

PENGUIN BOOKS

1647

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To the Boss

*Since all the characters in this book are real, any
resemblance between them and imaginary
persons is entirely accidental.*

Raymond Queneau

Acknowledgements

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... Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven...

Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire.

ST MATTHEW, 18

Bah! Let's make all sorts of faces.

RIMBAUD (who became as a little child, and had his foot cut off, and died).

PART ONE

Tapioca Island

CHAPTER 1

'Much prognosis today,' the old man panted.

The climb up the mountain was hard for him, several times he had to lean against the trunk of a raffia palm and try to catch his breath. With each halt he went through the same ritual of *malaise*. Removed from his head the green-visored tennis cap. Unwrapped from his emaciated middle a delicately figured silk paisley scarf. Mopped brow with loincloth. Then reached down to massage his feet through the cricket sneakers.

He knew he was not supposed to tax himself but he would not take time out for a real rest, much less turn back. From his knobby shoulders hung the only native garment he could boast at the moment, a loose chieftain's robe made of pounded bark and decorated with neat alternating rows of stylized parakeets and cacao flowers; he hitched it to his knees as he picked his way through the brush, arthritic ballet.

The jungle was noisy today, fidgety as an insomniac (he had been suffering from insomnia lately, Dr Martine had been treating him for it), fronds rasped against each other, trees creaked, mynah birds shrilled nasal obscenities at the sun, marmosets jibbered in falsetto. He disapproved of this order of sounds, they were symptomatic of hyperthyroidism, hypertension, hypertonus. He frowned upon such tension, in Nature as in himself. Better to be like the slow loris, heavy-lidded, tapioca-muscled. Lately, though, he had been very tense.

Each time he interrupted his climb toward the Mandunga Circle he looked down in the direction of the village. Silly, of course, there was no chance of his being followed. As for the villagers, nobody was allowed to approach the Circle except the troubled ones and those who had business with them; and as for strangers, well, none had been seen on the island in his lifetime. Ever. None except Dr Martine. Still, he kept looking back over his shoulder.

His intelligent deep-amber face, shining with sweat under a thatch of crinkly white hair, was fixed in a scowl now, muscles coagulated in ridges – welts left by some whip of woe. It felt as though he were wearing some sort of mask, he was not used to worry or the crampings of worry and the knots around his mouth and in his forehead quivered. Insomnia, bunched-up muscles, tremors, worry – it almost looked, he thought, as if he had developed some of the signs of the troubled ones. Unpleasant notion. He wished he had a bowl of tapioca, it relaxed the bowels.

A moment later, puffing hard, he had reached a small clearing on the crest of the mountain, bare except for a scattering of yuka and cassava plants. Memorable spot. Here was the centre of the Mandunga Circle, here, eighteen and a half years ago, he had first set eyes on Dr Martine. Looking down over the carpet of pinnate leaves thrown up by the raffias, he could see the saw-tooth cliffs on the perimeter of the island – island which by some miracle, Martine liked to say, had never been charted on any map by any cartographer – and the glinting waters of the Indian Ocean beyond. The sky was

without a trace of cloud, a flawless impermeable blue – 'as dazzling', Martine sometimes said of it, 'as a baboon's ass.'

It was on just such a day eighteen years ago, as the sun was heaving up over Sumatra and Borneo (Martine insisted there were such places to the east: called them the islands of Oceania), that the doctor had been tossed out of the sky on to the mountain top. What more ominous bundles was that cobalt vacuum preparing to sprinkle over the island today?

'Tomorrow sunny and continued warm,' he said to himself, still in the doctor's language. 'Prognosis for weather, anyway, favourable.' Added, '*The* prognosis. For *the* weather. *Is*.'

Shading his eyes with a bony hand, he began to search the ocean for ships. It would be suicide, he knew, for mariners not familiar with these waters to attempt a landing anywhere on the island's coast because of the treacherous reefs and the razor-backed cliffs which jutted out into the surf. Nevertheless, he looked. Ships could carry planes. It was possible these days for strangers to come by air as well as by sea. Dr Martine had come by air.

Was that a vessel he saw, that speck on the horizon beyond which lay Mauritius and Reunion and Madagascar (places he had glimpsed only from thirty thousand feet up, on scavenging trips in Martine's plane)? Out there in the direction of the forgotten trade routes which had once slashed this untuned old ocean? Way off to the west there, where if you travelled long enough you came at last to Africa, whose toppled cities were filled with fabulous paisley scarves and tennis caps, cummerbunds and opera hats and cricket sneakers, even crates of penicillin and electroencephalographs, and no people? The speck seemed to be moving, he could not be sure.

'No,' the old man said. 'Otherwise, Doctor, prognosis not favourable.'

His features settled in a deeper frown, it felt like a hand grabbing his face. He re-entered the jungle to begin the descent on the far side of the summit, a galago dashed hysterically across the path.

In a few moments he reached the landmark, a tall column of scaly rock almost entirely overrun with creepers and ferns. Squatting in the thicket, he called out as loudly as he could, 'Peace to all! Peace and long life. Open up, here is Ubu.' It was not English he spoke now but the throaty, resonant, richly vowelled tongue of the Mandunji.

Facing him was a boulder which bulged out from the base of the rock, hidden from sight by a tangle of briers. It swung inward, briers and all. Stooping, Ubu stepped into the cavern.

'Peace to all,' he repeated. His hands went up in the ceremonial greeting, fingers extended and palms up as though a tray were resting on them, to indicate that their owner came without weapons and therefore in friendship and good will.

'Peace, Ubu,' the tall teak-complexioned young man at the gate answered sleepily. He yawned, a cosmic gape. Then he remembered the rest of the salutation and awkwardly stuck his hands out in turn. They were not empty; in one. was a brush dripping red berry juice and in the other a sheet of pounded bark partially covered with rows of painted mynah birds and manioc plants. Apparently he had been working on this decorative drawing when Ubu arrived.

'I... do not mean... to offend,' he said slowly, searching for the words. It was dawning on him, Ubu could see, that he had committed a serious breach of etiquette by not emptying his hands before holding them out. 'My thought is far away... I was making a design and...'

Ubu smiled and patted him on the shoulder. At the same time he leaned forward to examine the scar on the young man's shaved head, a ribbon of pink tissue which ran in an unwavering line from the forehead past both ears to the nape of the neck. It was the welt that was always made when the dome of a troubled one's skull was sliced off with a Mandunga saw and then neatly pasted back in place.

'It heals nicely,' Ubu said, pointing to the scar.

'It has stopped itching,' the boy said.

'No more trouble there?'

The boy looked puzzled. 'I do not remember the trouble people speak of,' he said. 'Dr Martine says I used to fight much... and there was much tonus in my muscles... I do not remember. Mostly I like to sit and draw birds and trees. I want to sleep all the time.'

'You are much improved, Notoa. I noticed just now that when you said "Peace" it was not just a thing to say, you meant it. The reports I hear from Dr Martine are very good.'

'People say I used to fight,' Notoa said, looking down at the floor. 'When I hear about it I feel ashamed. I do not know what used to make me hit my relatives.'

'You were troubled.'

Notoa regarded his hands with wonder. 'It is very hard now even to make a fist, when I try it is a great effort and it does not feel right. Dr Martine says the electric charge in my tensor muscles is down many points, he showed me on the measuring machine. Most of the time I am very sleepy.'

'Only the troubled are afraid of sleep.' Ubu, patted the youngster again. 'Speaking of Dr Martine, where is he?'

Notoa yawned again. 'In surgery. Moaga was brought this afternoon.'

'Yes, I forgot.' Ubu nodded and started down the corridor. Notoa swung the slab of rock to, and abruptly the rustling, crackling, croaking, twittering, twanging, twitching, ranting, jeering sounds of the jungle were cut off. In the sudden hush Ubu became aware of the throttled hum from the fans Dr Martine had installed in camouflaged shafts overhead to pump a steady flow of fresh, filtered, dehumidified, and aseptic air into the great underground hollow. The doctor liked to put his motors everywhere: on fishing boats, on the chisels and adzes used in hollowing out logs to make canoes, on stones for grinding maize, even on the saws for cutting skulls off. Such machines were not necessary, of course, they only took a man away from his natural work and made his mind and hands idle. One thing only was bad about this mechanization, it upset the routine. Because there were so many machines to do the work the young men now had much time to talk and study with the doctor and the old habits of work began to slip. The old habits made for a great steadiness, a looking in one fixed direction along a straight line...

As he passed the row of cubicles, Ubu peered through the one-way glass on each door at the patient inside. Most of these Mandungabas were recent operatees, with tentlike bandages still on their heads, but some of them had had their dressings

removed and were beginning to sprout new crops of hair over their scars. Ubu studied their faces as he went along, looking for signs of the tautness which had been a chronic torment for all of them before Mandunga. He knew what to watch for: narrowed eyes, tight rigid lips, corrugated foreheads, a hunched stiffness in the shoulder muscles – flexings of those who live in a world of perpetual feints and pounces.

No, there was no tell-tale strain in these once troubled people. If anything, their features and bodies seemed to have relaxed to the point of falling apart: heads lolling, mouths loose and hanging open, arms and legs flung like sacks of maize on the pallets. Well, a sleepy man does not break his uncle's nose.

Beyond the cubicles was the large animal-experimentation chamber in which the tarsiers, marmosets, pottos, lemurs, and chimpanzees huddled listlessly in their cages, most of them also wearing head bandages; beyond that, the laboratory in 19 which most of the doctor's encephalographs and other power-driven apparatus were kept; and finally, in the farthest corner of the hollow, the operating room. The window in this door was of ordinary two-way glass, Ubu could see that Dr Martine was just slicing through the last portion of Moaga's cranium with his automatic rotary saw.

What a sick one was this poor Moaga, Moaga the troublemaker, the sullen, the never-speaking, the vilifier of neighbours, and husband-slasher. The riot had been drained from her body now, she lay stretched out on the operating table like a mound of tapioca so completely anaesthetized by *rotabunga* that although her eyes were wide open they could see nothing. She was naked and Ubu could see the tangle of wires that led from her arms, her legs, her chest, her eyelids, from all the orifices of her bronze body, to the measuring machines scattered around the room. He knew that in a few minutes, when Mandunga took place, the indicating needles on those machines would sink from the level of distress to the level of ease and Moaga's sickness would be over, she, would stay away from *ganja* ('marijuana', in the doctor's peculiar language) and eat more tapioca, take more *rotabunga*. Done with electric trepans and chrome-steel scalpels and sutures, or with an old-fashioned chisel driven by an old-fashioned rock, the result was always the same magic: the troubled one came out of it no longer troubled, only a little sleepy. When, of course, he did not die. It was true, fewer patients died since the doctor had introduced trepans and asepsis and anatomy and penicillin.

Dr Martine inserted a thin metal instrument into the incision and pried; in a moment the skull gave and began to come away. An assistant was standing by with gloved hands held out, in spite of the surgical mask Ubu recognized him as Martine's son Rambo. The boy took the bony cup, holding it like a bowl in the ritual of the tapioca feast, and immediately submerged it in a large tray containing the usual saline bath.

Despite the dozens of times Ubu had watched this ceremony, despite the hundreds of times he had performed it (at least the ancient rock-and-chisel version of it) himself in the old days, before Martine, he still felt a certain thrill at the sight of the brain's crumpled convolutions – 'those intellectual intestines, that hive of anarchy', the doctor called them.

Suddenly Ubu thought of the black dot he had seen on the horizon: had it really been moving? Involuntarily his shoulders hunched and he sucked his lips in until they were thin and bloodless.

'You are lucky, Moaga,' he said, reverting to English. 'Soon no more worries, prognosis good. But for some worries, no scalpel, prognosis very bad...' This time he did not add the articles and verbs and so on.

CHAPTER 2

Pulse normal, respiration normal: the rubber bladders through which she breathed clenched and unclenched in perfect rhythm, two pneumatic fists. Rambo trundled a large Monel metal cabinet over to the table, through its glass front a bank of electronic tubes glowed. Everything was in order.

From the machine, which contained an array of slender steel probes attached by coiled wires to the electronic circuits within, Martine selected a needle and brought it close to the exposed brain. He applied the point carefully to an area on the cortex, signalled his readiness with a nod. Rambo twisted one of the control dials on the machine's operating panel. Moaga's left leg shot up and twitched in an absent-minded *entrechat*. Another contact made the shoulders writhe, another doubled the hands into fists and sent them paddling in the air, a fourth set the teeth to grinding.

Now the doctor began the multiple stimulation tests, applying four, then six, then eight and ten needles simultaneously to various cortical centres; with the final flow of current Moaga's face grew contorted, its muscles worked in spasms and her abdomen arched away from the table and began to heave. In spite of himself Martine felt his own abdominal muscles contracting, he always had this sympathetic response to the mock intercourse induced by a few expertly distributed amperes. 'I got rhythm,' he said to himself.

He looked around the chamber. All his assistants were at their posts, watching their measuring dials and recording at each stage Moaga's variations in temperature, muscle tonus, skin moisture, blood pressure, pulse rate, intestinal peristalsis, pupil dilation and eyelid blinking, lacrimation, vaginal contractions.

Rambo wheeled away the machine and brought up a table, on it was a row of hypodermic needles filled with liquid. Strychnine. The next step was neuronography, strychninization, the firing of certain key areas of the cerebrum with this potent excitant in order to trace the pathways from the brain's jellied rind to the hidden cerebellum, the thalamus, the hypothalamus. He made the injections expertly – but tensely: he was always tense with hypodermic needles – while his assistants jotted their scrupulous notations about the pursing of the lips, the fluttering in the cloaca, the squirmings of the pelvis.

While the strychnine bulletted through the brain's maze and the indicators jumped, he looked down at Moaga's face, down into the wide-open eyes which saw little and said much. Babbling eyes, ranting eyes. As always, the *rotabunga* drugs had induced a completely comatose state in which the eyes remained open; for almost nineteen years he had been performing Mandunga here in the cave and never once had he been able to turn his attention entirely from those open soapboxing eyes. What was it he always thought he saw in them? Icy accusation, glaciers of accusation.

Once the routine experiments were out of the way it did not take long for the actual surgery. First he put in place the fine surgical threads which marked the upstart areas on the patient's frontal lobes, then he speedily made incisions along them and added

several deft undercuts with the scalpel to free the spongy masses at the desired depth, then he removed these masses with a suction cup and quickly tied off the blood vessels. He reached down into Moaga's throat and made her cough: no leakage from the sliced veins, everything in order.

Rambo returned with the Monel cabinet. The ten electric needles were applied to the same spots as before: the woman's pelvic area remained inert, the vaginal indicators did not move. While Martine doused the exposed area with penicillin Rambo brought the skull and very soon it was back in place, the flaps of skin knitted together with stitches and silver clips.

Martine nodded and stepped back, beginning to strip off his rubber gloves. 'Done it again,' he said to himself. 'Goddamned Siamese twins. I've cut out the aggression. I've also cut out the orgasm, can't seem to separate the two. Sorry, Moaga. The pigsticker did his best.'

Martine looked up at the door and saw Ubu's face through the window. His eyes widened with pleasure, then hardened. He yanked his mask off and came out looking angry.

'Peace to –' Ubu began, in English.

'What the hell are you doing here?'

'I bring news.'

'Couldn't it have waited?'

'No. We must have talk together.'

'Well... What's it all about?'

'Another fishing boat. The men went as far as Cargados Island, they were following a big school of swordfish. They bring a bad report.'

'The queer-limbs again?'

'Yes, the queer-limbs. Yes, forty, fifty. And a large ship, most peculiar shape.'

'They were white?'

'White like the others, speak English like the others. They called to the fishermen but our boys pretended they did not understand and went away.'

Martine raised his hand and rubbed his eyes wearily. He thought: I know why he's telling me this in English. This is the most terrifying thing that's ever happened to him, he's got to push it away from him, by talking about it in a remote language he hopes to make the whole thing remote. He always switches to English when we talk about orgasm, too.

'So,' Martine said. 'This makes the seventh time they've been seen in, let's see, five weeks or so. Each time they come a little closer.'

