TOMORROW'S CHILD

He did not want to be the father of a small blue pyramid. Peter Horn hadn't planned it that way at all. Neither he nor his wife imagined that such a thing could happen to them. They had talked quietly for days about the birth of their coming child, they had eaten normal foods, slept a great deal, taken in a few shows, and, when it was time for her to fly in the helicopter to the hospital, her husband held her and kissed her.

"Honey, you'll be home in six hours," he said. "These new birth-mechanisms do everything but father the child for you."

She remembered an old-time song. "No, no, they

can't take that away from me!" and sang it, and they laughed as the helicopter lifted them over the green way from country to city.

The doctor, a quiet gentleman named Wolcott, was very confident. Polly Ann, the wife, was made ready for the task ahead and the father was put, as usual, out in the waiting room where he could suck on cigarettes or take highballs from a convenient mixer. He was feeling pretty good. This was the first baby, but there was not a thing to worry about. Polly Ann was in good hands.

Dr. Wolcott came into the waiting room an hour later. He looked like a man who has seen death. Peter Horn, on his third highball, did not move. His hand tightened on the glass and he whispered:

"She's dead."

"No," said Wolcott, quietly. "No, no, she's fine. It's the baby."

"The baby's dead, then."

"The baby's alive, too, but—drink the rest of that drink and come along after me. Something's happened."

Yes, indeed, something had happened. The "something" that had happened had brought the entire hospital out into the corridors. People were going and coming from one room to another. As Peter Horn was led through a hallway where attendants in white uniforms were standing around peering into each other's faces and whispering, he became quite ill.

"Hey, looky looky! The child of Peter Horn! Incredible!"

They entered a small clean room. There was a crowd in the room, looking down at a low table. There was something on the table.

A small blue pyramid.

"Why've you brought me here?" said Horn, turning to the doctor.

The small blue pyramid moved. It began to cry.

Peter Horn pushed forward and looked down wildly. He was very white and he was breathing rapidly. "You don't mean that's it?"

The doctor named Wolcott nodded.

The blue pyramid had six blue snakelike appendages and three eyes that blinked from the tips of projecting structures.

Horn didn't move.

"It weighs seven pounds, eight ounces," someone said.

Horn thought to himself, they're kidding me. This is some joke. Charlie Ruscoll is behind all this. He'll pop in a door any moment and cry "April Fool!" and everybody'll laugh. That's not my child. Oh, horrible! They're kidding me.

Horn stood there, and the sweat rolled down his face.

"Get me away from here." Horn turned and his hands were opening and closing without purpose, his eyes were flickering.

Wolcott held his elbow, talking calmly. "This is your child. Understand that, Mr. Horn."

"No. No, it's not." His mind wouldn't touch the thing. "It's a nightmare. Destroy *it!*"

"You can't kill a human being."

"Human?" Horn blinked tears. "That's not human! That's a crime against God!"

The doctor went on, quickly. "We've examined this—child—and we've decided that it is not a mutant, a result of gene destruction or rearrangement. It's not a freak. Nor is it sick. Please listen to everything I say to you."

Horn stared at the wall, his eyes wide and sick. He swayed. The doctor talked distantly, with assurance.

"The child was somehow affected by the birth pressure. There was a dimensional distructure caused by the simultaneous short-circuitings and malfunctionings of the new birth and hypnosis machines. Well, anyway," the doctor ended lamely, "your baby was born into—another dimension."

Horn did not even nod. He stood there, waiting.

Dr. Wolcott made it emphatic. "Your child is alive, well, and happy. It is lying there, on the table. But because it was born into another dimension it has a

shape alien to us. Our eyes, adjusted to a three-dimensional concept, cannot recognize it as a baby. But it *is*. Underneath that camouflage, the strange pyramidal shape and appendages, it is *your* child."

Horn closed his mouth and shut his eyes. "Can I have a drink?"

"Certainly." A drink was thrust into Horn's hands.

