewing the sidewalks. Wisely they waited. They were only a little bit early.

In other sections, students attacked soldiers. The students always averaged about ten years older than the soldiers. Embassies were burned. Small private armies moved through the streets. They were distinguished only by armbands or not distinguished at all. The transit workers announced a one hour strike for the following morning as evidence of their solidarity.

Fred Foley heard a chuckle in his mind. It was the brittle chuckle of Carmody Overlark. Carmody and his would cause the disturbances to succeed (while seeming to fail) or to fail (while seeming to succeed); anyhow they would have their sort of value out of them, and the world would be further shackled.

"It's time to get moving," Fred Foley told his four men. "Only one target inside the Bug, according to Larker. I'd have thought there'd be more."

Foley sent Croll to kill Doctor Millhouse. Croll the patrick seemed a little timid about going and kill-

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ing a man, and Boneface wanted to do it, but Foley repeated the command, and Croll went.

Meanwhile, Foley briefed them again rapidly, armed them from the cache that Leo Joe Larker had hidden and told of in the note, waited. Croll came back twitching; he said that he couldn't kill Doctor Millhouse, that Doctor Millhouse had already been dead when he got to him. Foley looked around for Boneface, then saw him deep in the shadows. "Who, me?" was the look that Boneface gave him. Well, it was done, and Boneface had done it; but Foley had rather wanted to test the patrick Croll on an easy one first. They went over the fence to begin what Larker had called the Night of the Long Knives in his notes. Like all unstarred generals, Larker was something of a ham.

XIII: AND ALL TALL MONSTERS STAND

The psychological rule says that when the inner situation is not made conscious, it happens outside as fate. That is to say, when the individual remains undivided and does not become conscious of his inner contradictions, the world must perforce act out the conflict and be torn into opposite halves.

Aion: C. G. Jung

TARGETS! Larker had tagged many of the prominent returnees for Foley and his group to get. But another unstarred general was mocking in Foley's mind.

"It doesn't make any difference, Frederick," Miguel Fuentes was saying from his distant underground. "It is just a little diversion, a little fun. Do it if you want to do it. But the first phase has already happened, and the next will not begin till I and others (and especially you) come out tomorrow. This doesn't matter."

"This *does* matter!" Foley swore. "You battle your monsters and I'll battle mine! There *will* be dimensions—in me, or in the world."

Some very prominent people were on the list, but who would have suspected that they were returned people? Lee, Twitchell, Cramms, Rowell, Goodfoot, Munsey, Napier, Nash, Cabot, Bottoms, Miss Cora Addamson. Well, how *does* one go about killing leading people, those of a station above one? The etiquette of murder is incomplete. It may be that the intent and

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the act itself carry the basis of an introduction. There should be a certain fluidity of the rules, murder being partly a social and partly a business thing. There is need of a small rule book on the manners of it.

Lee was the first on the list and the first ticked off. Foley knew him on sight, knew where he lived, knew his shuffling figure now going back and forth in front of his own luxury apartment building. In fact, Lee seemed to be waiting for Foley or for the event. Foley killed him quickly, the first man he ever slew.

He shot him suddenly. A lady gasped nearby, and there were other sounds of shock in the street. But many things as rude were going on. Foley quickly rejoined his group.

On Constitution Avenue, one group of soldiers had scattered a gaggle of "students" and there was a little clatter of quick death on each side. Some very respectable fighting was going on around the circles and up and down Massachusetts and New York Avenues. "It is all for nothing, Freddy," Miguel Fuentes was mocking. "This isn't the real thing. It is only little theatricals."

"*They* want to turn the world into little theatricals," Freddy said. "I want to make it real again." Freddy went after Twitchell.

Twitchell had a permanent hotel suite right in the way and Fred Foley went boldly in. It was a red-eyed woman who answered and came to the door.

"I must see Mr. Twitchell at once," Freddy said and began to push in.

"That will be quite impossible," said the red-eyed lady. "Please go. I haven't time to explain."

"Neither have I—I'll just come in. What I have to do will only take an instant."

"No, no, God nol Not at a time like this." The lady was suddenly strong, and Foley had pushed his way in only with great difficulty.

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"Be quiet, lady," he said. "My business will be brief and to the point, if my hand is steady."