'More news,' Ubu said. 'Over an hour ago I stopped at the clearing and looked out at the sea. I am not all sure but I thought I saw something moving far away to the west, where the water ends.'

'Sounds to me as though they've got some base of operations around the Mozambique waters. They seem to be covering the whole area pretty systematically, they're obviously looking for something. Christ knows what.'

'Maybe – for you?'

Martine stared at the chief in astonishment. 'That's crazy, old man, in over eighteen years they've forgotten all about me.'

The door of the operating-room swung open and Rambo came out, wheeling Moaga. Ubu watched as the bed rolled down the corridor, then he said hesitantly, 'You think of something to do?'

Martine laughed; these gentle people were good for everything but crisis. Then he put his arm around his friend's shoulders and began to walk with him down the corridor. 'Not exactly, but I'm not going to go up to them with my hands held out and say, "Peace to all." A guy can get himself very dead that way.'

'You suggest we hide then?'

'No good, they'd find the village and know we were around somewhere. We've got to face them, I guess, but it's not easy to work out a way of dealing with them. All we know so far is that these people, creatures, monsters, whatever they are, are exactly like us – except that where their arms and legs ought to be they've got tubular appliances that you can see through and that flicker as though they were filled with fireflies. And they speak English, American.'

'That bothers you?'

'As much as anything,' Martine admitted. For eighteen and a half years, he had to confess to himself, he hadn't thought too much about his home and the people there, hadn't even been much concerned to know whether there *were* any people left there. He'd had so little interest in the past that when his plane cracked up he'd saved all the machinery and surgical equipment and energy capsules but hadn't hesitated to destroy the radio and video. 'I wish', he said, 'I'd kept the short-wave radio from my plane.'

'You are good with machines,' Ubu suggested. 'Perhaps you could build such a radio.'

Martine laughed again, shaking his head. 'It's a little late for that,' he said. He reached out and squeezed Ubu's arm affectionately. 'That's the trouble with you, dear Ubu, with all the Mandunji – you've become such congenital pacifists that when a threat finally does show up, your minds just go blank. One pugnacious bum with a slingshot could take over the village and dispose of the lot of you.'

It was perfectly true: six hundred years of dogged good will had left these people without any will at all, you just had to say boo and they all but fell to the ground in a hebephrenic huddle. The village had been in a state of frozen panic for weeks, Ubu hadn't been able to sleep, his whole metabolism was on the blink.

'Do not make fun,' Ubu said. 'I have a great worry.'

'Calm yourself, old man. There is nothing to be done.'

'I have a worry not only for the village. Since these queerlimbs came, I have stayed awake many nights thinking – he will go, the doctor will go.'

'Suppose that happened?' Martine said. 'Would it be such a calamity?'

'You must not leave us.'

'Nonsense.' Martine took Ubu's arm and steered him over to the row of cubicles which housed the convalescents. 'These Mandungabas', he said, 'used to be pretty scrappy characters. They spent a lot of time in hiding, making themselves spears and bolos and stilettos and poison darts that are forbidden by village law. They refused their doses of *rotabunga* and smoked *ganja* and went into trances and raided their neighbours' yam gardens at night. They made effigies of their mothers-in-law and other

people they didn't like and stuck pins in them, a form of magic which is strictly taboo. They had a terrible thirst to be different from the others, to stand out, to be raised above the mass, while our normal citizens are so leery of distinguishing themselves in any way they have to be browbeaten into taking any kind of office, including your own. They poured so much aggressive energy into their sexuality that their mates were often seriously maimed and disfigured, sometimes even killed. All in all, a pretty edgy, stand-offish, and bloodthirsty lot. Well, it certainly looks as though they've become very meek and mild citizens – except for the ones who have relapses or develop other infirmities, you and the elders don't like to think about *them*. So I guess you'd say they're improved.'

'Prognosis good,' Ubu said happily. 'Is.'

'From the point of view of the village, sure. But how does it look from the point of view of the man? Prognosis one big yawn.'

'A man', Ubu said, 'is well to the extent that his village is well.'

'A moot point. Come on in here for a minute.' He led the way into one of the cubicles. There was no one on the pallet. 'This is Notoa's room,' he explained. 'Before he was assigned for Mandunga, you remember, he gave his wife quite a thrashing – her eyes were black for days after. But he seemed to love his wife as passionately as he hated her, made love to her much more often and for much longer periods of time than our more normal men do with their wives. Well, Notoa doesn't want to beat his wife any more, that's true, but he doesn't want to caress her either, he's bored with her. When she came to visit him yesterday she obediently lay down on his pallet so that he could take his pleasure of her but he simply ignored her, sat in a corner munching on his nails and drawing parakeets and dozing off from time to time.'

'Love which is tabooed by the village', Ubu said, 'cannot be enjoyed. True love is gentle and with much quiet and no tonus, not wild.'

'When I cut out the aggression much of the sexuality goes too, they're Siamese twins. Maybe love is only for the wild.'

'Those who enjoy such love are sick.'

'Tell that to Notoa's wife,' Martine said. He remembered his last conversation with the woman: she hadn't had an orgasm since Notoa's operation, she was scared out of her wits that she might *never* be satisfied any more, she knew that often happened to the wives of Mandungabas. 'She's getting very tense.'

'Then she is sick also. Perhaps Mandunga –'

'Absolutely not!'

Ubu was disturbed by the doctor's sudden forcefulness. 'Dear friend, is there something wrong?'

'We've had this out before. So long as a woman is not an active physical danger to anybody I will not attack her orgasm with a knife, even if you think it's worse than an epileptic fit.'

'It is a sickness,' the old man said stubbornly. 'We have many normal women in our village. Why do they not have this wildness?'

'For a very good reason – because you define a normal woman as one who does *not* have this wildness. It's a joke, Ubu. Do you know why we always speak of these matters in my language, English? I'll tell you why, it's because you have no words for

such things in Mandunji. Oh, I know, I know, for you this orgasm business, especially in a woman, is a collapse, a pathological letting-go, the same thing has been believed by many tribes. But I have told you over and over that it is a sickness only if the community *says* it is a sickness. In the West, where I came from, it was something that everybody wanted and was encouraged to want, even women. Perhaps one woman out of ten fully achieved it and perhaps only four men out of ten, but the sickness was *not* to have it. According to the doctors, anyway, the better doctors. The priests were a little mixed up about the subject.'

'It cannot be a good thing,' Ubu said. 'The women who work to have it build up too much tension.'

'Orgasm is the body's best way of discharging its tension. Maybe a seesaw is better than a coffin.'

They passed through the animal lab; marmosets and spider monkeys, pottos and slow lorises raised their bandaged heads and regarded the two men with indifference. At the far end of the room they passed through an archway and entered Martine's office-library. They sat down on matted-straw chairs.

Martine waved his hand at the bound volumes which lined the walls, hundreds of them, the case histories and experimental records accumulated in eighteen and a half years of Mandunga. 'If the queer-limbs come', he said, 'they must not get their hands on all this. Whether they come as friends or as enemies.'

'What bad could they do with it?'

'Such knowledge can be misused, it's happened before.'

'You have something to propose?'

'If you had asked me that earlier', Martine said seriously, 'I would have proposed something very concrete. Instead of destroying the contraband spears and poison darts and bolos made by the troubled ones, cache them away and keep them sharp. And instead of cutting the bloodthirstiness out of the troubled ones, keep them in fighting trim.'

'Ah,' Ubu said, shaking his head, 'you are making fun again.'

'Not at all. Obviously, these violent ones are the only Mandunji ready to fight for the village. That lunatic fringe might have made a first-rate rampart...'

'This is not meeting the problem.'

'Right,' Martine said gloomily. 'But mumbling peace-to-all and holding empty hands out isn't meeting it either.' He sat up in his chair and waved his index finger at the chief. 'Look here,' he said, 'suppose we took all those hacked-up monkeys out there and set them loose in the jungle? Why, their unlobotomized brethren, who still have the pathways of lust and attack open in their corticalthalamic areas, would tear them to ribbons in a minute... Hell, I don't know what to propose, really...'

They sat without talking, the old man with a look of bewilderment on his face, the doctor stroking his chin and staring at the volumes in his bookshelves.

Sound of running in the corridor; a young villager burst into the room panting and covered with sweat. His hands were trembling as they went out in greeting. 'The elders sent me,' he said, in between shuddering breaths. 'The queer-limbs, the glass-limbs have landed!'

'Not glass,' Martine said irritably. 'I've told you over and over. Plastic, probably. Some kind of plastic.'

Ubu stood up, pulling his robe around him. 'How did it happen?'

'A ship came near the shore,' the boy said. 'Then from the ship a second ship, a smaller one, rose up in the air with wings flying around and around very fast and floated over the village.'

'Helicopter,' Martine muttered.

'Then it went back to the large ship and picked up many men and brought them in to land at a clearing. All men with funny arms and legs. Now they are cutting their way through the jungle with flames and saws.'

Martine sighed and rose to his feet. 'All right,' he said. 'If they mean us harm we can do nothing, but if they don't then we must play a game.'

'A game?' Ubu was puzzled.

'Yes. First, these strangers mustn't find out that so many of the villagers know English. Only a few, including you, Ubu, must let on that they know the language. You be spokesman, you like the role. You can easily explain how you know the language by saying that long before the war – the *third* war, in case there've been others since then – you were over on the African mainland, say in Johannesburg, as a student.'

'What shall I say?'

'Tell them nothing about the village, nothing. And try to find out everything you can about why they've come here. Oh, and one other thing –' Here Martine hesitated, made a face.

'Tell me,' Ubu said eagerly.

'If it seems in order, try tactfully to inquire about their arms and legs. Ah – no, on second thought, maybe you'd better not. I've got a feeling... Maybe you'd better skip the whole thing.'

'What will you be doing, Martine?'

'I'll be hiding in my hut. Under no circumstances breathe a word about a white man living in the village.'

'Yes,' said Ubu. 'Anything else?'

'All the Mandungabas must be kept out of sight. If it does happen that these men notice the Mandunga marks on somebody, explain them this way: say they are harmless decorations, like tattoos. You know what a tattoo is, you've seen the one on my arm.'

'Let us pray it works.'

'Yes,' Martine said as they walked down the corridor to the entrance. 'And if it doesn't let's regret all those lunatics we whittled into pacifists. A little spare tonus might come in handy in the next hour or so.'

CHAPTER 3

The first ones came by land. Deep in the jungle there was a low woosh and rumble like the surge of surf far away, strangled bassoons, it grew louder and soon there was added to it a soprano effect, shrill metallic yelps such as might be made by steel teeth eating into bark and wood pulp. Wisps of smoke began to curl out of the foliage; the villagers stood motionless around the maize grinder, watching.

The smoke grew denser, billowing black clouds spurted from the trees. Suddenly a ten-foot-wide wall of fire appeared on the edge of the jungle, the villagers sighed in terror, trees were crashing and bushes and vines went up in puffs of intense white flame. In a moment, as though by the flick of a switch, the sheet of fire was gone and behind it everyone could see that a ten-foot tunnel had been blasted open in the vegetation.

In the pathway stood the strangers.

Martine lay on the wooden floor of his haphazard attic, Ooda beside him. Through a slit in the thatching he studied the first white men he had seen in over eighteen years. It was true, it was all true. They were wearing shorts and T-shirts with large blue 'M's on their front, their limbs were exposed. Instead of arms and legs they had transparent extensions whose smooth surfaces shone in the sun. Each of these limbs was a tangle of metallic rods and coils, scattered all through each one were tiny bulbs which lit up and faded as the limb moved, sending off spatters of icy blue light. The strangers advanced a short distance into the open, arms and legs flashing as though, yes, as though they contained swarms of fireflies. And now something else: with each movement a very faint staccato sequence of clicks and clacks, an almost inaudible susurring, as of twigs snapping.

All of these men had four artificial limbs, always four, but the ones in front, the ones who had cleared the path through the jungle, were wearing specialized instruments in place of their right arms. Some had what looked like flame-throwers, long tubes terminating in funnel-shaped nozzles which were still smoking, a moment ago they had been spitting out fifty-foot tongues of fire (the bassoons); others had long many-jointed claws on the ends of which were mounted high-speed rotary saws (the sopranos). Some twenty of these men emerged from the thicket. When they stopped, those in the lead pulled the tools from their arm stumps, picked up regular plastic arms which were hanging from their belts, and snapped them into place in the empty sockets.

They stood in a group, surveying the village and the natives assembled in dead silence behind Ubu. They made no further move. Except for the blasting and cutting tools now dangling from their waists they seemed to have nothing even remotely resembling a weapon with them. They talked quietly among themselves, looking up to the sky from time to time as though expecting something there.

In a few seconds another group, aerialists, came into sight some forty or fifty feet over the tops of the raffia trees. Each was self-propelled: two counter-rotating rotors attached to an elongated right arm made each man a human helicopter.

The airborne ones landed as a unit and quickly substituted regular arms for the helicopter ones. They then closed ranks with the others and the whole group began to move toward the centre of the village where Ubu stood waiting, the elders arranged in an anxious half-moon behind him. The strangers walked with the ease and assurance of normal men, even more, even a little cockily, their legs taking firm, brisk steps and their arms swinging gracefully at their sides. At the head of the party strode a well-built, good-looking man in his late thirties, close-cropped moustache, rather taller than the others and with an indefinable air of authority about him. The face under his crew-cut blond hair was firm and powerful in spite of its ruddy youthfulness, there was strength in it, but he was smiling now.

'Oh, bad,' Ooda whispered. 'Bad, bad, bad.'

'Shhh,' Martine said, squinting to get a clearer look at the leader's face. 'Be patient, monkey. Maybe it's not as bad as you think.'

'They're all like you, Martine. Only for the arms and legs.'

'That's a big only.'

That handsome, genial, youngish face interested him. In fact, the whole shape of the head interested him. The skull was impressively broad, that was one thing. 'Brachycephalic,' he whispered. His free hand automatically curled, as though taking hold of something.

The big man came to a halt several feet from Ubu, flanked by two of his comrades; the others remained tactfully behind him. At a nod from the leader his two companions turned to Ubu.

'*Wamba dumuji kuana ashatu?*' one said.

Ubu's eyes opened wide, he said nothing.

'*Bwa zamzam, bwa riri?*' the second man said.

Ubu was still silent.

'Try again,' the leader said in English. 'Maybe you'll hit on something.'

'*Fakshi tumpar, oo ah?*' the first man said.

Through his terror Ubu finally got the point: these men were not simply making peculiar noises, they were translators. He understood what he had to do and raised his hands in the palms-up gesture. 'Peace to all,' he said in English. 'Long life. May *the* war stay on *the* other side of *the* river.' He felt it was only polite that on such an occasion he should use the full greeting rather than one of its abbreviated forms.

The leader was startled. 'I'll be damned,' he said. 'No. Don't tell me you speak English?'

'Oh, yes,' Ubu said. It made him feel good to be able to please the stranger. 'I have studied English, I know many words, Prognosis, electronic, bohemian, cobra, rampart.'

Now he remembered that he was supposed to explain his knowledge of English and he hurried on to tell the story: Johannesburg, school, long time ago, and so on.

'That's interesting,' the stranger said. He held out his hands as he had seen Ubu do. 'Peace,' he said. 'My name is Theo.'

'Mine Ubu. Is.'

'I'm very glad to know you, Mr Ubu.' The stranger was studying the old man's face, politely but with interest. 'Tell me, Mr Ubu, are your people in any way related to a tribe called the Bantus? There's something in your faces... Your island isn't indicated on any of our maps, we haven't been able to find a reference to it anywhere.'

'There is some of Bantu in us. Likewise Malay. Likewise Arab. Many things. We are the Mandunji.'

Yvfandunji? That's a new one on me.'

'Few people on the outside know of us, we make no trouble.'

'Where did you get your name?'

'Easy to explain. In our language *Mandunji* means literally, "those whose heads are without devils". You see, we have also a word *Mandunga*, it is a verb meaning "to chase the devils from the head", it refers to some of our old ceremonies, our name comes from the same root. Among us there are also some people called *Mandungabas*, this means "those from whose heads the devils have been chased". However,' the thought occurred to him that he might be talking too much, he felt Martine's eyes on him, 'to make a free translation, perhaps in English one would say *Mandunji* means simply "the sane ones, the normal". Among us it is considered a very good idea to be normal, we have a great respect for it.'