"Now, let me just sit down, sit down somewhere a moment." Horn sank wearily into a chair. It was coming clear. Everything shifted slowly into place. It was his child, no matter what. He shuddered. No matter how horrible it looked, it was his first child.

At last he looked up and tried to see the doctor. "What'll we tell Polly?" His voice was hardly a whisper.

"We'll work that out this morning, as soon as you feel up to it."

"What happens after that? Is there any way to—change it back?"

"We'll try. That is, if you give us permission to try. After all, it's your child. You can do anything with him you want to do."

"Him?" Horn laughed ironically, shutting his eyes. "How do you know it's a him?" He sank down into darkness. His ears roared.

Wolcott was visibly upset. "Why, we—that is—well, we don't know, for sure."

Horn drank more of his drink. "What if you *can't* change him back?"

"I realize what a shock it is to you, Mr. Horn. If you can't bear to look upon the child, we'll be glad to raise him here, at the Institute, for you."

Horn thought it over. "Thanks. But he still belongs to me and Polly. I'll give him a home. Raise him like I'd raise any kid. Give him a normal home life. Try to learn to love him. Treat him right." His lips were numb, he couldn't think.

"You realize what a job you're taking on, Mr. Horn? This child can't be allowed to have normal playmates; why, they'd pester it to death in no time. You know how children are. If you decide to raise the

child at home, his life will be strictly regimented, he must *never* be seen by anyone. Is that clear?"

"Yes. Yes, it's clear. Doc. Doc, is he all right mentally?"

"Yes. We've tested his reactions. He's a fine healthy child as far as nervous response and such things go."

"I just wanted to be sure. Now, the only problem is Polly."

Wolcott frowned. "I confess that one has me stumped. You know it is pretty hard on a woman to hear that her child has been born dead. But *this*, telling a woman she's given birth to something not recognizable as human. It's not as clean as death. There's too much chance for shock. And yet I must tell her the truth. A doctor gets nowhere by lying to his patient."

Horn put his glass down. "I don't want to lose Polly, too. I'd be prepared now, if you destroyed the child, to take it. But I don't want Polly killed by the shock of this whole thing."

"I think we may be able to change the child back. That's the point which makes me hesitate. If I thought the case was hopeless I'd make out a certificate of euthanasia immediately. But it's at least worth a chance."

Horn was very tired. He was shivering quietly, deeply. "All right, doctor. It needs food, milk, and love until you can fix it up. It's had a raw deal so far, no reason for it to go on getting a raw deal. When will we tell Polly?"

"Tomorrow afternoon, when she wakes up."

Horn got up and walked to the table which was warmed by a soft illumination from overhead. The blue pyramid sat upon the table as Horn held out his hand.

"Hello, Baby," said Horn.

The blue pyramid looked up at Horn with three bright blue eyes. It shifted a tiny blue tendril, touching Horn's fingers with it.

Horn shivered.

"Hello, Baby."

The doctor produced a special feeding bottle.

"This is woman's milk. Here we go."

Baby looked upward through clearing mists. Baby saw the shapes moving over him and knew them to be friendly. Baby was newborn, but already alert, strangely alert. Baby was aware.

There were moving objects above and around Baby. Six cubes of a gray-white color, bending down. Six cubes with hexagonal appendages and three eyes to each cube. Then there were two other cubes coming from a distance over a crystalline plateau. One of the cubes was white. It had three eyes, too. There was something about this White Cube that Baby liked. There was an attraction. Some relation. There was an odor to the White Cube that reminded Baby of itself.

Shrill sounds came from the six bending-down gray-white cubes. Sounds of curiosity and wonder. It was like a kind of piccolo music, all playing at once.

Now the two newly arrived cubes, the White Cube and the Gray Cube, were whistling. After a while the White Cube extended one of its hexagonal appendages to touch Baby. Baby responded by putting out one of its tendrils from its pyramidal body. Baby liked the White Cube. Baby liked. Baby was hungry. Baby liked. Maybe the White Cube would give it food . . .