"My husband has no more business at all to transact. He is dead."

"But can we be sure? I'll make sure, lady."

"You monster! He has just died. How is it possible for one to be so heartless?" But Foley had forced his way into the inner room.

"He does look pretty dead. What was it?"

"One of the new diseases of today. He was tired and he lay down for a little. When I went to wake him just now he was dead."

"There's no harm at all in making sure."

"The doctor will make sure. He's on his way here now."

"The doctors are going to be very overworked tonight. I'll make it easier for them. I'll leave no doubt that this man is dead."

Mrs. Twitchell uttered a series of short little screams or yelps, and Foley made sure that Twitchell was dead. "I bet I'm as good with the short knife as Boneface says that he is," Freddy growled in a sort of sordid trance as he did it. The man bled hardly at all when Foley gave him the blade. It was as if the blood had been frozen. From this, and from other signs, Foley knew that the man had been suspended, not dead. But now he was dead.

Mrs. Twitchell was making such a fuss about it that Foley was glad to get out of there, back to his group and to the peace and quiet of the riotous streets.

Loras was explaining that he had not been able to kill Cramms, that Cramms was already dead when he got there. "Well, all right, so long as you made sure," said Foley.

"Of course I made sure," Loras stated. "It was a little embarrassing for me to do it, me a stranger with no proper explanation of myself, and his family all around him, but I made sure."

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"How?" asked Boneface.

"Why, I held a small mirror to his mouth. It wasn't clouded as it would be if he had the slightest breath. And he had no pulse or body warmth. He was dead."

"No, let me," said Boneface. "I'll make sure." Boneface went up to kill Cramms, and Loras was puzzled. "But what other test will he use?" this peculiar Loras asked. It wasn't just that Loras was an alien. Beyond that, he seemed uncomprehending at times.

"Oh, he'll have a sure test," Foley said. "I thought you understood the nature of the men we're combatting."

"I begin to see," Loras mused. "It's possible that he was not dead at all. That would fool anybody not in the secret, wouldn't it? But I haven't a lot of enthusiasm for this killing. I am terminating my relationship with this group."

Loras didn't fully understand people. Or else he was faking; possibly he was no alien, but something else.

"You'll either kill or be killed," Foley told him. "I'll leave no loose ends."

The lights of the town went out then. It gave a chilly effect to Foley's words.

"No, no, I don't believe you'd do it," Loras protested. "A person can quit any time he wants to quit. I'll stay right here by the bonfire till you're gone. You wouldn't dare do it here in the light."

Boneface was back already. Say, that man was fast! He was fast in understanding a situation also. He did Loras in. He did it in an offhand way, with a rapid and deadly wrist-flick that he used. "I was wrong," Foley said to himself. "I'm not near as good with the short knife as Boneface is."

After that, luck turned against them. They couldn't find Rowell; they realized that Rowell would see to it that they didn't find him. And Goodfoot, Munsey, Napier, Nash, Cabot, Bottoms were not only said to be dead but they were aggressively dead; they were un-

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alterably dead, watchfully dead, and with their minions about them. They were making a great thing about being dead. There was no getting to them; they were guarded, they were inviolable. They had not made the mistake of Twitchell and Cramms, or it may be that the word travels very fast in their set. They were safely dead so that they could live again, or they had already entered other persons and were living there.

Perhaps one of them could be crashed to. Boneface was eager to try it. It mattered not at all to him if his own destruction was part of the bargain. Boneface disappeared rather suddenly from the group, and he may have gotten one of the Suspendeds. But none of the rest of Foley's band could get at any of the enemies at all.

"Forget it, Fred, forget it," Miguel Fuentes was saying from distant underground. "They are only toys now. But tomorrow you yourself may turn into something more than a toy."

It had become very difficult to move about now. Everyone was out of his lightless house and into the streets to watch the crowds and the fires. There is no one who doesn't like to watch fires. There was a great amount of breaking glass, and much fighting, but now it was more and more confused.

The New Prophets began to preach by torchlight as though the latter days had come. It was the younger Pliny, those many centuries ago, who mentioned that in times of turmoil men with beards will appear instantly, when in all Rome there had not been bearded men before the moment of strife. The younger Pliny had lived in a shaved age; he believed that the bearded men who appear suddenly are wraiths or portents, and not men at all.