'Fascinating, fascinating,' Theo said enthusiastically. 'My people too have great respect for the normal and they also hope that war will stay on the other side of the river, all rivers. We have a lot in common.'

'Your people?' Ubu said courteously. 'By what name are they known?'

'We are Inland Strippers. We come from a place called the Inland Strip.'

'It is a big island?'

Theo laughed, not at all offensively. 'Big as hell,' he said. 'Used to be called America. You've heard of it?'

'Oh, indeed. Many times, when I attended school.'

'Well, the Inland Strip is the only part of America that's inhabited now. You see, there are many fewer people there now, since the Third... Oh, excuse me, I mean the third war, that's the way we refer to it. You know about the war?'

'Ah, rumph, yes, some men came in a ship many years ago and told us of the terrible events. EMSIAC, hydrogen bombs, radiological dust, supersonic ships. I remember many things. They said Johannesburg was an ash heap.'

The old man stopped in confusion: his muscles were stiff with tension, it was such a horrible effort to lie. Especially to a person as pleasant and friendly as this Theo. He longed to put away all the subterfuges and talk frankly with the good man, tell him everything. But, aside from other deterrents, Martine was listening.

'Yes,' Theo said soberly. 'For a short time during the war I served in Africa. I saw with my own eyes what happened to Johannesburg. Johannesburg and many other cities.'

He noticed that Ubu was staring at his body.

'Oh?' he said. 'You haven't heard about Immob?'

'Immob?'

'Yes. That's what behind these arms and legs.'

'Is it that you and your friends were injured in, in the Third? In some hydrogen explosions?' Ubu said sympathetically.

'No, no, nothing like that. Immob has to do with a very great effort to keep the war, the steamroller of war, on the other side of the river. Forever.'

Theo was obviously pleased with himself for having found exactly the right formulation for his thought. He moved several steps closer to Ubu. 'Mr Ubu, I'd like to tell you why we are here. We come in friendship, with no desire to upset the life of your village. You see, my comrades here are all athletes. You know what athletes are?'

'I remember from school,' Ubu said uncertainly. 'Running and lifting weights and walking on the hands. Things like that.'

'Exactly. Men who engage in sports must train, practise, and that's what we are now doing – we're on a training cruise, and we stop here and there on our travels to see new sights and meet different peoples. We'd like very much to know your island better, especially since it's not charted on any of our maps, we'd like to collect some data on your flora and your fauna, too – for example, my hobby is butterfly collecting. Our intention is to establish a base at the other end of the island, where we won't be a bother to you, and make some surveys.'

'You will stay long?'

'I myself must leave in a few weeks, but the rest of the party will stay for some months. They'll be making some more expeditions around.'

'Good. We shall talk much and tell each other many things.'

'That'll be just wonderful. We'd like to know all about your people, and it may interest you to hear about the Immobs. We'll be friends.'

'You come in peace, Mr Theo,' Ubu said, 'and you are welcomed in peace. I shall send to you a present of some sweet *cassava*, it is what you call tapioca, I believe. Relieves intestinal tonus, very excellent for the bowels.'

'Thank you,' Theo said. 'Perhaps you would like some pistachio ice cream.'

The two men looked at each other with mutual respect. They ceremoniously extended their hands toward one another again, Theo's flickering. Then the white man turned and, accompanied by his friends, retreated across the clearing, disappeared into the newly cut pathway.

Ubu stood for some time, looking thoughtfully at the mouth of the tunnel; some of the bushes and plants were still smouldering from the searing fire of the flame-throwers. Then he faced about and went to Martine's house.

The doctor was standing in the doorway, staring at the hole in the jungle down which the strangers had vanished. Brachycephalic as hell, skull at least as broad as it was long, cranial proportions at least 10:10, he was thinking. And Immob? What, for God's sake, was Immob? Nonsense syllable. But his pulse had never before been sent racing at 120, at least 120, by a nonsense syllable.

'You heard?' the old man asked.

'Most of it.'

'You feared for no reason.'

'Maybe.'

'But this Mr Theo is such a nice, friendly man! There is no harm in him, he would not trouble a spider.'

'The guy certainly spoke well enough, but that whole line about training cruises and flora and fauna – it sounds fishy to me.'

'You see fish everywhere, Doctor, it is the characteristic of tonicity.'

Martine turned his head – Ooda, standing in the shadow inside, quiet and anxious. He reached out, drew her close to him. 'I see something else: a great fire-shooting arm and a great sharp-toothed hand. These could be very nasty weapons. Worse than a slingshot. Or a steamroller.'

'What suspicious is there in all this? It seems to me very simple: all the men from your country are in love with machines, they make all kinds of machines, very good, these arms and legs are just more of the toy machines they like to make.'

'You once saw what such toys can do. Or don't you remember what Johannesburg and Durban and Cape Town looked like after my people got through playing with them?'

'No connexion,' Ubu insisted. 'Mr Theo says his country wants only to keep the war on the other side of the river. However, if they want to collect some plants and insects, why not?'

'Let them go swishing their butterfly nets all over the place,' Martine said absent-mindedly. 'Maybe they're all harmless as rabbits. In any case, their coming here complicates matters a good deal.'

'I do not follow.'

'I mean just this: under no circumstance can they learn about my work here. I absolutely insist on that. All Mandunga ceremonies must be suspended completely. All us devil-chasers are out of work, Ubu, let's face it.'

'Suspended?' Ubu said dully.

'More: the cave must be sealed up, with all the records and research data. All the experimental animals must be destroyed – if we turned those four-footed pacifists loose in the jungle our visitors would certainly come upon them and wonder at their scars and strange behaviour. Besides, you can't keep all the Mandungabas under cover indefinitely and Theo's men would soon see a connexion between their scars and the scars on the animals. Remember: you must all act as though Mandunga does not exist and never existed. Or Martine, either.'

'You, you, you,' Ubu echoed. 'Always you say you, not we. What of yourself?'

'I was thinking about that,' Martine said. 'Obviously I can't stay here.'

He felt Ooda's shoulders stiffen, he held his arm tighter around her.

'Why not, Martine? We could hide you, maybe in the cave.'

'For months? I'd go nuts with boredom. Besides, these are smart, observant people, if there were a white man on the island they'd find out about it one way or another. Especially since our people aren't good liars. You yourself were ready to blab the works just a few minutes ago, weren't you, when you were talking to the nice man? No, I've got to disappear, there's no other way.'

Before Ubu could say anything, before Ooda could find words for the fear that was spilling into her eyes, Rambo came across the clearing and approached his parents' hut.

'You sent for me, Father?'

'Yes,' Martine said. 'I have a job for you. I want you to go to the camp of these strangers.'

The boy's alert eyes widened, but he said nothing.

'You will carry a basket of sweet *cassava*, tell them it is the present Ubu promised. No doubt they'll be very polite, ask you to stay and eat or drink. Accept, and in the course of the conversation, without showing any unusual curiosity, ask them certain things about their country which I must know. Do you think you can do that, Rambo?'

'Yes.'

Martine began to enumerate, item by item, the things he wanted to find out, going into careful detail about those matters which could not mean very much to the boy: passports, routes of travel, currency, clothes, and so on. When he was through the boy nodded, promised to report as soon as he returned, and left.

Ubu hardly heard the exchange between Martine and Rambo. 'Disappear where, dear friend?' the old man said now with some agitation. 'Komoro? Madagascar? If these strangers can find you here, they can find you anywhere in the archipelago.'

'I know that,' Martine said. 'I've thought the whole thing out. I can disappear only in one place – where all the other people look like me.'

'Martine...'

'I've got to go to America, or whatever's left of it. Incognito, of course. You should understand that: all the normal Mandunji live with each other all their lives incognito.'

'You must not go,' Ubu said in a trembling voice. 'They think you dead, do not change their minds. Besides, you cannot leave us, your friends...'

'Maybe you're friends of another one of my incognitos.' But there were tears in the old man's eyes. 'Don't go dramatic on me, Ubu,' Martine said gently. 'That's another thing about low tonus, it makes you sentimental as hell, your emotions get as flabby as your muscles. It's just that I'm curious about what's been happening back there, now that I've seen these soft-spoken monsters. I want to examine *their* flora and fauna.'

'If you go you – you will not come back,' Ubu said. 'You will forget us. How shall we live without you now?'

'This is my home. I'll come back, count on it.'

Ubu was silent for a long time. Martine could feel Ooda's body quaking in his arm as though she had a chill. Finally the old chief said in a low voice, 'When shall you leave, Martine?'

Martine held Ooda tight. 'The sooner the better,' he said. 'Tonight, if it's possible.'

CHAPTER 4

They lay on the slabs of foam rubber (salvaged from the seats of a cocktail lounge in Pretoria), their bodies just touching. After a while she reached out and lit another cigarette of *ganja*.

The moonlight streaming in through the aperture in the far wall, spray of pearl dust, cut across their bodies just above the knees; he studied the juxtaposed shanks. Hers was a tawny brown, brown of chestnuts and dried tobacco leaf, sprinkled with bronzing; his, for all the years of exposure to a brutal sun, remained a white man's leg, low in melanin, chalky, cheeky. Smug leg. Arrogant. Wore its bleach like a white badge of asepsis, a halo. The white man's burden was first of all whiteness.

Her body was still trembling, he could feel it. With her, agitation always took a motoric turn. She had it bad this time.

And so, finally, after centuries of sahibism, these two legs, hatched and stained in opposite hemispheres, one in the leafy suburbs of Salt Lake City, the other in a jungle some hundreds of miles southeast of Antananarive, now lying side by side on a mattress of foam rubber in the middle of the Indian Ocean. One filled with the messianic blood of Mormons, the other with a pacifist Bantu-Arab-Malay brew called Mandunji. A coupling to shatter a Kipling...

She made a hissing sound as she pulled the smoke into her lungs, inhaling kinesthetic ease, trying to.

'Have you been happy with me?' he said.

She took another puff on the cigarette and passed it to him. He sipped as she had taught him; held the smoke as long as he could, then let it out in dabs which he immediately sucked up again and swallowed. He felt the tingling in his viscera, in his toes, in his fingers, the stuff was as penetrating in its way as diathermy.

'I mean really happy,' he said. 'All the way. So you feel there is nothing more.'

He handed the cigarette back to her. He had to deliver a lecture tonight, he had just this moment decided on it, it would be tricky, he would need his wits about him.

'Well,' he said. 'Have you?'

'Happy?'

He understood the sullen question in her voice. Many times, in the early days, he had asked her the same thing, and always her answer had been: 'The word has no meaning for me. It is a sound, like water running. When my people mean it goes well they say it is peaceful, quiet – is that what you mean? No, it has not been peaceful.'

'I am not talking about peace,' he said. 'You were not meant for peace, you did not have peace before I came.'

'No, but I was alone. I did not live near others. There was no one close enough to hurt me. When I felt a hurt it came from inside, not from another... Now the hurt comes from you. You are near but many times I feel alone...'

'I want to know: in your life with me, do you use yourself up? All of you? You feel that what is in you comes out, you like the feeling? Do you yawn?'

She took a long drag on the cigarette, held her breath. 'No,' she said, sulky, as she exhaled. 'I do not yawn.'

'Is it good not to be sleepy?'

'This is how I would have it, not the regular way. With you it is very low one moment, very high the next, always the going up or down. I would not like it to be the same always. Although when we are low – when you go away from me and into yourself – it is sometimes very bad. It does not bother me too much.' He felt her body begin to tremble again, worse than before. 'Now we are down far, to the bottom. I feel a hurt that will make me crazy.'

'No. No.'

He put his arms around her and drew her to him. She tried to fight down the sobs, he stroked her shoulder. Her body was lithe and compact, she was thirty-six now but with no suggestion of flabbiness or sag in her flesh. Not skimpy, breasts full and firm, hips gently swelling, a roundness in the thighs; still, unlike the more typical women of the village, she had a slender and hard-packed quality. Concentration. Very much like himself, although he was more clearly the cerebrotonic with a touch of the somatonic. If the mixtures were slightly different (he lived more in the nerves, she in the muscles), the ingredients were the same. They were birds of a mottled feather. A taboo feather.

'Monkey,' he said, 'while I'm away you must not smoke any more. It could be serious.'

'No more bed,' she said. 'No more talk. No more ganja. I am to stop living when you go. And you always go. Somewhere, where I am not to follow.'

'You must be careful. You know that you have a need to be very active when you are feeling bad, that in itself is dangerous in the village. When you smoke the need is greater.'

'That is my business.'

'Mine too. When I'm here I can protect you but there are many who don't like you, even fear you, as they fear all who are different. Many were sent for Mandunga only because they smoked, before I came.'

'When you go, the knives go,' she said bitterly. 'I do not fear the cave.'

'If you are found smoking it will go badly with you, even without Mandunga. They will find ways to hurt you. The mild ones often make the best torturers.'

'What is the use to save myself? You will not come back.'

'Why shouldn't I? There's nothing there to keep me.'

'Something will keep you. Another woman with her orgasms, something.'

He could not help laughing. 'Jealousy too? You know the normal ones consider themselves above that sort of thing, it's much too violent an emotion.'

'Jealousy. Another word you taught me. Another hurt.'

'That's so, isn't it? I guess my real contribution to your life was a vocabulary of distress. But not only that. Also a vocabulary of joy.'

'Jealousy. Happy, unhappy. Orgasm. All the up-and-down things.'

'But remember.' He propped himself up on one elbow and tried to see her face in the dark. 'Listen and remember this: you were up-and-down before I came. All I gave you was a language to describe the swings of the seesaw. You can blame me for the words, not the seesaw. And to be on a seesaw is not the worst thing.'

'You make it the worst. You lift me up very high and then you go away. Always you are going away a little. Even in bed... Ah,, sometimes I hate you. All this talk. I could scratch your eyes out.'

'Fine Mandunji sentiment. People have lost all of Region Nine, and a good part of the thalamus too, for less.' He began to run his fingers down the fine warm curve of her back, down to the compact haunches. 'I'm sorry, monkey. I haven't always been good to you. Sometimes... There are many things that trouble me, now with these queer-limbs –'

He stopped: sound of footsteps outside.

'Father?'

It was Rambo. He slipped into his shorts and went out.

'I did as you said.'

Martine nodded.

'Many things were happening in their camp. Some were using long poles and jumping over trees with them. Others were leaping in the air, twenty and thirty feet, and turning many somersaults each time. Others were picking up whole trees they had cut down and throwing them as though they were only spears. All this they were doing for Mr Theo, he told each one of his mistakes and how he could do better.'

'How did they act toward you?'

'Very friendly, we talked and I learned some words. They call themselves amps, from amputee. The arms and legs they wear are pros, that is short for pro, oh, prosthetics. In their country most of the younger men are amps and almost all wear the pros but there are quite a few men of your age, men over forty, who are not amps. There are different kinds of amps, it depends on how many arms and legs are gone – uni-amps, duo-amps, tri-amps, quadro-amps. Then they also have the word Immob –'

'Good, good.' He was annoyed by the nonsensical word, made an impatient gesture to cut Rambo short. 'What else?'

Rambo went on to give a full report, running in sequence through the items his father had outlined. Martine listened attentively: some of the information was astonishing, nearly all of it was good. The trip was not only feasible, it promised to be a cinch.

'One thing more,' Rambo said. 'I do not know the meaning of it. When I was going to the camp I heard noises from the jungle.'

'What sort of noises?'

'I couldn't identify them so I left the path and went to look. I was very careful, no one saw me. The thing I found was strange. They have made their camp down at the low end of the island, near a place where there are many rocks and boulders and high walls of stone. Many of the queer-limbs were at this place, some had instruments in place of their arms, high-speed drills and scoops and other things for digging and breaking stone. These men chipped out little pieces of stone and others took them to some

machines, they poured chemicals over them and examined them under special lights and things like that. After a while I left and went on to the camp.'

'This begins to make sense,' Martine said. 'Oh, a whole lot of sense.'