The Gray Cube produced a pink globe for Baby. Baby was now to be fed. Good. Good. Baby accepted food eagerly.

Food was good. All the gray-white cubes drifted away, leaving only the nice White Cube standing over Baby looking down and whistling over and over. Over and over.

They told Polly the next day. Not everything. Just enough. Just a hint. They told her the baby was not well, in a certain way. They talked slowly, and in ever-tightening circles, in upon Polly. Then Dr. Wolcott gave a long lecture on the birth-mechanisms,

how they helped a woman in her labor, and how, this time, they short-circuited. There was another man of scientific means present and he gave her a dry little talk on dimensions, holding up his fingers, so! one, two, three, and four. Still another man talked of energy and matter. Another spoke of underprivileged children.

Polly finally sat up in bed and said, "What's all the talk for? What's wrong with my baby that you should all be talking so long?"

Wolcott told her.

"Of course, you can wait a week and see it," he said. "Or you can sign over guardianship of the child to the Institute."

"There's only one thing I want to know," said Polly.

Dr. Wolcott raised his brows.

"Did I *make* the child that way?" asked Polly.

"You most certainly did *not!*"

"The child isn't a monster, genetically?" asked Polly.

"The child was thrust into another continuum. Otherwise, it is perfectly normal."

Polly's tight, lined mouth relaxed. She said, simply, "Then bring me my baby. I want to see him. Please. Now."

They brought the "child."

The Horns left the hospital the next day. Polly walked out on her own two good legs, with Peter Horn following her, looking at her in quiet amazement.

They did not have the baby with them. That would come later. Horn helped his wife into their helicopter and sat beside her. He lifted the ship, whirring, into the warm air.

"You're a wonder," he said.

"Am I?" she said, lighting a cigarette.

"You are. You didn't cry. You didn't do anything."

"He's not so bad, you know," she said. "Once you get to know him. I can even—hold him in my arms. He's warm and he cries and he even needs his triangular diapers." Here she laughed. He noticed a nervous tremor in the laugh, however. "No, I didn't cry, Pete, because that's my baby. Or he will be. He isn't dead, I thank God for that. He's—I don't know how to explain—still unborn. I like to think he hasn't been born yet. We're waiting for him to show up. I have confidence in Dr. Wolcott. Haven't you?"

"You're right. You're right." He reached over and held her hand. "You know something? You're a peach."

"I can hold on," she said, sitting there looking ahead as the green country swung under them. "As long as I know something good will happen, I won't let it hurt or shock me. I'll wait six months, and then maybe I'll kill myself."

"Polly!"

She looked at him as if he'd just come in. "Pete, I'm sorry. But this sort of thing doesn't happen. Once it's over and the baby is finally 'born' I'll forget it so quick it'll never have occurred. But if the doctor can't help us, then a mind can't take it, a mind can only tell the body to climb out on a roof and jump."

"Things'll be all right," he said, holding to the guide-wheel. "They have to be."

She said nothing, but let the cigarette smoke blow out of her mouth in the pounding concussion of the helicopter fan.

Three weeks passed. Every day they flew in to the Institute to visit "Py." For that was the quiet calm name that Polly Horn gave to the blue pyramid that lay on the warm sleeping-table and blinked up at them. Dr. Wolcott was careful to point out that the habits of the "child" were as normal as any others; so many hours sleep, so many awake, so much attentiveness, so much boredom, so much food, so much elimination. Polly Horn listened, and her face softened and her eyes warmed.

At the end of the third week, Dr. Wolcott said, "Feel up to taking him home now? You live in the country, don't you? All right, you have an enclosed patio, he can be out there in the sunlight, on occa-

sion. He needs a mother's love. That's trite, but nevertheless true. He should be suckled. We have an arrangement where he's been fed by the new feedmech; cooing voice, warmth, hands, and all." Dr. Wolcott's voice was dry. "But still I feel you are familiar enough with him now to know he's a pretty healthy child. Are you game, Mrs. Horn?"