It was a bearded portent who appeared now at one of the circles, further clogging traffic; and there were others of them about town. This one talked with a rum-

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ble touched with both irony and hysteria, and he seemed to have found his proper setting there in the torchlight:

"The pact is broken. The compromise has revealed itself as no deeper than spiderwebs on the grass. Did you really believe that the peace would be longer than a long breath? Did you imagine that the thin earth on which you trod did not have another earth under it? Did you really believe that these brittle buildings were the houses of the mighty? Did you actually suppose that this white town on the river would endure longer than three long lifetimes? Did you imagine that the sickly hum you heard was truly the speech of men? Or that the mechanical wound-up toys would never run down?"

You have heard of fiery-eyed prophets, and this man was one indeed. There were many bonfires and torches going now and their fire seemed to dance in his huge eyes. And yet the fire images there were not reflections; they were originals.

"Whoever promised you peace? Who promised you ease? Did you really believe that you could live your whole life without spilling blood? Could you have dreamed that it is in the natural order for a man to die in bed? You fancied that the day would be so long that the dark would never come? That the earth would lie still and no more ruffle its hide? But the weak interval is over with, and we come now to life itself, or to death."

"He's a prophet like one of the prophets," Croll told Foley. "As patrick, I will extend my aegis over him."

"Who told you that your house was meant to keep out the elements?" the prophet still prophesied. "Who gave the promise that one should live clean and dry? What mad seer said that a man should live long enough to see the faces of his grandchildren? Who told you that you had the right to go in shoes, or fed? Did you not know that the steep earth would break through this smooth clutter you have placed upon it? Who told you

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to quit growing fangs and claws? What actuary promised you life till morning?"

Not direful, no, no. This was the most joyous prophet anyone ever heard. It was all high expectation about to be fulfilled for him now. Like snow on deserts, like crowning fire in dead wood, like violence and eruption giving the answer to satiety, this was an addled prophet of new life, not of death.

"It has been said that a man must lose his soul at least once if only for the pleasure of finding it again. I say that a man who has died without seeing the end of the world has lived in vain! But many of us here will not have lived in vain. The corral is open and the beasts are loose. Do not look back. The world isn't there any more. Ah, but look back then, if only to raise a little salt. There has never been enough salt in the earth. Unless your salt exceeds that of the saltimbanques it were no matter if you ever lived or not. Why do you fear to die who have never lived? But I am sure of my new life, I am sure of my new desire, though it is born out of ashes. What, is it not a wonder that I was dead and that now I live?"

"Let's be about our business, Croll," Foley said. "I have his words anyhow, as coming from the weave."

"And I have them anyhow, as patrick," Croll said.

It was hard to tell which of the night screams were genuine, as the teenagers were on the jag of screaming in dark places for the fun of it. A genuine scream will always sound false, just as real terror always appears comical and contemptible to those without compassion. But there was more noise than blood that night. An effete generation does not return to massive rapine and murder all at once, even though it has long lost all moral objection to them. It will take a while for new energy to grow toward real action.

The amateur town-criers were having a field night of it with stories of rockets only ninety seconds away, and

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Baltimore and Philadelphia already obliterated; and corpses piled deep in the streets of New York with no one to bury them.

It was only those who believed in an incredible plot who understood that it might already have succeeded. For, if the Suspendeds had already decided to die, it meant that they had the situation under control, or that they had entered other hosts. It was not their idea to waste time in watching these death agonies of a civilization, a dreary interval that would surely take the greater part of a generation.

And their job had not been too difficult: to bump the world at one critical point, to ensure that it dropped once more into its old repeating cycle, that it did not break out of the cycle into ascending spiral. Three cities, each more advanced in artifact and building and spirit: these had been. Then the fourth city, the city of destruction. And then let it repeat. This was the essence of real order, to maintain the sequence of birth, growth, destruction and death, and rebirth: the closed cycle. Let it never be broken or opened!

And (like the old Oriental wrestlers) you could let the world throw itself by its own strength. The stodgy old watchers, they would overwatch now. The reactors would overreact. The Lawful-Lawless Hydra-Weave would absorb psychic energy and turn it back on itself. The monsters defeat each other and the world and bring about the destruction plateau.