'What does it mean, Father?'

'They say they're interested only in sightseeing and in collecting flora and fauna, but the first day they begin to examine rocks. A much more meaningful hobby... You did well, Rambo. This news only proves what I've thought right along: I must go.' He looked at the boy. 'You know I'm going away?'

'Yes,' Rambo said soberly.

'How do you know?'

'Ubu has arranged a special feast in the eating room, they are all there now.'

Martine looked across the clearing toward the large communal mess at the other end of the village: it seemed more brightly lit than usual, people were going in and out with baskets on their heads.

'They are eating some peculiar stuff,' Rambo said. 'Very cold and sticky. Theo sent it in return for the cassava.'

'It must be the ice cream he promised. What colour is it?'

'Green. With little solid pieces in it.'

'Pistachio ice cream!' Martine said. 'Very, very good for the bowels.' He thought hard for a moment. Then, in a whisper: 'Two more things I want you to do, Rambo. In back of the machine shop, in the shed, I have some valises packed and some baskets of food. Get a couple of the boys to help you and carry everything down to the boat – I'm taking the blue-and-white power catamaran. Then visit all the students and assistants and nurses, take them aside and tell them one by one to slip away in an hour's time and go to the lecture room in the cave. Only the young ones, understand, only those who have worked with me, no others. You will come yourself, of course, I want you to hear.'

'All right, Father.'

Martine watched the boy disappear around the side of the hut, then went back inside. As soon as he rejoined Ooda he reached out and touched her thigh: her first response was to move away. He caught hold of her leg and pulled her back toward him, desire began to stir in him as he increased the pressure. The miracle of flesh: pliant on the outside, steel inside; one learned that at the breast. She lay back without moving, yielding to his superior strength but implying that she would defeat him by another stratagem – indifference.

'Passivity?' he said. 'Oh, no. It doesn't become you. You're not that normal.'

The more he caressed her, the more he sensed the tension in her body as she strained to keep from reacting.

'You devil, devil,' she said.

She jerked into a sitting position, swivelled, began to pummel him. On the legs, on the shoulders, on the rib-cage – her fists avoiding the genitals and the eyes and other parts of the face; even as a berserker she chose her targets carefully. Her muscles chortled, her nerves chirped, this was what she had needed all evening. The good feel of his obstinate flesh giving under her knuckles. The retreat of his stubborn bone and

cartilage. The stinging impact of skin against skin. This was *her* will on parade. Good, good, good.

He lay with his body tensed against the attack, it hurt but he did not try to stop it. He knew that she had never felt so much torment before and he had no pain-killers for her. Besides, within this hate there was a firm skeleton of love, he knew that too. There were times when to love meant to be a punching-bag for the one you loved. Especially if it was your taste to love a somatotone.

All of a sudden her belligerence caved away in an unaccountable landslide: one, two, it was gone. The rigid cylinder of her body collapsed and she was all concave and receptive, a bowl of yearning. Her arms went imperiously around him. 'Martine,' she whispered. 'Ah, yes, I want you.'

For the first time tonight she was speaking to him in Mandunji. It was their language of intimacy, they fell into it automatically when they were closest. The first night he had made love to her, months after he came to the island, at the height of it he had found himself whispering to her in his faltering Mandunji, wildly, in a gust of feeling. It had given him a strange, triumphant glow. He had thought: I am speaking to her in her language, I am reaching her, for the first time I am reaching a woman. After that they had fallen into an easy pattern of talk, English for the day-to-day things, Mandunji for the times of the night when there was nothing but a jabbering schizoid jungle and they were burrowed in it, holding on tight to each other in their pooled loneliness...

A long time later: 'Martine, Martine. Stay with me. With you I am used, I use myself. All that there is in me.'

'It will be that way again. I will come back.'

He raised his head from her shoulder.

'I want you to know. In my country a long time ago I had a wife. It was bad. She was like the normal ones here in the village, even worse – the normal ones here are not supposed to feel anything and they do not pretend to feel, but she pretended. What you feel with me she pretended to feel. It was a game. I knew all the time that she pretended but I never told her I knew, I pretended that I had been fooled by her. That was my part of the game. Very often it happened this way in my country, and not only in my country. Here they say you are not normal, but you are very lucky to be as you are and not to know about this.'

He took her hand and held it cupped against his cheek.

'Listen. We have done everything together, you and I. Night after night. It was never like this for me before, you are more woman than I have ever known. What days I have left, I wish to spend with you. Oh, I will come back.' He slipped his arms around her and held her tight. 'When I come back,' he said, 'I will not go away from you again. Even a little. I will try. I do not want to be so troubled and turned in on myself, but there is something – and lately...' He got up, pulled on his shorts and a shirt.

'Now?' she said. 'You are going now?'

'No, no. I have a headache, there are no pills here. I will go to the cave to get some.' He leaned over and kissed her. 'Try to eat something,' he said. 'There is some tapioca on the table.'

CHAPTER 5

How, really, do you go about saying good-bye? With a lingering toodle-oo? With a kick of the heels and a soft-shoe shuffle? It was over eighteen years since he'd gone anywhere, he'd forgotten how the thing was done.

Leaning against the edge of the desk, looking down at the rows of intent faces, he went on talking about facts, history, matters of the record; all very objective and impersonal. When you can't say an intimate thing you can always lecture: a technique for using words to insulate yourself against your audience.

There were, he mechanically reminded his listeners, two important dates in Mandunji history. The first, as nearly as one could guess from the old stories told around the evening fires, was in the fourteenth century, that was when the founding fathers, fleeing from the wars in Africa and Madagascar, had accidentally come upon this remote button of land and decided to settle here. With them, of course, they brought a recently developed ceremony named Mandunga. The second date could be given a little more exactly: 19 October 1972, at 7.21 in the morning. That was when he, Martine, in flight from the EMSIAC wars, had caught sight of this island – again, entirely by accident – and brought his plane down. With him he had all the tools for a recently developed ceremony called lobotomy. Mandunga and lobotomy met, looked at each other, and saw with a start that they were twins.

'Those are the two dates,' he said. 'In the six hundred-odd years between them, nothing happened. It was not because people were too busy to precipitate big events and promote memorable excitements and create red-letter days that would remain in the tribal mind. They were just too sleepy. Sleepy people do not make history, they just yawn. For the Mandunji, the gap between the fourteenth century and the twentieth century is one long yawn.'

Since 1972, he went on, things had gotten a bit livelier – a certain dynamism had filtered into the village. This was due first of all to the machine, all the machines which had been salvaged from the deserted African cities and made to run the traditional tools of the village.

Quite a few of them were now half-doctors, and good ones; others were more than competent laboratory technicians, machinists, chemists, pharmacologists, electronics engineers of a sort, even statisticians; still others were anaesthetists, nurses, and so on.

There was change in the village, dramatic change. It could be defined first of all in medical terms. They all knew the statistics of the past fifteen years or so: infant mortality cut down almost to zero, deaths in childbirth practically eliminated, most infectious diseases wiped out or under control, no epidemic of malaria or anything else for almost a decade, no deaths from snake bites, gangrene, perforated appendixes, and peritonitis, no more hookworm or elephantiasis, no villagers left crippled because of unbalanced diet or inept bonesetting. This medical care by itself had broken up long-standing 'facts' and made them turn into their opposites.

'Always in the past,' Martine said, 'the Mandunji were so appalled by energy that they could not tolerate any display of it. Whenever they saw an active man, they assumed that the energy activating him was the energy of belligerence, and therefore a threat.'

He stopped and rubbed his temples with his fingers, blinking hard. He felt overheated, the thoughts were racing, maybe he'd had more *ganja* than he'd thought.

'Here is the point,' he said, wondering whether, after all, he knew what the damned slippery point was, whether there was any. 'In a village where everything is habit and repetition, no man can feel that he is in control of anything, the outside world or himself. He is not a doer but a thing done to, a victim. Even his body is a victim: of germs, of hookworms, of all the other dangerous things in Nature which are not stamped out or subdued. Of backbreaking labour from sunup to sundown, because it would take too much will to invent labour-saving devices.

'All right,' he said more forcefully. 'You young people sitting in this cave, you are the first ones in the history of your village to shake off some of the sense of menace and taste the sense of power. The first for whom the world is not entirely a steamroller –' He frowned; hadn't meant to say that. 'The very first. You have begun to acquire some control over your bodies – with pills, with drugs, with microscopes and splints – and simultaneously over the physical world in which your bodies are planted with the tools I have just mentioned, and also with the machines and other equipment. All of that became possible only because you had the audacity to break away from routine and make yourselves into something new. As a result, the human body in our village is healthier than it has ever been before. But we have learned that diseases are not only of the body, they are also of the mind. So we must now ask: How healthy is the human mind on our island? What about Mandunga?

'About Mandunga, one big point. It is a wrong thing and a bad thing to make fun of the old people. They may begin to look ridiculous, with their solemn ceremonies and their set ways, but there are very strong reasons for their attachment to certain archaic forms and attitudes. You will find those reasons in the harrowing past of your tribe. You all know the story...'

They did, indeed, know the story. They had heard it many times from Martine's lips. The story began at an undetermined time, on some undetermined plateau in north-central Africa. Here, barricaded from the outside by a ring of mountains, lived the X's, pastoral, vegetarians, without the spears and knives of the hunter and the warrior. One day they were discovered and overrun by a band of fierce young men, offshoots of the Bantu tribes far to the east: lean and hungry young men, bristling with arms, without women – they had been banished from their own villages because they had been discovered plotting to kill their fathers and take over the households of women monopolized by their fathers. The X-men were enslaved, the X-women expropriated.

Thus began the X-Bantus. Life was easy on the plateau, the warriors from the east relaxed and forgot about meat eating and turned their hunter's spears into spades. Then came another throng of strangers: burnoosed and sword-brandishing Arabs, fleeing from the terrible wars of extermination in the deserts far to the north. Lean and hungry, armed to the teeth, without women, and so on. Thus began the X-Bantu-Arabs.

Peace again – until scouting parties reported more bands of wild men swooping down from the north. In panic the chiefs gathered and reached a decision: they must become

nomads and tiptoe southward to a haven beyond the reach of war and the fugitives from war.

They ran away. For many years they wandered wretchedly. Many died. Through the Sudan and Kenya they wandered -as Martine reconstructed it from the old stories – into Tanganyika, then west to the Congo, then east again through the Rhodesias. So, finally, to Mozambique and the placid blue waters of the Mozambique Channel. They settled here in a lush coastal area, far from the scrapes and skirmishes of other peoples, and time passed. Then a violent war broke out between two tribes to the north.

The X-Bantu-Arabs were attacked, many were killed. The survivors piled into their boats and paddled furiously to sea, not knowing what was ahead, knowing only that once more they had to run from something behind.

They reached the shores of Madagascar. Rich country, everything went smoothly, life became one long sunny romp, not too bad even for the slaves. Until the ferocious Malays put in their boats and swarmed ashore: they'd come a long way, bellies caved in, few women but many flashing scimitars, the old story. Heads hacked off, rape, enslavement. Then things were quiet for a few generations, and the population grew so rapidly that a second village was established. But soon bad blood began to develop between the two villages: each chief claimed that the other was plotting to murder him and take over his village. The slaves in both villages were put to work making more spears and bolos.

Working side by side during the day, lying side by side in their huts at night, the terrified slaves talked over what was happening and tried to evaluate it in terms of their past experiences. They had much to talk about: in each slave's veins ran the guilt-laden blood of three ravagers. And as a result of their secret musings and nocturnal communications, a radical idea began to take root in the guilty minds of the slaves: what their forefathers had been running from for centuries could not be escaped geographically, the trouble was in the head. Those who make spears and think of war have devils in their heads, they are insane. Internal geography had to be considered. And if the trouble had finally been traced to its pathological source, it was clear what had to be done by way of therapy.

Some night between 1450 and 1500, very late, the same thing happened in both villages. A group of men, faces hidden by masks with tusks and fangs and tiger tails on them, bodies slashed with brilliant paints, crept up to each chief's hut, overpowered the guards, gagged the chief, and stole away with him into the jungle. In the morning both chiefs were found on the bank of a small pool halfway between the two villages. They were bound together with braided vines, hands interlocked, and between them was the body of a freshly killed owl, symbol of peace and fraternity.

The chiefs were not dead but they were unconscious, and their heads were swathed with bandages of bark. From the forehead of each a circle of bone had been chiselled, a portion of the brain scooped out, and the bone carefully wedged back in place. They were the first Mandungabas. No way of telling whether they lived, and whether the removal of their prefrontal demons prompted them to call their war off; those who might have told the story were no longer on the scene. By this time all the slaves who could manage it were far out to sea in the hardy boats of their Malayan masters, with as many of their masters' women and children as they had been able to carry off.

They headed east, of course, southeast, rather, because to the north and west lay Africa and their memories of Africa were not good. Again they had no idea where they were going, whether they would ever find land again or simply sail to the water's edge and slip off the rim of the world, but they were happy that Madagascar was behind them. This time luck was with them: after some hundreds of miles they sighted a small, thickly overgrown island, lying far away from all the sea routes, which turned out to be entirely uninhabited. It was hard to land because of the reefs and cliffs, two boats were broken to bits and most of their passengers drowned, but the rest of them made it.

Very soon they were settled. When their nerves had stopped vibrating they began to squat around their evening fire and talk about their miraculous adventures. Mostly they talked about the great discovery they had made: that there were devils in the heads of those who wish to fight, and that these devils could be cut out with a chisel and a rock. Back on Madagascar they had decided to call this new ceremony Mandunga, 'to chase the devils from the head'. These X-Bantu-Arab-Malays now realized that they needed a name for themselves, and since they were people who had no wish whatsoever to fight they saw that it was logical to call themselves the Mandunji, 'those whose heads are without devils'. It was a definition designed to appease the guilt which everybody felt, everybody without exception – because, to be perfectly honest about it, no human head is entirely without devils. From it came the mild incognito personality of every tribesman.

They immediately decreed the therapy of the chisel for any villager who showed a taste for violence, and settled down to sleep for six hundred years...

'You all know the story,' Martine said. 'Anatomically speaking, the founders of Mandunga showed a good deal of sense. Somehow men have always known that those bumps of anticipation and anxiety, the frontal lobes, are the seat of most human troubles: from them come art, imagination, conscience, curiosity, egoness, migraine, and tension. And more than once, when confronted with behaviour which frightens them – because it reminds them unbearably of their unacknowledged selves – men have hit upon the Mandunga method of dealing with it. In many parts of the world archaeologists have dug up very old human skulls with holes bored in them, and this must be the explanation. It is, in short, a very common form of magic. In the twentieth century my own people discovered it and named it lobotomy.'

He reached up and unrolled two large sheets of pounded bark which were attached to the edge of the blackboard: both of them diagrams of the brain, showing it in top, side, and bottom views and various cross-sections. Studying them, he felt a rush of dizziness again, as though his own brain had broken loose from its moorings and started to whirl around and around inside its pan, exactly the same swimming sensation he had experienced earlier in the evening when, hidden in his attic, he had stared down at the big blond head of Theo and heard the nonsensical references to Immob.

Funny: he had only heard the word spoken once or twice, but he had a clear visual image of it – i, m, m, o, b, he was quite sure it had to be spelled that way.

He took hold of the desk to steady himself, a voice inside reassured him senselessly, 'Brachycephalics are very common,' in a moment it was over and he turned back to his audience.

'I don't have to tell you about my people,' he said. 'You know my story too...'

Back in the 1960s Martine had been a medical student in New York, preparing to be a neurosurgeon. By that time insanity had become so frequent among his people – very anticipatory, very anxious, his people – that it was a major health problem, as much as cancer: things had gotten so bad that one out of every fifteen Americans could expect to be a psychotic patient in a mental institution at some time in his life. The situation was all the more upsetting because there were not nearly enough psychiatric doctors, and those who were practising did not know enough about the diseases of the mind to do much good: there were ways to deal with some of the milder neuroses but the psychoses were very stubborn and hard to treat. Martine himself, when he finished his medical studies at the age of twenty – by that time college preparations for the technical professions had been greatly accelerated, and, besides, he had skipped some grades in public school – had been so startled by this situation that he had been tempted to go into psychiatry, but other pressures on him had been too great.