"Yes, I'm game."

"Good. Bring him in every third day for a checkup. Here's his formula. We're working on several solutions now, Mrs. Horn. We should have some results for you by the end of the year. I don't want to say anything definite, but I have reason to believe we'll pull that boy right out of the fourth dimension, like a rabbit out of a hat."

The doctor was mildly surprised and pleased when Polly Horn kissed him, then and there.

Pete Horn took the copter home over the smooth rolling greens of Griffith. From time to time he looked at the pyramid lying in Polly's arms. She was making cooing noises at it, it was replying in approximately the same way.

"I wonder," said Polly.

"What?"

"How do *we* look to it?" asked his wife.

"I asked Wolcott about that. He said we probably look funny to him, also. He's in one dimension, we're in another."

"You mean we don't look like men and women to him?"

"If we could see ourselves, no. But remember, the baby knows nothing of men or women. To the baby whatever shape we're in, we are natural. It's accustomed to seeing us shaped like cubes or squares or pyramids, as it sees us from its separate dimension. The baby's had no other experience, no other norm with which to compare what it sees. We *are* its norm. On the other hand, the baby seems weird to us because we compare it to our accustomed shapes and sizes."

"Yes, I see. I see."

Baby was conscious of movement. One White Cube held him in warm appendages. Another White Cube sat further over, within an oblong of purple. The oblong moved in the air over a vast bright plain of pyramids, hexagons, oblongs, pillars, bubbles, and multi-colored cubes.

One White Cube made a whistling noise. The other White Cube replied with a whistling. The White Cube that held him shifted about. Baby watched the two White Cubes, and watched the fleeing world outside the traveling bubble.

Baby felt—sleepy. Baby closed his eyes, settled his pyramidal youngness upon the lap of the White Cube, and made faint little noises . . .

"He's asleep," said Polly Horn.

Summer came, Peter Horn himself was busy with his export-import business. But he made certain he was home every night. Polly was all right during the day, but, at night, when she had to be alone with the child, she got to smoking too much, and one night he found her passed out on the davenport, an empty sherry bottle on the table beside her. From then on, he took care of the child himself nights. When it cried it made a weird whistling noise, like some jungle animal lost and wailing. It wasn't the sound of a child.

Peter Horn had the nursery soundproofed.

"So your wife won't hear your baby crying?" asked the workman.

"Yes," said Peter Horn. "So she won't hear."

They had few visitors. They were afraid that someone might stumble on Py, dear sweet pyramid little Py.

"What's that noise?" asked a visitor one evening, over his cocktail. "Sounds like some sort of bird. You didn't tell me you had an aviary, Peter?"

"Oh, yes," said Horn, closing the nursery door. "Have another drink. Let's drink, everyone."

It was like having a dog or a cat in the house. At

least that's how Polly looked upon it. Peter Horn watched her and observed exactly how she talked and petted the small Py. It was Py this and Py that, but somehow with some reserve, and sometimes she would look around the room and touch herself, and her hands would clench, and she would look lost and afraid, as if she were waiting for someone to arrive.

In September, Polly reported to her husband: "He can say Father. Yes he can. Come on, Py. Say, Father!"

She held the blue warm pyramid up.

"Wheelly," whistled the little warm blue pyramid.

"Again," repeated Polly.

"Wheelly!" whistled the pyramid.

"For God's sake, stop!" said Pete Horn. He took the child from her and put it in the nursery where it whistled over and over that name, that name, that name. Horn came out and poured himself a stiff drink. Polly was laughing quietly.

"Isn't that terrific?" she said. "Even his *voice* is in the fourth dimension. Won't it be nice when he learns to talk later? We'll give him Hamlet's soliloquy to memorize and he'll say it but it'll come out like something from James Joyce! Aren't we lucky? Give me a drink."

"You've had enough," he said.

"Thanks, I'll help myself," she said and did.