"We'll see if their plot works, Fred," young Miguel Fuentes was communicating from far underground. "Yes, the watchers will overwatch. The old patrick here is shaking their invisible net. The reactors will overreact. I myself will overreact most strenuously in the morning. And that hydra that brushed myself and yourself, it is sending out electric poison that I can see like the borealis lights even here in my underground. But there is something else, little Freddy. You are

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the something else. You are the simple man, the innocent, you are the virgin who charms the unicorn. Hey, is that not jazzy talk, little Freddy? I don't know what you will do, how you will alter it. But there is something. Do *you* know what you will do, Freddy?"

"No," said Fred Foley shortly to the voice that was coming from underground seventeen hundred miles away.

"This patrick does not overwatch, but he watches," said Croll.

"We need no more than the desire to break to a higher life," the prophet was still sounding in the distance. "If we are sure of this, then we cannot be leveled."

Yet it would seem as if the stimulus of the Suspendeds was working. Throughout the boondocks and waste places of the world, a hundred or so groups had gotten the whiff of the change, of the vacuum needing to be filled, and had begun to move. There was a strong group in Anatolia, one in Bas Pyrenees, one in Circassia, one in Sierra Leone, one on the Rio Grande River which was led by Miguel Fuentes. Some of these sudden armies, after they had eaten their surroundings and their near rivals, would be of real effect. And tinder had been torched everywhere.

Double assassinations of men of opposite parties had happened in a dozen parts of the world. Soon there would be risings by the minorities and the abused, and the abusing. The acute could already hear those stirrings like a giant hornets' nest.

"That phase is unstoppable, Freddy," Miguel Fuentes called again from the distance. "But tomorrow you will start a different thing. Freddy, you are the difference."

Then they spoiled the night. They turned on the lights again. A few maintenance workers had got past the tepid terrorists and turned on the lights of the city again. It made a disappointing difference. There had been a

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certain rightness of setting in the torchlights and bonfires. Now that was gone.

There was a dead girl lying in the gutter. Nobody went to her. All went past with eyes averted as though she had been nothing. She remained there; she may still be there. But otherwise it was only night-time in the city, and people going home.

Foley, Croll, O'Mara and the boney-faced man went to Proviant's, which was still open, or opened again. Well, perhaps it was a different world already, but it looked about the same.

They sat across from Larker (or a man who was just possibly Larker; he had still another appearance now), who was with some people Foley didn't know. Foley and Larker exchanged glances and maintained the fiction of not knowing each other.

"It didn't go off so well, even for a show," Foley told his group. "I imagine they planned it to misfire. Except for the grotesqueness and confusion of it all, it might have provoked some sort of heroic reaction; and their point is to prove that there's nothing heroic left. With that, our ruin is already assured, and they've won it in their sleep."

"This is the way the world ends," said Larker at the table across. "The lights go on and it's revealed that it was all a play-act. There wasn't any world. There was only the fiction of a world."

"There was a Byzantine legend," said Bencher, "to the effect that God made the world only for the grand effect of ending it. But the effect never came off quite right. He couldn't get the thing to climax properly. It was bad and he knew it. He'd set it back a few days or years from the ending and try again. It would be even worse. There were conflagrations that failed to convince, thunderbolts that sounded as if a boy were throwing them, doom-cracking that went off like a toy pistol. He'd set it back a few days and try the ending again,

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and again, and again. And it developed that the ending would ultimately be only that Byzantine one, to live the latter days futilely over and over again."

Bencher? What was Bencher doing here? And why hadn't Foley known him when he had looked right at him? Foley went over the man now, and he was Bencher in every point. But Foley hadn't known him before. And how come he was with Larker and that company? How come he knew them?

"Mr. Bencher, what are you doing here?" Fred Foley demanded.

"Drinking twice-heated bad coffee and observing an unsatisfactory end of a world. Oh no, I didn't think that you were crazy, Freddy. It was necessary at the time that I appeared to. Biddy had come to me with your story some time ago. I found it too wild to have been invented. I looked into it and found that it was quite true. I put my resources to it and discovered many of its ramifications. I find now that I've come too late on the scene; the damage is done. It's to be snake-bit finally, to watch the snake slither out of reach of even revenge. They're secure somewhere as though frozen in ice and they can laugh at us out of the frost. There's nothing we can do.