How did his people react to this growing threat? In their characteristic way: they turned to the machine for help.

Nothing more natural. His people had been remarkably good with machines, but in the course of their fantastic technological development something peculiar had happened. To oversimplify: the Americans had built themselves remarkable machines to overcome the steamroller of their environment – and then, somehow, the machine had reared up, gotten out of control, and become a new steamroller. People, cowed by the machines that had grown bigger than themselves, could no longer think except in mechanical terms. It was common knowledge, for example, that when a clock stops ticking or a simple electronic calculator develops tremors, it can often be fixed by jiggling it or giving it a kick – the jolt meshes the teeth of the cogs again, or untangles the short circuits. So, when faced with human beings breaking down in various psychotic dysfunctions, the first thing people thought of was – give the machine a jolt, shake up its gears and circuits a bit.

This they accomplished at first with a technique called shock treatment. They built electric shock machines, they induced narcotic shock with shots of insulin and metrazol. For a decade or two this was more or less the routine in mental hospitals. And a little later, after the middle of the century, the new fad became lobotomy and related brain operations. Here the principle was essentially the same, mechanical: now the troublemaking cogs and circuits were snipped out of the machine or at least cut off from it.

This form of Mandunga was the major psychiatric therapy when Martine was a medical student. There was, of course, an acute shortage of lobotomists, and since he had shown promise as a neurosurgeon he was selected to become a practitioner in the new field. He worked very hard at his studies, but as the time approached when he was to join a hospital staff and begin operating on human brains he began to feel uneasy about it. This uneasiness came from an idea that was growing in him until it became an obsession: before you irrevocably remove a portion of the brain you must be very sure that you know everything about that brain, but what medical science actually did know was next to nothing.

How could you be sure that, in allegedly cutting away some devils from the brain, you were not at the same time cutting away some guardian angels? You could only be sure of that if you knew what every single cell of the brain did, and how it was entwined with all the other cells. But there were 10,000 million cells in the brain.

Neurologists knew a tiny bit about a measly few dozen of them, maybe; and about all the possible interweavings between these 10,000 million cells, about the way they act in concert, they were almost entirely in the dark. How, then, could you know what your scalpel was doing when you slid it into the grey matter of someone's brain? You could dismiss this question and go ahead with your surgery only if you looked upon people, not as unique organisms with unique personalities – unique neuronically tangled, if you liked – but as machines. Machines are expendable and replaceable. One machine is very much like another.

This had been his dilemma: he was a lobotomist who didn't dare to go near a human lobe. He solved the problem, at least temporarily, by dodging hospital duty: went into a laboratory where they were conducting brain-surgery experiments on the higher mammals. Here he worked out some new surgical techniques and performed several unusual experiments which won him quite a reputation; his papers were published in many technical journals, he was invited to lecture before learned bodies, and so on.

But although he was helping to acquire important new knowledge about the brain, there remained the terrible doubt that this knowledge would ever be solid enough to warrant applying it to human beings via the scalpel. For one thing, he remembered what a very wise neurologist had written in 1946: 'Most of our present understanding of mind would remain as valid and useful if, for all we knew, the cranium were stuffed with cotton wadding.' For another, he was haunted by the words of Norbert Wiener, the mathematician.

He had told his students all about this unusual man – the man who during World War II had developed the science of cybernetics, the science of building machines to duplicate and improve on the functions of the animal; the man who understood more about machines and their meaning in American life than any other. Wiener had seen the horror of the mechanistic approach to the troubles of the mind. He had written this: 'Prefrontal lobotomy does seem to have a genuine effect on malignant worry, not by bringing the patient nearer to a solution of his problems, but by damaging or destroying the capacity for maintained worry, known in the terminology of another profession as the *conscience*. More generally it appears to limit all aspects of the circulating memory, the ability to keep in mind a situation not actually presented...'

Then the Third World War broke out. The completely mechanized war, the war of machines turned into steamrollers, the war of EMSIACS. He was almost happy when he was drafted and sent off with a flying hospital unit: it meant he could forget about lobotomy for a while. And then, after two years of war, he had landed on the Mandunji island.

At first he was horrified by Mandunga and would have nothing to do with it. But time after time he saw that, because of the primitive way in which the ceremony was performed, the patient died. The elders, of course, attributed these deaths to the stubbornness of the devils in the head, but Martine knew differently: they were due to lack of asepsis, gangrene, blood clots, haemorrhaging, a clumsy removal of too large cortical masses, and so on. Could he stand by and let this continue? With or without him, the ceremony would go on; if he participated, at least the patients would not die or be left permanently crippled – crippled, that is, beyond the minimum considered normal among the Mandunji.

Of course, to anybody with a streak of the messianic in him, the temptation of the cave – the chance to carry out a wild mass experiment in reshaping human clay, with

no moral responsibility for the experiment – was almost irresistible. That had to be considered too. He had considered it many times, in private. But this part of his story he had *not* passed on to his students.

'You know my story too. So we can turn to the real question: How healthy is the human mind on our island?' He waved his hand at the diagrams of the brain which hung behind him. 'There it is,' he said mockingly. 'The object of our affections, in the ugly flesh. In it are all the secrets -'

There was a patter of feet in the corridor. A boy rushed into the room, eyes wide with fright. 'Queer-limbs in the Circle!' he panted. 'On top of the mountain, in the clearing – jumping over trees, playing games in the air!'

'I'll go and see,' Martine said. 'The rest of you stay here.'

He signalled to Rambo to come with him. The boy rose from his seat and followed his father out of the lecture hall.

CHAPTER 6

Hidden in a clump of raffias on a ridge, they watched the amps, some ten or twelve of them, hopping about in the clearing below. The strangers, all of them wearing short-sleeved sweat shirts with large blue 'M's pasted over their chests, were playing a Bunyanesque form of leapfrog: each man took off from a crouching position, sailed over the back of the next man effortlessly as a kite, and came to earth again at least fifty feet beyond, shouting exuberantly.

'All right, fellows.' It was Theo's voice. 'That's enough horsing around. Let's do some dexterities and discernments.'

It was easy to follow the vaulting bodies, as they rose and fell the tubes in their limbs blinked agitated semaphores; the clearing looked like an enormous telephone switchboard gone berserk. And there was more illumination than that. The amps seemed to be carrying powerful searchlights – no, Martine saw now that the index finger on each amp's right hand was itself a searchlight, from its tip projected a beam of light.

'Come on, you guys,' Theo said. 'This isn't getting us anywhere. Your jumping's fine – it's your d-and-d's that are ragged –'

Shouts of protest from the playful athletes: 'Follow the leader! Let's play follow the leader!'

The last suggestion seemed to appeal to everybody. 'Great idea!' 'Follow the leader!' 'Come on, Theo, you be leader!' A dozen index fingers pointed at Theo, his bulging-skulled head was bathed in light.

'All right, men,' he said humorously. 'All *right*. This is no way for humanists to pass the time, but I guess you deserve a little relaxation.'

The beams of light were still on him. He bent his legs. 'Here goes!' he called, and took off from the ground. Up he rocketed, thirty feet or more, caught hold of a raffia branch and whirled around it, the tubes in his limbs leaving trails like miniature comets. Then he let go and dropped, his body twisting so fast that it could be seen only as a twinkling blur. There were whistles, shouts of approval.

Now the athletes followed suit: one by one they jumped, pin-wheeled, spun back to earth.

Theo laughed. 'What a bunch of duds,' he said. 'Not one of you made it. Haven't you noticed anything about my sweat shirt?'

The lights hashed on him again. He turned around slowly, the young men gasped in surprise: the 'M' that had been on his chest was now on his back.

'Let that be a lesson to you,' he said. 'That shows you what you can do when you really concentrate on your dexterities – as I was dropping from the tree I slipped my arms out of my sleeves, twisted my shirt around, put it on again backwards. You'd better do some woodshedding on your discernments too – if you'd been a little more

discerning you would have noticed it... All right, you humanists! Back to camp for some shut-eye – let's go!

He jumped for a high-hanging branch again, described one loop around it, then let go and sailed almost fifty feet to another tree, then to another. One by one the athletes – whooping: 'Yippee!' 'Wah-hoo-wah-hoo-wah-hoo!' – took off after him. The lights flickered through the trees. When they had disappeared into the jungle, Martine patted Rambo on the shoulder.

'We can go back now,' he said. 'I guess they're gone for the night.'

On their way to the cave Rambo said, 'They do not act like metallurgists.'

'No, they don't.' Martine began to laugh. 'Funny – some pessimists used to say man would wind up back in the trees, swinging from the branches. But nobody ever thought it would happen *this* way. In the name of humanism.'

'What does the big "M" mean?'

'I don't know. But I don't think it stands for Man.'

Martine pointed again at the cytoarchitectonic maps.

'There it is!' he said. 'Huddled like a turtle under its mantle, wrinkled, hunched, clamming up. Sometimes it will babble away a mile a minute – you've all heard it screeching on the encephalograph – but the moment you ask it a simple question about how well it's doing, it falls into a sulk and won't talk. That's its secret, it intends to keep mum about it, our old brain does. It's too brainy to be a chatterbox. Examine it well, all of you. Under those wrinkles are all the secrets, and all the answers – to war, orgasm, amuckism, art. But it's very hard to pry loose any of its secrets and answers. Oh, it's a taciturn old onion, the brain is.'

He was feeling a little flushed and giddy again, thoughts darting out in all directions at once, fizzing pinwheels, he had to calm down.

'Very well,' he said. 'Now, we have been opening up skulls in this cave for eighteen years. You all know how many brains we have had exposed before our eyes to study and operate on, how many hundreds of thousands of pages of data we have collected on those brains. I'm pretty sure that here in this cave we have learned and recorded more about the human brain and its workings than is known anywhere else in the world. But I have arrived at a certain credo,' Martine said. '*Primum non nocere*: Above all, do no harm. I think that it is vicious and evil for one man to do damage to another, or even to wish to very intensely. But I think that flabbiness can be a vice and an evil too. Sleep destroys human beings as much as war. Sleep is self-imposed damage, and I think it is evil for a man to do damage to himself as well...'

His voice faltered, died away. Why, suddenly, did he have the sickening feeling that, behind the mask of the Olympian lecturer, he was really talking about himself? That, maybe, he had been sleeping, curled like a foetus, for well over eighteen years in this cave? Sleep – sleep was a steamroller too. Immobilization – self-immobilization, that was the worst steamroller of all...

'And if it is wrong to do damage to another, what if Mandunga should turn out to be a damage? In the months ahead, you can find out for yourselves: add up all the data in our thousands of case histories and make a statistical summary. And keep this last question in mind: if Mandunga *is* a damaging, what are we to say of those who inflict it

on others? Are they not carrying on, under the slogan of pacifism, a war of their own, a surgical-magical war? Then are these pacifists not the subtlest kind of aggressors? I leave it to your statisticians to give us the answer.'

A long time ago, Martine said, a poet had asked a very pointed question: 'Are there other lives?' And he had answered the question for himself: 'It seemed to me that to every creature several *other* lives were due.' Could it be that here, in their own village, other lives, lives that were not bland incognitos, were both possible and due? The same poet, sensing that what a village calls out from a man may not be his whole or even his best potential, had thundered a warning: 'Don't be a victim.' Martine's credo was a slight elaboration of that: Don't be a victim – of the outside *or* of yourself – and don't victimize anybody else.

He had to leave now, for a while. In his absence, he wished them peace – with alertness. He wished them long life, and the energy to live it hard and fully.

He hoped that the war would stay on the other side of the river. But he hoped that some of the ego push which war stirs up in men and puts to terrible use, some of the greed for experience and zest for the new, would come to *their* side of the river. Some of the cerebrotone and somatotone tension of war, without war.

If that happened, there might be a third date in Mandunji history. That would be something to anticipate – perhaps without too much anxiety.

Rambo went first down the narrow winding path, carrying the searchlight. No sign of the queer-limbs about. It was a long climb, but finally they came to the little dock alongside which dozens of fishing boats were tied up – in an inlet whose mouth was almost entirely hidden from outside view by a thick overhang of branches and vines. The trim blue-and-white catamaran with its gawky pontoons, the biggest of the vessels, rode peacefully in the moonlight; Rambo stopped when he reached it, and a moment later Martine joined him on the dock.

'Did you understand my lecture?' Martine asked.

'Some, I did not know all the words. I shall understand more, I shall study.'

'Good.' The moonlight filtered down into the basin, he could see Rambo's bronzed, solemn face. 'Don't study just the serious things. Try to understand the jokes too.'

The boy nodded; his eyes sparkled too much, he was near tears.

'I want to tell you something, son. The poet I mentioned in my talk, he was a Frenchman, his name was R-i-m-b-a-u-d, pronounced Rambo. You were named after him.'

The boy was startled. 'Why? Was he a man to imitate?'

'No. No, it was not that.' Martine spoke slowly, he wanted to get this very straight, it was important to make Rambo understand but first *he* had to understand. 'He was not a man to imitate. But, you see, when he was only two years older than you he decided that he could have other and better lives than Europe would allow him, he thought Europe was dead and finished and he ran away to Africa. And when I came to the island a hundred years later I was running away from the West too, from its wars, and I felt that what I had left behind was hopeless too. So I thought a lot about Rimbaud. And a little later, when you were born, I decided to name you after him, it was just a romantic gesture against my past.'

'But what was good about this man?'

'His life was not good. You see, when you have to spend your whole life attacking and running away from something, you are no better off than those who spend their whole lives uncritically defending that thing. A man who is driven to flee from a village is no more free than those who are driven to stay and support its ways. One is as compulsive as the other, and so long as you are pushed by compulsions you are not free. Some "It" is riding you, the "I" is not in control and that's the big thing... But if this man could not be free in his life, he sometimes through his agony saw things, important things that others did not see so clearly. Although he was all his life a victim of his compulsions, he saw that the worst thing was to be a victim. And to be asleep... It is a good name to have. His book is in my hut, take the time to read it.'

'I shall, Father.' Then: 'Is – is some "It" riding you now?'

'Maybe so.' Martine put his arms around the boy and kissed him on both cheeks. 'You are intelligent and alive,' he said. 'It is a good feeling to look at you and to know you are my son. If I leave nothing behind me in the world but you, I will be satisfied.'

He climbed down into the catamaran and started the motor. It coughed a couple of times, then began to hum smoothly.

'Your mother is suffering very much,' he said. 'It would only give her more pain if I went back to see her again. Say goodbye to her for me, Rambo – and take care of her, she has no one else.'

'I shall do my best.'

'Tell her there will be no more going away. I will not come back until I am sure of that.'

The boy's eyes were very wet now, pools of bewilderment and hurt.

'You've got to understand!' Martine said, more loudly than he had intended. 'I have to go, I have to, for more reasons than I know myself. Maybe it doesn't have much to do with these damned queer-limbs at all – maybe it's just that I've been living here incognito all these years, feel that I have, and now the time has come to go looking for my real self. Something like that. Something's been stirring in me ever since these damned queer-limbs first showed up – even before... But I will do everything to come back. So long as I am alive, I will try to come back. If I don't, you will know that I am dead – but that until I died I kept trying.'

He cast off the rope. Rambo leaned over, tears were running down his cheeks, he said excitedly, with a quaver in his voice, 'I do not know what you are going to look for out there, Father. But may you find it.'

'Thanks, son. I hope I find it too. Whatever it is.' He waved, the boat began to move.

From Dr Martine's Notebook

(MARK II)

23 May 1990. Diego Suarez, Madagascar

Three days to get here. Sea calm as tapioca all the way.

Town's a junk yard, just about as I remember it from my last trip (not long before my plane fell apart: 1974?). Deserted except for a few old Afrikanders – they run a small airstrip, a rickety dock, and a fleabag called, in a splash of anachronism, the Royal Dutch Inn.

No curiosity about me. They swallowed my story without batting an eyelash. I'm Dr Lazarus, parasitologist, been studying tropical diseases in the area, going home now to report my findings. Pleased with that – nifty incognito.