October, and then November. Py was learning to talk now. He whistled and squealed and made a bell-like tone when he was hungry. Dr. Wolcott visited. "When his color is a constant bright blue," said the doctor, "that means he's healthy. When the color fades, dull—the child is feeling poorly. Remember that."

"Oh, yes, I will, I will," said Polly. "Robin's-egg blue for health, dull cobalt for illness."

"Young lady," said Wolcott. "You'd better take a couple of these pills and come see me tomorrow for a little chat. I don't like the way you're talking. Stick out your tongue. Ah-hmm. You been drinking? Look at the stains on your fingers. Cut the cigarettes in half. See you tomorrow."

"You don't give me much to go on," said Polly. "It's been almost a year now."

"My dear Mrs. Horn, I don't want to excite you continually. When we have our mechs ready we'll let you know. We're working every day. There'll be an experiment soon. Take those pills now and shut that nice mouth." He chucked Py under the "chin." "Good healthy baby, by God! Twenty pounds if he's an *ounce!*"

Baby was conscious of the goings and comings of the two nice White Cubes who were with him during all of his waking hours. There was another cube, a gray one, who visited on certain days. But mostly it was the two White Cubes who cared for and loved him. He looked up at the one warm, rounder, softer White Cube and made the low warbling soft sound of contentment. The White Cube fed him. He was content. He grew. All was familiar and good.

The New Year, the year 1989, arrived.

Rocket ships flashed on the sky, and helicopters whirred and flourished the warm California winds.

Peter Horn carted home large plates of specially poured blue and gray polarized glass, secretly. Through these, he peered at his "child." Nothing. The pyramid remained a pyramid, no matter if he viewed it through X-ray or yellow cellophane. The barrier was unbreakable. Horn returned quietly to his drinking.

The big thing happened early in February. Horn, arriving home in his helicopter, was appalled to see a crowd of neighbors gathered on the lawn of his home. Some of them were sitting, others were standing, still others were moving away, with frightened expressions on their faces.

Polly was walking the "child" in the yard.

Polly was quite drunk. She held the small blue pyramid by the hand and walked him up and down. She did not see the helicopter land, nor did she pay much attention as Horn came running up.

One of the neighbors turned. "Oh, Mr. Horn, it's the cutest thing. Where'd you *find* it?"

One of the others cried, "Hey, you're quite the traveler, Horn. Pick it up in South America?"

Polly held the pyramid up. "Say Father!" she cried, trying to focus on her husband.

"Wheel!" cried the pyramid.

"Polly!" Peter Horn said.

"He's friendly as a dog or a cat," said Polly moving the child with her. "Oh, no, he's not dangerous. He's friendly as a baby. My husband brought him from Afghanistan."

The neighbors began to move off.

"Come back!" Polly waved at them. "Don't you want to see my baby? Isn't he simply beautiful!"

He slapped her face.

"My baby," she said, brokenly.

He slapped her again and again until she quit saying it and collapsed. He picked her up and took her into the house. Then he came out and took Py in and then he sat down and phoned the Institute.

"Dr. Wolcott, this is Horn. You'd better have your stuff ready. It's tonight or not at all."

There was a hesitation. Finally Wolcott sighed. "All right. Bring your wife and the child. We'll try to have things in shape."

They hung up.

Horn sat there studying the pyramid.

"The neighbors thought he was grand," said his wife, lying on the couch, her eyes shut, her lips trembling . . .

The Institute hall smelled clean, neat, sterile. Dr. Wolcott walked along it, followed by Peter Horn and his wife Polly, who was holding Py in her arms. They turned in at a doorway and stood in a large room. In the center of the room were two tables with large black hoods suspended over them.

Behind the tables were a number of machines with dials and levers on them. There was the faintest perceptible hum in the room. Pete Horn looked at Polly for a moment.

Wolcott gave her a glass of liquid. "Drink this." She drank it. "Now. Sit down." They both sat. The doctor put his hands together and looked at them for a moment.