"Oh, we'll live with it for a while. We may even seem for that while to regain part of our footing. But the world has already worked itself into too precarious a position. It's gone down before. I don't see how we can keep it from going down again. It's the old cycle, you know."

"I still hope to break that cycle, somehow," said Fred Foley.

"Why, Freddy? To break it means there may be an end to the temporality, I see that now. I'm not brave enough to face that end, no matter how distant, and I'm the bravest man I know. The repeating cycle is, after all, the best. It means that someone will still be going

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on, over and over. I'm afraid to break out of the cycle, even out of the top side of it. And it will do no good to warn the world. There'll be no belief in the nature of the disaster, not even after the disaster has happened. And we'd certainly be madmen to talk of the old dead men reappearing and frustrating at intervals."

"Can't we at least hunt down the remnants of them?" the boney-faced man asked. "Now, yet tonight."

"We will, some of them, and you'll have more adventure tonight, man. But we can't even guess where most of them have gone. We have one microscopic triumph though, Freddy. Carmody Overlark, one of their real leaders, the one who first attracted your attention, is really dead and not gone to his state."

"That nearly makes me happy, Mr. Bencher. How?"

"Drowned. We went for him out at his estate. He went into his lake at quite a deep point to escape us. There's a local legend that the lake is bottomless. We shot at him when he surfaced, and we watched for his reappearance long enough to be sure that he wouldn't reappear. He's drowned for good. He, at least, will not be returning."

It is no good to warn the world of disaster, even after it has happened. It is no good to tell your associates that they hadn't made good even in this. Whatever had happened to Carmody Overlark, he wasn't drowned, not that oldest of the survivors, he who soaked his head in a bucket. It was unlikely that he had been shot. It was very likely that he was denned up underwater till he should decide to waken again.

Had there been the veriest flick of mockery in Bencher's telling Freddy of this? And why hadn't Freddy known Bencher at first sight here, when he was surely that man in every point of him?

"Where's Biddy?" Fred Foley asked.

"She should be here in a moment, Freddy," Bencher said. "She went after Miss Cora Addamson, that perni-

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cious female of the returnees. And she got her. I felt it."

"I thought that Addamson was on *our* list."

"She was on several lists, Freddy; we wanted to make sure of her. She'd try her escape by the back door of her warren, and Biddy was at the back door. Biddy wanted the job. She was as avid as Boneface here. The report of Miss Addamson's death is already out. And here comes Biddy now!" *Biddy! That?* Oh yeah, it was Biddy.

"I'd go with her if I were you." (Why was Bencher being a little oily about all this?) "Two young people can still salvage something even from a sinking world."

Why now, at the appearance of Biddy Bencher, did it seem to Foley that things had gone irrevocably wrong? For him, she should be the one right thing left in the world. What was this new horror?

"There's something very wrong about all this," Foley said, rising. "All the warnings are screaming at me but I can't tell what they say."

"There are a lot of things wrong," Bencher said, "but this is one thing that can still be right. Be off, you two. We'll bury the world without your help for the rest of the night."

"Come along, Freddy, little poodle-tooth," said Biddy Bencher. "We have so many things to make up for." And Freddy went with her. Empty! Biddy had never seemed empty before.

"There's still something wrong with this," Fred Foley said to himself. "All the warnings are screaming at me. Even from the weave. Why isn't she in the weave now?"

"Wait, sir, wait!" Croll called. He rushed to Foley, caught him at the door, and held his two hands. Nobody in his life had ever called Freddy "sir" before. The patrick seemed really possessed now and he emanated another sort of weave.

"Sir, Your Magnanimous, know you that the Congregation of Patricks, Larkers and Crolls, and Autocrats

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and Exarchs, and Aloysii and Metropolitans, meeting in convocation of the mind, have filled the Office that has been vacant for a thousand years," Croll intoned. He was pathetic in his derangement.

"I've heard of the office," Foley said. "Good luck to all patricks this night! Who fills the office now, Croll?"

"You, sir, Your Simplicitas, Your Innocentia, Your Laetitia, you are the Elect." Then the Croll gave Foley a sort of accolade-embrace, and Foley returned it in a special form that he had been ignorant of till that moment. Croll also laid a narrow stole about the neck and shoulders of Foley.