The catamaran will be safe here, they'll look after it until I pick it up. Paid them a year's rent and maintenance fees in advance. Reaction to my old greenbacks: Royal Dutch glee.

Boat for Mozambique due in five days.

Growing a beard to go with my moustache.

30 May 1990. Mozambique, Mozambique

Pretty much the same setup here: airstrip, few warehouses, dock, flophouse-hotel, handful of inward-turned old Afrikanders. There's one ancient tub, apparently, that shuttles between here and Durban. Scheduled to pull in about four days from now, it's pretty erratic in its movements.

Place hasn't changed much. Flowers, vines, creepers sprout on everything: the branch office of Lloyd's of London, an old automobile pump, a first-aid kit, an equestrian statue of General Smuts, a tarnished silver box containing a pessary.

Walked along the waterfront this morning, dodging the craters. Few blocks from the hotel: a Cadillac convertible ('69 model) covered, inundated from radiator to rear bumper, with bougainvillea.

Awake all night thinking about Ooda.

5 June 1990. Durban, Union of South Africa

Another coastal whistle-stop. Everything the same here, except the old folks are Belgians. Still not a sign of a plastic leg. Another wait of a few days, for the prewar freighter that limps between here and Cape Town.

My greenbacks received with great enthusiasm here too. Glad I thought to pick some up during my scavenging days: must have somewhere between 400 and 500 million in old American bills back in the cave, plus about half that amount in other currencies, plus Christ knows how much in bullion. Mother always told me to lay aside a little something for a rainy day.

Seems I can catch either a plane or a ship at Cape Town. Guess it's the ship for me. Slower, give me time to get my beard under way.

Rambo certainly got the straight dope about passports: people seem to have forgotten there ever was such a precious hunk of paper. From the looks of things anybody can hop on to any kind of ship and go anywhere in the world, with no questions asked. Hurrah for the Brotherhood of Man.

7 June 1990. Durban

Something bothering me: why have I started to keep a notebook again? It's an asinine schoolboy's trick, haven't done it since the war, 1972.

Seems that in big moments I'm moved to eloquence. Strange, considering that I never did put much stock in words – always twitted politicians like Helder because they gabbed so much, spouted such a mucky sloganizing lingo – as though words were anything but dust in the eyes, lures, decoys.

Do I consider my words so remarkable? At least markable? Is the diary a mealy-mouthed way of trying to make a mark, of telling the world: Mark my words? Maybe I ought to label my notebooks the way cyberneticists used to label the successive versions of a guided missile or a robot brain: Mark I, Mark II, Mark III...

Last time it was more understandable, in a way. I was a lot younger and I'd been off to the EMSIAC wars for well over a year, operating day and night. It was really getting me down (Helder seemed to take it better than I did), and at odd moments I would huddle up in my bunk in the barracks plane and make jottings in my notebook just to hold on to whatever shreds of sanity I had left.

Wonder what happened to that old journal of mine? I beat it in such a hurry that I didn't stop to round up the odds and ends.

Still, why fool with a notebook? You could say it's just a diversion, way of passing the time, but the motive is more devious than that: some furtive itch for immortality or whatever.

9 June 1990. Durban

Still waiting for that lackadaisical freighter.

15 June 1990. Cape Town, Union of South Africa

Made it, finally. Things are a little livelier around here, town's still a mess but a section of the waterfront's been restored. Handful of Americans around waiting for the liner (due in next week from Dakar), including a few young quadro-amps : they stint around the place like cocks of the walk, everybody kow-tows to them.

Observe with relief that, just as Rambo reported, the non-amp older men dress very much as they did twenty years ago. My elegant prewar tweeds and flannels will do very nicely, seems nobody pays much attention to non-amps anyhow.

Having my meals brought up to my room. Don't want to meet any of my fellow countrymen out here, they might get too interested in my story.

Beard coming along splendidly: beginning to look like General Smuts.

22 June 1990. Cape Town

Sleeping and eating, eating and sleeping. Mind's been a blank for a week.
Liner's arriving in the morning. Hallelujah.

23 June 1990. Aboard S.S. Norbert Wiener

That's what the liner's called, all right. Breezed up the gangplank, bought my passage from the purser, installed in nifty outside stateroom, nobody said boo.

Weird sort of ship. Must be a larger version of the one the Olympic team's cruising in: like a long box lying on its side, open at both ends, the bottom side missing (the one that would be in the water). Cross-section:



Topside has several layers, decks with staterooms, cargo space, etc.; supporting it are two thin vertical slabs which rest in the water, between them open space. Run by an atomic power plant, of course. Jerry, my steward, tells me the vessel is developed from an experimental ship Gar Wood built back in the forties.

Real break, having Jerry for my steward: nice kid, about nineteen, red-haired, very amiable, and very naive. Uni-amp. No suspicions about my story – parasitologist, staying in my cabin because of a touch of malaria, haven't been back home for many years.

'Guess I'm sort of out of touch with things,' I said when he brought my lunch. 'As you see, I'm not an amp.'

'Oh, lots of the older men aren't,' he said. 'It's not the older men who fight the wars.'

Gather from Jerry's remarks that there are two major powers in the world: the Inland Strip, which is the focal point of whatever little clusters of communities have been rebuilt in the Western Hemisphere, and the East Union, which is based in what used to be Russia and takes in whatever centres have sprung up in the Asiatic, Near Eastern, and European areas. Together they make up the civilized world: everything's sweetness and light between them, one big happy family.

'How big is the Inland Strip now?' I asked.

'Population's up to thirty-four million,' Berry said. 'Of course, it's still peanuts compared to what the States were. I guess you'd remember the States, wouldn't you? They've really shrunk some.'

'They weren't sanforized,' I said.

His face was blank and I didn't press the point.

24 June 1990. Aboard the Wiener

Just my luck. (Or destiny?) Was looking out the porthole a few minutes ago, daydreaming, when who should stroll by on deck but Theo.

Theo! Of course he *did* tell Ubu he had to leave in about a month – guess he flew to Cape Town and boarded the ship yesterday.

Think I'll stick close to my cabin – something about this guy bothers me, I'd just as soon avoid him.

It's not just that he's so strikingly brachycephalic. He's also got a hell of an ugly jagged scar running all the way down from his crown to his neck, I hadn't seen that on the island. It jumps right out at you when you see him from the rear, because of his crew cut the whole thing's visible.

Haven't seen a male passenger under forty with all his own limbs. Another thing, there's some kind of hierarchy of status involved, it hits you immediately in people's attitudes. Seems to depend on how many limbs are gone. I notice, for example, that the captain and first mate of the ship have four artificial limbs, the second-rank officers have three or two, and most of the deck hands and stewards only have one. And those with fewer artificial limbs treat those who have three or four with great deference. Quite a few women on board, none of them amps.

But, to judge from what I see through the porthole, Brother Theo is really kingpin around here. Everybody butters up to him, even the captain and the other quadros.

Who in the name of sweet Jesus is he? Why, every time I catch sight of him, do my fingers begin to twitch?

26 June 1990. Aboard the Wiener

This morning I noticed Jerry's tie-clasp. Large button with the design of a triskelion, circle with several legs fanning out from the focal point, running legs: miniature prosthetics, transparent, inside them luminous pinpoints representing tubes and gold elements duplicating the moving parts.



'Nice,' I said. 'Where'd you get it?'

'My mother gave it to me. Birthday present.'

That reminded me of my own speculations about birthdays; they seem to keep coming back. 'Tell me something,' I said. 'Do you think the day you're born on is pretty much a matter of accident? Or do you think it's all part of a scheme?'

'How do you mean?'

'Well, what about people who get born on special days, real red-letter days? Such people often think it was arranged that way – that they were somehow *picked* for the honour. For example, I know of a fellow who played with such ideas about himself. He was born on 16 July 1945.'

'Huh!' Jerry said. 'Alamorgordo Day. Who doesn't know somebody who was born on *that* day?'

I didn't know what to answer. Did he mean that there'd been a mass labour precipitated around the country on the Day of the Mushroom, that women had given birth all over the place? I'd never heard that before, it irked me a bit, made my distinction seem a commonplace.

'I've got a pretty special birthday myself,' Jerry added.

'What is it?'

'I was born on 19 October 1972.'

I choked on the toast, quickly got over it with a couple gulps of coffee. Why, he might have popped on the scene at the very moment the bombs were cascading down over our encampment; maybe even the moment I was taking off in the surgery plane.

'What's so special about that?'

'Heck,' Jerry said, 'a lot of people will tell you that Immob really got started that day, that's all. That's all that's special about it.'

'Oh, sure,' I said. 'I see what you mean. For a moment I didn't make the connexion.'

When he left me my head was spinning. Wish to hell I *could* make the connexion. Something else must have taken place on the day I gave up, something big. Talk about destiny – looks like my career is cluttered with red-letter days. And red-letter nonsense syllables.

Immob. Is it a word or a hiccup?

PART TWO

To the Inland Strip

CHAPTER 7

Voices outside the porthole. Martine put his pen down and flexed his cramped fingers, he'd gotten out of the habit of writing, it was tiring.

Slowly, without concentrating on it, he became aware that one of the voices coming from the promenade deck was Theo's. He switched off the desk's softly glowing glass top, turned out the luminous plastic ceiling too; then he went to the porthole and opened the curtains a slit.

Balmy: in the moonlight the subtropical Atlantic was like melted quartz. Several of the V.I.P.s were sitting around a large umbrella-topped table near the railing, drinking lemonade and chatting. They were all quadros – should they be called plus-fours or minus-fours? – among them the ship's captain, a few of his officers, and some of the more distinguished-looking passengers. All of them, including Theo, their guest of honour, were in evening clothes: White dinner jacket with sleeves shortened to expose the arms, striped black trousers ending well above the knees to show the legs. Logical costume – no extremities to keep warm.

'So it was a nice trip?' the captain said.

'Perfect,' Theo said. 'Did me a world of good. I always seem to relax more on a boat than in a plane, that's why I decided not to fly home.'

'Did you put in at any interesting places?'

'Well, we just lazed around the Indian Ocean mostly, visited islands here and there. On one of the islands there was a pretty unusual tribe called the Mandunji. I caught some butterflies there that were honeys. Then I flew up to Lake Victoria to see how the Dredging Project is coming along. Got in some fine skiing on Kilimanjaro.'

'Sort of a pleasure jaunt,' the second mate said.

'The Olympic team was aboard, it was really a training cruise for them. I just went along for the ride.'

'That was a real break for them, having you around to give them some pointers,' the first mate said.

'Well, my athletic days are over, you know. Last time I competed in the Olympics, let's see, that was six years ago. I'd already slowed up pretty badly.'

'Slowed up, my eye. That year, if I remember, you broke seven world's records.'

'Sure,' one of the passengers said. 'I remember the exact figures. High jump, thirty-nine feet something. Pole vault, sixty-three feet something. Broad jump, eighty-seven. Shot-put, three hundred and –'

'Don't give me too much credit for all that,' Theo said. 'Don't forget 1984, that was the year our pros got really good.'

'You had good pros, all right,' the first mate said, 'but you still had to coordinate your pros. Why, the sports writers still refer to you as the greatest neuro-loco coordinator who ever took part in the Games.'

'Meadow dressing,' Theo said. 'You want to take a look at some of those boys I left out on the training yacht.'

'What about the East Union team? They've been talking pretty big lately.'

'They always shoot their mouths off before the Games, but look at the record. They're good, all right, but just not good enough, it's a question of technological know-how and technique and in those departments they can't hold a candle to us. We're a cinch to win every event, just as we always have.'

Martine pulled the curtains shut and switched on the lumiceiling again. He wandered around the room absent-mindedly, did a waltz step, scratched his left armpit, sang a few lines from an old Mandunji chant, a pentatonic work song that went,

Knots are very hard to cut with an adze.

They blunt the edges of the adze.

How hard I am working to cut these knots.

Then he sat down at the desk, opened his notebook to the last entry, and began to write rapidly:

2 July 1990. Aboard the Wiener

They're very cybernetics-minded, these amps. Also, they seem to be very much interested in metallurgy. (Jerry, for instance, is studying the subject in some university, hopes to get a civil service job as a cybernetics metallurgist.) Which makes sense: you can't build machines without metals, cybernetics is after all only the science of duplicating in the metal what exists less perfectly – because more ambiguously – in the flesh. All right. But there's a mystery here: why is this Theo so damned cagey about his interest in metals? Why does he have to dress up a mining expedition around the islands of the Indian Ocean as an Olympic training cruise plus a little innocent tourism? Why does he keep mum about the rock digging and the ore assaying? And he doesn't only lie to the Mandunji about it, he lies to his friends and fellow amps as well... Like to find out more about this fellow. When we hit Florida tomorrow I may be, by a most peculiar turn of events, the only person in the Western Hemisphere who knows that when Theo says sports he means digging, when he says botany he means digging, when he says zoology he means digging...

Once again he put the lights out and went to the porthole.

'...tell you the truth, though,' Theo was saying, 'events like weight-lifting and jumping and shot-putting always left me cold. They're tests of strength, not skill.'

'I don't follow you,' the first mate said. '

'Well, take the high jump. What gets a man up thirty-nine feet and down again? Can he take the credit for the leap? No, sir. The real credit goes to the engineers who built

his pros, the cyberneticists. What's being demonstrated, mostly, is the efficiency of the elements in the pro: the solenoids, the atomic-energy plant, the servo-mechanisms, the oleo-strut shock absorbers.'

'Which events *do* you like?' the captain asked.

'The dexterities, most of all. The dexterities and the discernments.'

'I think I see what you mean,' the ship's doctor said. 'The d-and-d's test the cortex controlling the pros.'

'That's it exactly.'

'You've got a point,' a passenger said. 'Since we're all supposed to be humanists –'

'That's what I'm getting at,' Theo said enthusiastically. 'Immob is the first real humanism in the history of human thought. The d-and-d's show the potentialities of the human brain and point the way to the superior brain of the future.'

'According to your way of thinking,' the captain said, 'a lot of the standard events ought to be dropped from the Olympics entirely.'

'I'm sure they will be,' Theo said. 'When Immob really comes of age, I foresee that athletics as we know them, in the old strength-testing sense, will disappear.'

'I'd hate to see the old events go entirely,' the first mate said. 'I think we'd lose something. We ought to feel a *little* proud of our cyberneticists and the machines they make.'

'Certainly, but from an Immob perspective. If the EMSIAC war taught us anything, it was that all our machines are monsters unless we have a firm mastery over them. In this transitional period, I think, we're sometimes in danger of forgetting that our pros, marvels though they are, aren't one straw as astonishing as the brains of the cyberneticists who designed and built them and the brains of the amps who operate them. See what I mean? The human being must always be central, not the products and objects of his skill and energy. Wiener used to say that over and over. That's the whole spirit of Immob.'

Theo stood up and raised one plastic hand. With a series of lightning-quick movements he lifted the collar of his shirt, unbuttoned it, undid the tie, and slipped it off. 'Here,' he said, 'I'll show you what I mean.'

Still holding the tie, he reached over to the table and took from it two small saucers.

'Think back,' he said. 'Remember how awkward your real hands used to be? For example, most people with real hands don't coordinate well enough to juggle anything at all, even two small saucers, and when it comes to tying a bow tie, well, they're often all thumbs. Now watch this.'

Using only one hand, he began to toss the saucers above his head, one at a time. After each heave, in the split second between the release of one and the catching of the other, the hand flew up to the neck, fluttered there, then came down again just in time to meet the descending saucer. The observer's eye could follow the gross, overall movements – arm raised, hand working at neck; arm down, hand poised to catch saucer – but the detailed twitchings of the digits went much too fast to be seen as anything but a blur. Still, the thing was getting done: while the saucers rose and fell in perfect rhythm, the collar was buttoned, the tie was placed around the neckband, its ends were crossed, one end was tucked under and through to form a knot, the two halves of the

bow were pulled out on each side to tighten the knot, the loops were adjusted in length and straightened, the collar was pulled down.

Theo put the saucers down, moved closer to the umbrella (a luminous one), and turned so that his back was to Martine. 'It took me almost seven months to learn that one,' he said with a modest laugh.