"I want to tell you what I've been doing in the last few months," he said. "I've tried to bring the baby out of whatever hell dimension, fourth, fifth, or sixth, that it is in. Each time you left the baby for a checkup we worked on the problem. Now, we have a solution, but it has nothing to do with bringing the baby out of the dimension in which *it* exists."

Polly sank back. Horn simply watched the doctor carefully for anything he might say. Wolcott leaned forward.

"I can't bring Py out, but I can put you people *in*. That's it." He spread his hands.

Horn looked at the machine in the corner. "You mean you can send *us* into Py's dimension?"

"If you want to go badly enough."

Polly said nothing. She held Py quietly and looked at him.

Dr. Wolcott explained. "We know what series of malfunctions, mechanical and electrical, forced Py into his present state. We can reproduce those accidents and stresses. But bringing him *back* is something else. It might take a million trials and failures before we got the combination. The combination that jammed him into another space was an accident, but luckily we saw, observed, and recorded it. There are no records for bringing one back. We have to work in the dark. Therefore, it will be easier to put *you* in the fourth dimension than to bring Py into ours."

Polly asked, simply and earnestly, "Will I see my baby as he really is, if I go into his dimension?"

Wolcott nodded.

Polly said, "Then, I want to go."

"Hold on," said Peter Horn. "We've only been in this office five minutes and already you're promising away the rest of your life."

"I'll be with my real baby. I won't care."

"Dr. Wolcott, what will it be like, in that dimension on the other side?"

"There will be no change that *you* will notice. You will both seem the same size and shape to one another. The pyramid will become a baby, however. You will have added an extra sense, you will be able to interpret what you see differently."

"But won't we turn into oblongs or pyramids ourselves? And won't you, doctor, look like some geometrical form instead of a human?"

"Does a blind man who sees for the first time give up his ability to hear or taste?"

"No."

"All right, then. Stop thinking in terms of subtraction. Think in terms of addition. You're gaining something. You lose nothing. You know what a human looks like, which is an advantage Py doesn't have, looking out from his dimension. When you arrive 'over there' you can see Dr. Wolcott as *both* things, a geometrical abstract or a human, as you choose. It will probably make quite a philosopher out of you. There's one other thing, however."

"And that?"

"To everyone else in the world you, your wife and the child will look like abstract forms. The baby a triangle. Your wife an oblong perhaps. Yourself a hexagonal solid. The world will be shocked, not you."

"We'll be freaks."

"You'll be freaks. But you won't know it. You'll have to lead a secluded life."

"Until you find a way to bring all three of us out together."

"That's right. It may be ten years, twenty. I won't recommend it to you, you may both go quite mad as a result of feeling apart, different. If there's a grain of paranoia in you, it'll come out. It's up to you, naturally."

Peter Horn looked at his wife, she looked back gravely.

"We'll go," said Peter Horn.

"Into Py's dimension?" said Wolcott.

"Into Py's dimension."

They stood up from their chairs. "We'll lose no other sense, you're certain, doctor? Will you be able to understand us when we talk to you? Py's talk is incomprehensible."

"Py talks that way because that's what he thinks we sound like when our talk comes through the dimensions to him. He imitates the sound. When you are over there and talk to me, you'll be talking perfect English, because you know *how*. Dimensions have to do with senses and time and knowledge."

"And what about Py? When we come into his strata of existence. Will he see us as humans, immediately, and won't that be a shock to him? Won't it be dangerous?"

"He's awfully young. Things haven't got too set for him. There'll be a slight shock, but your odors will be the same, and your voices will have the same timber and pitch and you'll be just as warm and loving, which is most important of all. You'll get on with him well."

Horn scratched his head slowly. "This seems such a long way around to where we want to go." He sighed. "I wish we could have another kid and forget all about this one."

"This baby is the one that counts. I dare say Polly here wouldn't want any other, would you, Polly?"

"This baby, *this* baby," said Polly.

Wolcott gave Peter Horn a meaningful look. Horn interpreted it correctly. This baby or no more Polly ever again. This baby or Polly would be in a quiet room somewhere staring into space for the rest of her life.