"But this isn't the purple of the ruler," Freddy smiled. "It's the lavender of the fool."

"I know," said Croll. "But it is so ordered."

Biddy dragged Fred Foley out of the place. "What was all that?" she asked him. "What did he do?"

"Made me Emperor," said Freddy.

They walked in the parkways. It was all Biddy then, Biddy chatter, Biddy lapses of logic, Biddy high spirits as they walked about the mall. It seemed a little as if she were walking him in a direction he didn't want to go. But she'd always done that.

Oh, but why wasn't she in the weave? The weave had now come to the point of explosion and this girl who was essential to it wasn't in it at all. Cinnamon cookie with her eyeballs painted with landscapes and dragon-scapes, what had gone out from her? She seemed unfamiliar inside herself. It was almost as if she didn't know that the pictures on her eyeballs changed, as if she couldn't see with every part of her, as if she were using little peepholes through the painted scenes.

Now this was funny: Biddy's eyeballs were a part of the weave, and her eyeballs were the painted-on part of her. But otherwise, this girl here was not in the swelling weave at all. Serpents and patricks in the scenes on her eyeballs, the rooms of the patrick Bag-

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ley back home and the ape-dog plappergeist who served him! The plappergeist picked up a small sign and showed it and words flashed themselves across it. *Freddy, this is Biddy in the words. They moved in on me, they took me over, she crowded me out. That's not me Biddy in her. I go back to the weave now. We're going to break it and throw it.*

This girl here with him didn't even know that the pictures on her eyeballs changed, but she was chattering Biddy chatter and leading Fred Foley in a direction he didn't seem to want to go. And then there was the overpowering business of the breaking of the weave.

Hondo Silverio (that big, healing snake of a man) was into the weave very powerfully to throw it. Foley had the feeling and fear that Hondo would throw the weave to him. Even so, the weave was cleaner now. And Biddy Bencher was into the weave; dead, but not at all spiritless. The most overrated member of the weave, Baubo the demon indeed, was being broken out of it by Hondo and Salzy and Wing Manion; he began to lose his hold and to fall, whimpering and gibbering.

Arouet Manion, the writhing reticulatus on the stone floor, had been to his last arena. He died now with a flickering blue and orange glow about him; the glow gathered itself into a little ball-lightning that hung in the air a moment. It decayed with hissing and noisome odor, exploded with a weak *poof*, and was gone. And that was all the soul that Arouet Manion had had.

Jim Bauer, purpled and choking on his own tongue, staggered from the patio and reeled groaning down the iron-railed stairway to the lake. His own soul gulped out of his mouth in garish globs as he diminished and dimmed. A crackling purple light fell past him and plunged through the lake, falling down into interior infinity. It was the demon named Baubo who had been broken out of the weave and finally let go.

And Bauer was letting go, though his fingers throbbed

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out blood from the intensity of his grip on the iron railing. One by one, the members broke him out of the weave. Letitia Alive arose from a couch in an interior room, the hypnosis over her broken. She walked out of the house Morada and into the road. She had no resemblance to Letitia Bauer now, and no remembrance of the several days she had spent in Morada. Completely confused, back as the girl she had been before she was mind-napped, she walked away down the front road. She left the weave. She had never been in it strongly.

Letitia Dead found release in the cleansing of the weave and felt the first joy since she had died. And Hondo (why such a thing, why such a thing?) was throwing the weave to Fred Foley, as soon as Bauer should be completely broken out of it.

Biddy Bencher was dead, but still strong and in communication. And this girl here with Foley, who looked like Biddy and was not, was aware of many outre things, but she was completely blind and deaf to the weave itself. And her painted eyeballs ceased to change now; they were no more than dead paint. No, one last flick, one final material message from Biddy herself in words across the painted eyeballs.

Fooled her, Freddy, one last trick. The Harvester mark on the forehead is cancerous. It's a short-term body she's stolen from me.

Then the eyes were dead paint for an end, and this girl was someone else.

"What happened to Biddy Bencher?" Freddy asked her sullenly. Powerful men from the dark gripped each of Foley's arms. He *would* go in the direction this girl wished.