His friends began to applaud. Martine ignored them: he was staring again at the long, zigzagging scar which ran down that broad-breasted skull, worm of a scar, white and lumpy.

What was he trying to remember?

He stood in the darkness for a moment, holding his hands up as though he had just sterilized them and were waiting for the rubber gloves: he felt a formicative creeping in the fingertips.

A peculiar thought came to him: My hands are blushing.

He turned the light on and examined them, they were glistening with sweat.

He knew that with him strong emotional states always tried to find some kinaesthetic expression through the hands. Naturally, when he was trying hard to grasp something his supremely trained organs of grasp were mobilized in the effort. In this respect his cortex must be very much like that of a watchmaker or an embroiderer or a sculptor.

Still, he wasn't prepared for this: a 10:10 brachycephalic, a cranial scar, and immediately his hands were drenched and the fingers poised in a tense curled position and visibly tremulous. It didn't make sense, this pseudo-Parkinsonianism. It was as though his hands contained their own self-reverberating memory loops.

Then 'in a flash' he saw what this digital positioning meant. He had been side-stepping its meaning for a month now, ever since Theo had first appeared in the village and his fingers had automatically hooked on thin air, but now he saw it. The fingers had fallen into the operative set, one hand was holding an invisible scalpel and the other a suction cup or suture clamp, something like that.

That, of course, didn't account for the trembling or the sweating.

Theo's deep, soft, musical laugh drifted in through the curtains; Martine went back still again and looked out. Theo had turned around, his pleasant face, creased now with laughter, was bathed in the bright glow of the umbrella.

Martine's hands went up to his forehead, the palms pushing hard against his eyeballs. He felt weak, he thought that he might fall. He stood still for a time, afraid that if he opened his eyes and tried to take a step his legs would buckle. When he did finally move, his feet felt heavy, they dragged, it was like walking through water, but he managed to make it to the desk. He took up his pen and wrote in his notebook, over and over again: '19 October 1972, 19 October 1972.' Then he buried his head in his arms and, sickeningly, remembered.

19 October 1972. He could reconstruct it pretty accurately. It had started the night before, 18 October. He'd been without sleep, except for cat naps at odd moments, for close to four days, operating almost continually. The flying hospital unit was stationed for the moment in Central Africa: Belgian Congo, somewhere northwest of Stanleyville. Up north there'd been a head-on collision between one of the biggest

American air fleets and an equally big Russian one; for three days a tremendous dogfight had been going on in the skies all the way from Morocco to the Libyan Desert, with thousands of planes being blown to bits and practically all the inhabited areas beneath being pulverized.

That was how the war went in those days: the fleets would cruise about, each under orders from its own EMSIAC, then they'd meet and open up on each other. The idea was to knock enemy planes out and bomb any installations on the ground that seemed to be used by the enemy or might be of potential use to him. Naturally, the casualties were terrific. Whenever possible, helicopters would go in and try to rescue the downed airmen, and if they were wounded but still alive they'd be given emergency treatment and flown to the nearest mobile hospital unit. So Martine's outfit got most of the casualties from North Africa. The brain-surgery cases, of course, were routed over to Martine and Helder and their crew: the skull-duggery boys. They kept at it until the instruments were about falling out of their hands.

Toward evening on 18 October, they brought Babyface in. He was as bad a mess as Martine had ever seen, bad as you can get without being a corpse. The head injury was serious enough: the whole cranium had been ripped open by a fragment of shrapnel from the eyebrows down past the ears. To complicate things, both of the kid's legs had been snapped off neatly above the knees – that had happened, apparently, in a crackup somewhere around Tunis, when he was already unconscious from the cranial wounds.

It was a miracle that he was alive, he'd lost a lot of blood. But those helicopter rescue squads were good, they'd snatched him off the ground, pumped a lot of plasma and whole blood into him plus some cortisone and ACTH derivatives, doused him with penicillin and anti-bleeding chemicals, and shipped him down south by emergency jet plane to be fixed up good as new. He was still unconscious when they brought him in: respiration ragged, pulse awfully spotty. Martine didn't give him a chance.

While the kid was being prepared for surgery, purely as a matter of routine, Martine did the usual thing – went through his papers to check his identification, medical record, blood type, etc. He was stunned by what he found.

Babyface had a pretty remarkable background for a twenty-year-old, and not just medically: he was, for one thing, America's most famous ace of World War III. From the clippings in his wallet Martine learned that, single-handed, he had eliminated more enemy cities than any other five airmen put together, he had to his credit the destruction of Chunking, Warsaw, Paris, Johannesburg, and several other great cosmopolitan centres.

Martine kept trying to think as he read the clippings: How does it feel to know you erased Paris? Funny: he was a good-looking, raw-boned youngster, as nearly as you could judge from the scorched and blood-caked face, indistinguishable from millions of other American kids, and still when you looked at him you knew that he had certainly killed several million people with a few flicks of the wrist. By this time they were using H-bombs by the crate, including the delayed-action type which goes on spewing radioactivity over a wide area for a long time. And when wind conditions were good, these were supplemented with radiological-warfare dust, RW dust. So that one efficient airman could knock out a whole cosmopolitan population pretty thoroughly.

But that wasn't Babyface's only claim to fame. Among his papers there was also a card which indicated that he'd been a leading member of Tri-P, the pacifist movement

called the Peace Pledge Programme which had been so active before the war. Heider, when he had roomed with Martine in New York, had been one of the organizers of Tri-P, he'd always been after the other students to join.

That was surprising about Babyface. Obviously, in some idealistic spurt during his student days just two or three years before, he'd been revolted enough by the idea of war to have joined this movement which was sweeping the youth and to have signed its pledge 'never to participate in any war whatsoever under any circumstances whatsoever'. Even more, he'd been so much in earnest about the thing that he'd made quite a name for himself as a campaigner for peace at all costs – there were some clippings about that, too. Three years later, how many millions of notches did he have carved on his bombsight?

Martine couldn't resist showing the clippings to Helder. A look of horror came into Helder's eyes, he went over and studied the kid's face more carefully. 'My God,' he said shakily. 'Sure, it's Teddy Gorman. I've spoken from the same platform with him a hundred times. I didn't recognize him on account of the blood.'

'Take a good look,' Martine said. 'Observe the life cycle of the pacifist.'

They were both out on their feet but even so Martine felt like baiting Helder, and Helder felt like arguing about it; he was never one to look an irony full in the face without blinking.

'What's it prove?' he said.

'Nothing much. Just that people are glad to be pacifists – in between wars.'

Martine was thinking, too, about the movement initiated by students before World War II, the movement around the Oxford Peace Pledge. It was before his time but he'd read about it, matter of fact Tri-P was pretty much a revival of the Oxford idea.

'This is no reflection on the philosophy of pacifism,' Helder insisted. 'It only shows that up to now pacifist movements have been inefficient, tactically and programmatically.'

'Sure,' Martine said, 'and for a very good reason. Look at this baby-faced mass murderer. Like all good pacifists, he was ready to sign the peace-at-any-price pledge at the drop of a slogan. And, two years later, to sprinkle H-bombs around at the drop of a slightly different slogan. Doesn't that suggest there's a certain gap between slogans – yours, anyhow – and motives? That people are a bit more complex and ambivalent than you merchants of good will recognize?'

'People are fundamentally simple – at the core of any man is the simplest thing of all, a great fund of good will. We just have to find the words that will reach that simple core and activate it.'

'Onward and upward!' Martine said. 'If you'll excuse a wisecrack at such a time, maybe you should change that idea of progress to *unword* and upward. Your words only get people to agree not to fight when there isn't any fighting to be done.'

'I'll grant you that we've got to do some serious thinking about how to extend the emotional appeal of our programme,' Helder said. 'We're in a difficult transitional period.'

From up forward came the clear steely rat-a-tat of the EMSIAC receiver.

'While you're at it,' Martine said, 'think about how to extend the emotional appeal of your programme to you and me. I'd like to point out that at this precise transitional

moment the two of us are not especially active in advancing the brotherhood of man. As I get the picture, we're somewhere in the Belgian Congo, on orders of EMSIAC, patching up soldiers' skulls because that's what EMSIAC wants us to do.'

'Our movement isn't finished. Transitions are always hard to ride out. After this war we'll find a way to counter the propaganda of the war-makers.'

Martine had to laugh at the flamboyance of the remark. Just two days before, word had reached their unit to the effect that the entire Eastern seaboard back home, from the Massachusetts coast down to Baltimore, had been pretty systematically laid waste in a mass H-bomb attack. Way over twenty million people had been killed or wounded, in spite of extensive civilian evacuation (delayed-action radioactivity and RW dust no doubt accounted for many of the casualties), and this followed on the heels of a similar attack on the West Coast, which had been reduced to a mass of rubble from San Diego to above Puget Sound. Already the population back home had been cut down by much more than a third, and the end wasn't yet in sight. Who could tell? Very possibly Martine's family and friends, and Helder's too, were now distributed in dainty shreds over some vast radioactive landscape atomized at last into tranquillity.

'Noble words,' Martine said. 'Let's hope the war-makers leave a few people around for you to propagandize.'

He handed Babyface's wallet to an assistant. Then he couldn't help adding, 'The hitch is, it's hard to tell just who these warmakers of yours are any more. By the looks of things these days, just about everybody makes war. Or do you see some stout-hearted pacifist standing up to EMSIAC and telling it off?'

By this time the kid was ready for surgery; they both took some energy pills, then Helder got to work on the stumps and Martine went at the head.

For over three hours Martine's hands were probing around inside that mashed skull. He tried some daring techniques – he thought it was hopeless anyhow, what was there to lose? – experimental procedures that he'd never attempted before on anything but laboratory animals. His crew men stood around in amazement, it was one of his better efforts, a real virtuoso bit of protoplasmic tailoring. Several times the respiration bags went limp and the pulse disappeared, but with oxygen, digitalis, and a dozen other things they managed to bring him back each time.

While his fingers manoeuvred around in the head, Martine's mind was racing. The side of him that worked for EMSIAC did its job, and brilliantly. The other side hadn't yet been spotted and given its marching orders by EMSIAC, and it was thinking: Why in hell bother? Why not just let him die? Why not let them all die?

It wasn't enough to say that Babyface had been sloganized into doing what he'd done; you still had to consider his susceptibility to slogans. Because even Babyface was more than a morally neutral robot, he didn't simply carry out EMSIAC's instructions, before he carried them out he had to acquiesce to carrying them out. What Martine wanted to know was, where could this acquiescence be tracked down in this pacifist-homicidal brain – if somebody would only tell him, he would go after it immediately with his scalpel. He wanted to know what incisions to make in order to produce a brain which would say no to EMSIAC.

As soon as this thought hit him, sweat began to roll down from his forehead. It wasn't only the heat or the exhaustion. No, his next thought was: *I don't say no to EMSIAC either, I just abstractly, therapeutically, approve of the idea...*

The next minute – by this time he was fitting the tantalum plate which the lab technicians had prepared into Babyface's skull – he snapped back a little, saw a partial answer to his questions. Somewhere in this lacerated cortex, in some associational cluster he wasn't skilful enough to locate, was also a set of pathways which were loaded with idealism and good will and devotion to noble causes like Tri-P. This side of the brain didn't bulk very large against the more deeply rooted aggressions: the fondle networks are always dwarfed by the fight networks: the pacifism only came into play during lulls, standstills, and interregnums, when nobody had any use for the aggression. The surgical problem, then, was one of liberating the pacifist networks so that they couldn't be immediately blocked off by the violent ones the moment some EMSIAC sounded the bugle call.

As soon as he put it to himself that way he saw that it was not a surgical problem: nobody could ever know enough about these contraries in the brain to amputate the one without crippling the other. Maybe the truth was that you couldn't cut the ambivalence out of a human organism without hacking up every single cell in it, one by one. So knives were out. He couldn't do anything but sew Babyface up again and set him loose to prowl for more Parises. He wasn't God, he was only a patcher. You had to be a Helder to think you were God...

That night he couldn't sleep; his eyes wouldn't close, although they smarted from exhaustion. For three or four miserable hours he sat huddled in his bunk, listening to EMSIAC clacking up front, listening to Helder snore away just above him. For a while he tried to read, a passage from Wiener, a few lines from Rimbaud. Then he opened his diary and began making notes.

He wrote for a long time, putting down all the ideas that had tumbled through his head when he'd been operating on Babyface, trying to escape that infernal snore. The jottings were pretty wild and bitter – among other things there was some sort of imaginary dialogue with Babyface that rambled on interminably.

Somewhere way after two in the morning he put down his notebook. He was dizzy, he rubbed his temples and whispered to himself, 'No. I don't want any more. – it. I'm through.'

What happened right after that was hard to remember. EMSIAC was clattering away imperviously, Helder was snoring hideously. He slipped the notebook under his pillow and went outside, thinking that he needed some air. Then he walked over to the surgery plane – it was a long distance off, they were carefully dispersed – and found there was nobody in it.

He climbed inside the plane and poked around for a few minutes. Just for something to do he checked to see how many atomic-energy capsules there were – many dozens, enough to run all the motors in the plane for two or three hundred years. He eased into the cockpit and energized the starter, just for the heck of it.

The next moment, without anything in his mind, he took off. Automatically, since everything that nauseated him lay to the north and west, he turned south and east.

Not a minute too soon. Talk about the hand of destiny. He looked at his watch and saw that it was 3.29. Then he became aware of EMSIAC clicking away in the communications room. The click was mixed with another, more ominous sound: the hoarse foghorn blast that was the signal for a red-flash emergency. He realized that the blast had been going on for minutes, it just hadn't registered.

He set the controls on automatic flight and hurried back to look at the tape. With uncomprehending eyes he stared at the little ribboned announcement of catastrophe

HOSPITAL UNIT X-234-BL... ATTENTION... RED-FLASH ALERT ... SQUADRON OF ENEMY BOMBERS CRUISING TOWARD YOUR POSITION APPROACHING NORTH NORTHWEST ... EXPECT ATTACK 3.31 ... DO NOT TRY TO TAKE OFF ... ASSUME DEFENSIVE POSITIONS ... ALL ANTI-AIRCRAFT PERSONNEL TO POSTS ... EMPLOY RED-FLASH EMERGENCY STRATEGY 28-RF-6AA...

Martine dashed back to the cockpit and peered out through the Plexiglas bubble. Sure enough, at 3.33, great blinding flashes began to shimmy up from the encampment area, then seething white mushrooms of cloud. He couldn't see the bombers, the smart thing for him was to get the hell out of there even though there was some awful fascination in the scene.

Minutes later, with a jolt in his belly, he realized something. The mushrooms weren't receding any more. He had set the auto-flight for southeast and steep climb, the mushrooms should be dropping away and back as he watched. They weren't any more. They were coming closer, getting bigger. The plane wasn't climbing away, it had circled and was heading back in toward the camp.

He jumped. A metallic gully voice bellowed out at him from the rear of the ship, twanging and hollow: *'Surgery plane 17-M, Hospital Unit X-234-BL. You are on unauthorized flight. We are returning you to base. Report to your commanding officer immediately upon landing for court-martial. You are on unauthorized flight. We are returning –'*

It was EMSIAC's voice, the electrovox voice which was activated only in the most extreme emergencies. The dreaded voice which never came through except to bark instructions involving the most urgent disciplinary procedures.

Martine understood now. The automatic pilot was not steering the plane. EMSIAC had taken over command of the flight and was whisking the craft back to its base despite the upstart wishes of its occupant. If the plane touched ground again it meant death for Martine. Even if he was lucky enough to survive the bombing attack, he would be shot for his desertion. The articles of war were perfectly clear about unauthorized flights.

He was insane with rage. They didn't give him a chance. They couldn't be bothered to find out whether this unauthorized flight indicated desertion or – oh, absent-mindedness, vertigo, nausea, a cramp in the fingers from too much writing in notebooks, a shudder in the eardrums from too much snoring in the bunk above, a feeling of being smothered, a need to get out in the open and breathe, a need to sleep, anything. They didn't inquire as to his intentions. They didn't ask whether he'd intended to go away or just get a breath of fresh air. Unauthorized flight meant desertion meant court-martial meant a dozen slugs in the bread basket. They didn't even stop to consider that, no matter how he had happened to get into the air, now he *was* in it and down below everybody was going up in a boil of radioactive dust and it was more important to save him and the ship, than to yell discipline and send him back to be vaporized too.