They moved toward the machine together. "I guess I can stand it, if she can," said Horn, taking her hand. "I've worked hard for a good many years now, it might be fun retiring and being an abstract for a change."

"I envy you the journey, to be honest with you," said Wolcott, making adjustments on the large dark machine. "I don't mind telling you that as a result of

your being 'over there' you may very well write a volume of philosophy that will set Dewey, Bergson, Hegel, or any of the others on their ears. I might 'come over' to visit you one day."

"You'll be welcome. What do we need for the trip?"

"Nothing. Just lie on these tables and be still."

A humming filled the room. A sound of power and energy and warmth.

They lay on the tables, holding hands, Polly and Peter Horn. A double black hood came down over them. They were both in darkness. From somewhere far off in the hospital, a voice-clock sang, "Tick tock, seven o'clock. Tick tock, seven o'clock ..." fading away in a little soft gong.

The low humming grew louder. The machine glittered with hidden, shifting, compressed power.

"Is there any danger?" cried Peter Horn.

"None!"

The power screamed. The very atoms of the room divided against each other, into alien and enemy camps. The two sides fought for supremacy. Horn gaped his mouth to shout. His insides became pyramidal, oblong with terrific electric seizures. He felt a pulling, sucking, demanding power claw at his body. The power yearned and nuzzled and pressed through the room. The dimensions of the black hood over his torso were stretched, pulled into wild planes of incomprehension. Sweat, pouring down his face, was not sweat, but a pure dimensional essence! His limbs were wrenched, flung, jabbed, suddenly caught. He began to melt like running wax.

A clicking sliding noise.

Horn thought swiftly, but calmly. How will it be in the future with Polly and me and Py at home and people coming over for a cocktail party? How will it be?

Suddenly he knew how it would be and the thought of it filled him with a great awe and a sense

of credulous faith and time. They would live in the same white house on the same quiet, green hill, with a high fence around it to keep out the merely curious. And Dr. Wolcott would come to visit, park his beetle in the yard below, come up the steps and at the door would be a tall slim White Rectangle to meet him with a dry martini in its snakelike hand.

And in an easy chair across the room would sit a Salt White Oblong with a copy of Nietzsche open, reading, smoking a pipe. And on the floor would be Py, running about. And there would be talk and more friends would come in and the White Oblong and the White Rectangle would laugh and joke and offer little finger sandwiches and more drinks and it would be a good evening of talk and laughter.

That's how it would be.

Click.

The humming noise stopped.

The hood lifted from Horn.

It was all over.

They were in another dimension.

He heard Polly cry out. There was much light. Then he slipped from the table, stood blinking. Polly was running. She stopped and picked up something from the floor.

It was Peter Horn's son. A living, pink-faced, blue-eyed boy, lying in her arms, gasping and blinking and crying.

The pyramidal shape was gone. Polly was crying with happiness.

Peter Horn walked across the room, trembling, trying to smile himself, to hold on to Polly and the child, both at the same time, and weep with them.

"Well!" said Wolcott, standing back. He did not move for a long while. He only watched the White Oblong and the slim White Rectangle holding the Blue Pyramid on the opposite side of the room. An assistant came in the door.

"Shhh," said Wolcott, hand to his lips. "They'll

want to be alone awhile. Come along." He took the assistant by the arm and tiptoed across the room. The White Rectangle and the White Oblong didn't even look up when the door closed.

THE WOMEN

It was as if a light came on in a green room.

The ocean burned. A white phosphorescence stirred like a breath of steam through the autumn morning sea, rising. Bubbles rose from the throat of some hidden sea ravine.

Like lightning in the reversed green sky of the sea it was aware. It was old and beautiful. Out of the deeps it came, indolently. A shell, a wisp, a bubble, a weed, a glitter, a whisper, a gill. Suspended in its depths were brainlike trees of frosted coral, eyelike pips of yellow kelp, hairlike fluids of weed. Growing with the tides, growing with the ages, collecting and