"But I'm Biddy Bencher," she said. "How could there be another?"

"Then what happened to Miss Cora Addamson the beautiful and evergreen harpy?"

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"I'm still beautiful, don't you think so? It's nice to be several persons, and you yourself will sample that pleasure. When did you know?"

"When you called me 'little poodle-tooth.' Biddy had several hundred pet names for me, but they followed a pattern known only to the two of us. 'Poodle-tooth' couldn't be among them. Why are we going back to the Bug? And what did you do with Biddy?" Those men were hustling Foley along at a pretty good clip now.

"I became Biddy, what else?" said the Beautiful Addamson harpy. "You already know that. And you begin to doubt your sanity now when you were so sure of it before? Oh, you'll have a period of that, Freddy, but when you come through on the other side you'll be sound. We don't make mistakes in those we select to join us."

"Dammit, Addamson, at least tell me where is her body, or yours, or the other."

"When the lights came on in the town you saw it lying in the gutter and you passed it by without a second look. An empty body doesn't have much meaning when the personality has been drained out of it. Our beloved Carmody Overlark (now enjoying a well-earned sleep) told you that we were superb mimics, but I'm afraid he didn't tell you all that's involved in our very ancient art of mimicry. So now you don't know whether this is her body or mine."

"Why Biddy? She wasn't prominent in the world."

"In her potential she was staggering. Never in my lives did I move into such a house. And her father was prominent and rich and powerful, with a lifelong slumbering powerhouse of a mind. My own father, who is still my father and who has now become Bencher, selected him and her. My own father hadn't appeared in the world in quite some centuries and there are reasons why he can't be recognized even now. He rather overstepped himself the last time around and became one

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of the permanent legends of evil. Quite a good fellow, though. In not too long a time you'll appreciate him as a father-in-law."

"Had Bencher been taken over by your father when I saw him last?"

"Yes. Just minutes before."

They were back at the Bug. Two strong men dragged Fred Foley in. Doctor Millhouse was presiding.

"Ah, Smith-Foley, you wandered off to see your girl," he purred. "Fortunately she had the good sense to have you brought back here. You've guessed, haven't you, that the Bug is more than the Bug? It's one of our Centers."

"I thought you were dead."

"So did Croll. And Boneface, coming suddenly, killed another man whom I put up as a shield and gave my appearance (in the bone-face mind). And now things will go on as before."

"But the world is going to pieces," Foley protested.

"So it is," agreed Doctor Millhouse. "Exactly as before. We keep it going to pieces. And it'll be a smaller world when we put the pieces together again sometime hence. We have to shrink it periodically; that's part of the cycle. You also become part of it. You'll be one of us now. Foley. Your catharsis will begin now. Oh yes, you really will lose your mind, but only for a while. It'll be a much more amenable mind when it's restored to you. These things are so predictable."

But one thing not at all predictable was suffering terrible spasm and alteration.

In one context, James Bauer had lurched down to the bottom of the iron stairway and was standing ankle-deep in the waters of his lake, hanging on with the last skin of his life and moaning that he should fall. But in another context he had gone down the world cliff that is the side of Morada. This cliff has no bottom, and

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nobody has even been more than a dozen steps down that broken stairway from the top. Concrete steps breaking off from the everlasting stone; the iron railing, which had been built by giants, now swinging loose over the void; steeper and more pitchful steps and a great gap in them, and also the disappearance above of those steps that were already climbed down.

Bauer leapt the first gap, clawed stone, found the remnant of a step and even a last rusty length of an iron rail, slid purposefully toward a ledge, hung there a moment with bleeding fingers. He saw a continuance of the steps below, back in under the cliff at a dizzy angle. He swung himself in under, let go, scraped rougher rock in search of a foothold, missed his footing and hold in a sudden dampness and slickness (that was the lake in the mundane aspect) and fell downward, and down, and down, screaming hoarsely forever.

"It's a new weave now," said Hondo Silverio. Even that strong one, growing stronger, was shaken by Bauer's fall like black lightning. "A new weave. Here, Freddy, catch the tangle of it! We give you the Mastery!"

All his life people gave valuable things to Freddy unasked—powers, lives, worlds.

It beat the other thing into him. Hondo and Salzy Silverio, Wing Manion, the dead Letitia Bauer and the dead Bedelia Bencher, all were tangled up in him and they were stronger than the new intruder.

But a tired spirit *was* intruded into Foley then while men held him fast and other men plunged needles into him and Doctor Millhouse presided.

"He takes you over, Foley," the doctor said, "but he's old and he's incomplete. It's necessary that a lot of you survive along with him. You'll make your arrangements. *Go mad now!* But when your long madness passes you'll be one of us, what's left of you." And Doctor Millhouse held a watch in his hand, studying it.

"What are you looking at? Dammit, what are you

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watching?" Fred Foley demanded as the darkness began to gulp him down.

"The second hand," said the doctor. "These things are so predictable."

"Why? Why? Nothing is going to happen to me," Freddy declared. "I have strengths that you don't know about." (Pride of patricks, monstrous harvest of the brain-weave, flight of falcons.) "Biddy—Oh, dammit! Cora Addamson, what's he waiting for?"

Cora-Biddy had the curious old shell-form ears, the itching ears of Scripture. She had them from both her components, for the people of the weave are as evilly avid for novelty as are the returning people.

"The *stridor vesanus*, Freddy," said Cora-Biddy. "Be patient. It comes."

"The what?" Fred Foley asked, but he already knew. The second night in the tomb is always the most hideous one. What comes forth, comes forth from that delirium. And the last floating spider-silk had now settled on him. He was caught in the spiderweb.

"The screaming, Freddy," Cora the beautiful and ever-green harpy said. "It always comes on schedule."

Then, as Doctor Millhouse looked up from his watch, Foley's mind gave way. He began to scream. The old, returning Other entered and mingled with his mind and body. He continued the screaming (the final tomb humiliation) as they laced him into the jacket to take him away. And that was the end of Fred Foley as he had been.

But it wasn't the end of him as he would be. He *did* have strengths that they didn't know about.

He was Master of the weave, and now the weave need not remain anarchic.

With a word he could become Master of the falcon. He could fly the falcon, or he could ground it.

He was companion of patricks, and now he was him-

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self more than a patrick. He was more than a Croll or Aloysius. He was Emperor.

He now had a returning lightning-toad intruded into his head and his body, and in the toad was the wisdom-jewel.

He was Everyman. He was Everylout.

Nobody else, coming in simplicity, had ever partaken of all four Monsters. Nobody else had had such good eyes, had ever been able to see on all the levels and into all the worlds. No person else had ever integrated all his archetypes and become fully conscious—even while tumbling into needle-induced unconsciousness.

He had been called, as the patricks had not been, as the Harvesters themselves had not been, as none of the exterior creatures had been of themselves. The Harvesters, the persons of the weave, had not themselves truly mutated. They couldn't have done it; they hadn't the holy simplicity for it. Theirs was a false and premature mutation. It was Fred Foley who now became the first of the new mutation, the special sort of man.

And in the morning—

(Green-mottled humor in him, helical passion, saintly sex-fish, ashen death-joy, cinnamon cookie for Cerberus—

Pride of patricks in him, Black Patricks of New York and Nairobi, Yellow Patricks of Moscow and Lhasa, Brown Patricks of Batangas and Tongareva, Nobility of Metropolitans and Simplicity of Crolls, the Exarch of Yerevan and the Aloysius of Dublin in him—

Oceanic ages in him, insane flitting reptilian wraiths that have a random gift that isn't given to proper creatures, and a new interior guest from that returning jewel-headed toad people—

Flight of falcons in him. "You can command the falcon, Freddy, when you wake to it," came the under-

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ground voice of Miguel. "You can even command the falcon to furl its wings again."—

Unweaponed simplicity in him that could burst every bond. Every under-thing rooted in him now—

The ashen Letitia herself had just borne a child who was truly beautiful and full of light, somehow, in a manner and place that we do not know the names of. So—

Letitia-gladness in him. Gobbled devils in him—)

—and in the morning he would come out of it all: a new element that the returnees had not calculated in adjusting the cyclic trajectory. (Returnees also in him.)

On so small a new module it might depend. What would be the shape and direction of it now: still the repeating cycle, or the ascending spiral?

Would the next Mansions be the First again? Or the Fifth?