They didn't care, the -. Whoever 'they' were. The 'they' that was the 'It' that was EMSIAC.

In a blind panic he ran back to the communications room and began to pound the EMSIAC casing wildly with his fists.

'– for court-martial,' the voice droned. 'You are on unauthorized flight. We are returning you to base. Report –'

There was a fireman's axe hanging on the corridor wall just outside. He noticed it now. He ran into the hall and yanked it away from its supports. Back in the communications room he began to hack at the EMSIAC container savagely, screaming with each blow.

'Resistance is useless,' the voice boomed. 'Do not try to resist. Do not touch the EMSIAC box. We are returning you –'

Finally the casing gave way and the blade of the axe sank into the innards of the mechanism. Glass flew as he chopped through the banks of electronic tubes.

'Do not touch the EMSIAC box. Resistance is useless. Do not tryeeeeeeeeeeee –'

There was a rattle, a violent hum, some incredible smothered grumble. He chopped, he hacked, sweat poured down his face. He was still screaming like a stuck pig.

Now an abrupt choked sound, an eerie gurgle. The hum grew and grew, became a crazy reverberating roar.

And stopped.

Just like that.

Dead silence.

He kept on swinging the axe, kept on until he had chopped through all the cables and tangles of multicoloured wires. As he sliced through the last of them the plane gave a violent lurch, then shot up at a sharp angle, sending him sprawling on the floor.

Good, good. He had cut EMSIAC's connexion with the automatic pilot. The plane was on its own now, resuming the course he had set for it.

He lifted his hand wearily, gasping, and looked at his watch. It was exactly 3.39.

He seemed to hear a metallic hum deep in his rumbling stomach. The hum turned into a snore turned into a clanging whistling screeching electrovox which said, *'Do not go berserk, it is unauthorized, stop screaming, it is unauthorized...'*

High-tailing off into the emptiness southeast, thinking that no doubt Babyface and his tantulum plate, Helder, his fountain pen, his notebook, his Wiener, his Rimbaud were back there now in a boiling mutuality, blended in an ooze of brotherhood.

Fleeing from the wars in Africa, his plane catapulting unerringly and all unknowing toward a speck of an island far off in the Indian Ocean – island that miraculously had never been charted on any map by any cartographer – where a handful of serious dark-skinned men were busy eating tapioca and chasing the devils from each other's heads. It had taken the Mandunji at least four centuries to flee the wars in Africa and get to the island, it was to take his plane at the very most four hours...

He remembered it all now, almost all. When he could control the shake in his fingers he tried to write it all down as he remembered it. He wrote:

19 October 1972.

Did it finally. I, my unrobotized side, said no.

I said no to 'It'.

I said NO.

I said –

NO...

19 October 1972. Jerry's birthday? Hell, no. Mine. Day I became a hobo in a jet. Day I was born, started to get born... .

But what was I getting born *as*?

No name for it yet, after eighteen years. Hard to recognize it, it's been smothered with incognitos.

Hard to write. Head was like a yoyo, eyes filled with swirling fog, but after resting for a minute he was able to focus on the notebook again and make his final entry for the day:

Mystery of Theo solved. I might have known – if that scarred brachycephalic head made my fingers curl and tremble so, it was because they'd once been inside it. Of course. Got a good look at his face a few minutes ago and remembered, finally. To be sure, he's older, there's a suggestion of jowls and a touch of grey at the temples and the moustache threw me off too, but essentially it's still Babyface, the eraser of cities. Under the Theo there's the old Teddy: humanist with a tantalum skull.

My God, my God, *what's happened to his arms?*

CHAPTER 8

Miami was part shambles, part ghost town. Through Jerry's high-powered binoculars Martine could see that the town had suffered a relatively light and haphazard bombing, not a merciless earth-scorching one: while many of the flimsier buildings had been razed, others, maybe because they had been built to stand off hurricane winds, had only been gouged and nipped at and made to buckle at the joints, not demolished.

He scanned the implausible vista from end to end. Here and there along the ragged skyline, jutting up senselessly from the rubble like an oversight, he could make out a lopsided villa, an upended hot-dog stand, the corkscrewed framework of a beach-front luxury hotel, a sagging night club with a fragment of neon tubing on its façade to remind the seagulls that its name had once been LA TROPI something or other – the rest of the letters were missing.

Martine rubbed his eyes and looked again. The thing he had seen was still there, it was moving: it was a giraffe and it seemed to be nibbling at the neon letters on top of the night club.

The place was not quite deserted. Now he became aware of other movements in and around the debris – an undeniable camel here, an indisputable llama there, what could only be an okapi sprinting improbably down the avenue just beyond. Chewing its cud idiotically alongside a tiled swimming pool, a yak. Further on, standing guard outside a tilted real-estate office, a zebra.

Flashes of violent colour. Flamingos, pink and preenful, were waddling on erector-set legs along the pock-marked pavements, poking their aristocratic beaks into the piles of – what? – one could only guess – sandals and sun-lotion bottles, contraceptives and cash registers.

Needing some point of orientation in the jumble, Martine began to search for the skyscraper hotel in which, right after his internship, he had spent a month's honeymoon – month (for Irene) of pouting, tearful unacknowledged frigidity, and much histrionic love-making in between by way of camouflage. Farcical month of pretending to himself and to Irene that a sham Eros was both the genuine article and superior to the genuine article – the thankless assignment handed to all inwardly fuming and martyr-complexed husbands by their glacial wives. There it was, on the beach down to the left, walls caved in and girders warped but still standing: THE BREEZEWAYS. By counting the cross pieces, memorials to vanished floors, he was even able to locate the corner suite in which the month-long charade of eroticism had been played out. (*I love a charade, the beat of the gums...*) Something stirred on the steel beam: a spider monkey doing handsprings...

Jerry came in to get the lunch tray.

'This is crazy,' Martine said. 'It looks like a menagerie out there. I just saw a giraffe.'

'They're all over the place,' Jerry said. 'The circus was stationed at its winter quarters near here when the attack came, and most of the animals escaped. Later on, when we

opened up the port again, we shot all the dangerous ones, but there wasn't any reason to bother about the others.'

'I see Miami hasn't been rebuilt much.'

'Question just. never came up, I guess. The new cities in the Strip are more than enough for the people we have.'

'Hasn't anything been done to the coasts at all?' Martine asked.

'Not much, outside of getting a few docks back in shape and laying out a few airfields.'

'What about seaside resorts and all that? We used to be a nation of bathers and sun worshippers – is that all gone?'

'Pretty much – they don't have water sports in the Olympics any more, for instance. We've got plenty of sports and hobbies to keep us busy where we are.'

'Like what?'

'Well,' Jerry said, combing through his shock of red hair for the answer, 'there's all kinds of evening classes for adults in the various schools. In Yoga breathing, panic control, auto-suggestion, moral equivalents, neuro-loco coordination, dianetics, semantics, and all that. Besides, for the younger amps there's Olympic training, we have special clubs for that, just the training in the d-and-d's takes up a lot of time. Oh, there are lots of things.'

'That giraffe out there', Martine said, 'could use a little coaching in semantics. He thinks words were meant to be eaten. He seems to be eating words off old neon signs.'

'The glass'll do terrible things to his stomach,' Jerry said seriously...

Martine waited until he saw Theo go down the gangplank, let another hour pass, then shook hands warmly with Jerry and went off in a cocoon-shaped transparent-shelled bus to the airport. The plane was a triple-deck jet, with room for a hundred people on each deck; it took off from a vertical position, resting on its tail, the seats swivelling so that the passengers were always upright regardless of the angle of flight.

Two men preceded Martine up through the entry hatch and took seats directly in front of him. They were obviously foreigners: the heavy-shouldered, swarthy one looked like some sort of East European, something of the Balkans in him, something of the Slavic; the other, a short dumpy man with an Oriental cast to his features, seemed to be a Eurasian. Both were duo-amps, only their legs were artificial. The other passengers kept looking over in their direction and whispering, the airline personnel scraped and bowed. East Union bigwigs, Martine gathered; names were Vishinu and Dai.

Somewhere between the Panhandle and the Rockies the plane began to go down. He looked out and spied New Jamestown; he was electrified. He had been briefed on what not to expect; he remembered that even before the war most basic industry had gone underground, and Jerry had explained that when the rebuilding began these underground installations were kept and new cities were laid out over and around them. So he was not surprised to see no belching smokestacks and open hearths, none of the fume and grit of manufactures. But he was not prepared for the sheer geometric beauty of this glass-and-concrete diorama: it was as though the reverie of some city-planning visionary had been peeled from a drawing board, blown up, and pasted life-size over the countryside.

He gawked. Spacious parkways fanned out from one enormous central hub, which seemed to contain all the commercial and institutional buildings; and in easy concentric arcs between these spokes, along tree-dotted and garden-lined streets and boulevards, great meandering stretches of streamlined skyscraper apartments, interspersed with sprinklings of smaller individual family living units.

The two men in front of Martine were looking down at New Jamestown now and talking in a precise, clipped English which bore traces of some polyglot cosmopolitan accent.

'Nice,' said the short one. 'Laid out very good.'

'Façade is not unimposing,' the other man said. 'But underneath, phuh, you will see, all the old garbage. Same old exploiting mentality, Anglo-Saxons stick the noses up, Negroes segregated, the class struggle in a different form.'

'Understood. I meant only the laying-out.'

'Not so good as in New Tolstoygrad. Or New Singapore. Even New Saigon or New Pyongyang or, yes, New Surabaya.'

'Naturally.'

The stewardess, a provocative bit with swashbuckling bosoms, imminent strip-tease in her swaying walk, came down the aisle and stopped opposite the two men. Her attitude was at once deferential and come-onish. She was wearing an extremely low-cut blouse; when she leaned over to talk with the taller man, who was in the near seat, her breasts were half-exposed.

'Excuse me,' she said, husky voice full of the promise of prompt and unreluctant intimacies. 'Are you gentlemen being met at the airport or would you care to use the copter shuttle service into town?'

'The transportation is entirely arranged,' the heavy-set man said stiffly. The tips of her breasts brushed against his shoulder; he pulled away from the chesty overture. 'We are to be met by a limousine of the Olympics Arrangements Committee.'

The girl knew that she was dealing with dignitaries; she was all eyes, haunches, and mammary glands.

'You – you're Brother Vishinu, aren't you?'

'Yes. And', the man added, 'we need no advice on how to get around New Jamestown, thank you very much. I have been here many times before.'

The girl looked hurt and angry as she moved down to Martine's seat. The Eurasian said softly, 'They become worse and worse, the women. Absolutely without shame.'

'With the fists out, like prizefighters,' Brother Vishinu said loudly and distinctly. 'Everywhere it is like that, but here they are the worst, they were with fists to begin with. It is all garbage, phuh.'

The girl's face was flushed, she hardly noticed Martine as she rattled off the routine question.

'I'd like the copter service, I think,' he said. 'I want to go to the Gandhiji Hotel.'

'Gate Three,' she said mechanically. 'The copter there will take you directly to the Gandhiji roof.'

'Thank you.' He wanted to add, 'And here's a friendly tip: a real woman doesn't have to be a tout for herself,' but he contented himself with thinking it.

He had wondered if the girl's obvious play for the two men hadn't been prompted by the fact that they were dignitaries; but no. Across from Martine was a young quadro-amp with the face of a petulant boy scout; when she approached him her wiles were just as lavish and blunt as they had been with the East Union duos. Obviously there was something erotically enticing about an amp, Martine simply was not in the running. Except that with these amps the running seemed to be in the wrong direction: a furious skedaddle, not a chase.

'Are you being met at the airport, sir?' she said, bending so low that her breasts were not only in the boy's line of vision but almost in his line of mastication.

'I am not,' he said curtly, looking out the window.

'The copter might be crowded. Tell you what, I've got my car parked at the port... I'd be glad to give you a lift.'

There was murderous hostility in the amp's voice as he said, 'Get this straight – I don't care to be given a "lift", by you or anybody else. I'm not a cripple.'

So these amps hadn't managed to keep all wars on the other side of the river; the war between the sexes was very much with them. In some pretty spectacular forms. Phuh, garbage, etc.

As the plane backed down into the airport Martine, filled with anticipation and more than a little anxious, looked out. Several cigar-shaped objects in the sky some distance off, in the direction of New Jamestown: dirigibles, with signs on their sides that flashed on and off. Too far away to make out the letters.

CHAPTER 9

There was a reservations desk in the roof-top solarium of the Gandhiji, for the convenience of those who arrived by copter. Martine had no trouble getting a room.

'Do you intend to stay long, Dr Lazarus?' the clerk asked.

'Hard to say. I'm a parasitologist, I study parasites. When a new one turns up somewhere they send for me.'

The clerk looked concerned.

'Don't worry,' Martine added. 'I'm not at the Gandhiji on business. It looks like you run a nice, clean place here.'

'Oh, you won't find any parasites *here*, Doctor,' the young man said emphatically. 'The Gandhiji caters to a very exclusive clientele.'

'Parasites are extremely democratic,' Martine said. 'They have much less class prejudice than people. A cat can only look at a king but a bedbug can dine on him for weeks. Henry the Eighth –'

The clerk's face was polite, interested, sober, clerkish...

It was early, hardly more than dinner time, he was looking forward with excitement to his first glimpse of the city's street life, once he'd cleaned up and changed into some fresh clothes. But after showering he found that a numbing weariness had seeped through his body; the trip had been much more exhausting than he'd suspected, especially the last tropospheric leg of it.

He slipped on a robe and went out on the balcony. Directly to his left and two stories below, in another tier of sun decks, a young quadro-amp was stretched out on a couch, reading.

As Martine watched, a pretty and buxom girl came out, wearing high heels but dressed only in a brassière and a pair of skimpy, clinging panties. She stood at the side of the couch for a time, looking down at the boy and tapping her foot, but he wouldn't raise his eyes. Then with a determined movement she pulled the book from his gleaming hands and dropped it on the floor, sank down beside him, and stretched out so that her almost nude body was pressed against the whole length of his.

He made no movement. After a time she curled her arms around his shoulders and squirmed about until she was lying on top of him, her lips pressed ardently against his neck. She began to whisper something to him; she freed one hand, with a deft twist unplugged his left arm and put it on the floor.

For the first time the amp showed some sign of life. An expression of peevish rage on his face, he placed his remaining hand on the girl's back and with one powerful heave – Martine could hear the clicking – sent her sprawling across the floor. Then, his face frozen again, he retrieved his arm and plugged it back in, picked up the book, and went back to his reading. The girl sat on the floor, rubbing her shins and glaring at him.

The girls seemed to be getting pretty forward, all right. Forward, upward, topward. Maybe position *had* become everything in life, at least in love. The girls seemed to

have become positively disarming, preferred their lovers handsome but without hands – all this would take some looking into. But – the more the girls panted, the more the boys pouted.

What could the amp's book be: *War and Peace*?...

He leaned on the balustrade, looking down at the glittering Christmas tree of a city some fifty floors below.

A dirigible floated into sight over the skyscrapers and wheeled slowly around the hub of the city. The electric signs on its sides flashed on and off, Martine studied the words in astonishment

Dodge the steamroller!

Dodge the steamroller!

Dodge the steamroller!

Just that, over and over; nothing more. Gibberish. Why not, with equal logic, dodge the cyclotron? The player piano? The giraffe?

Still there was something tantalizing about the slogan. It had some slippery aura (error: horror) of meaning. The word 'steamroller' set up reverberations – some uncooperative net of neurones shuddered. He remembered his farewell lecture in the cave: Why had he kept on using the silly word and being upset by it?

He turned from the epigrammatic dirigible and wandered inside again. He sang,

Knots are very hard to cut with an adze.

They blunt the edges of the adze...

He stopped at the bureau and examined his face in the mirror, murmuring irrelevantly, 'Dodge the skyscraper.' Beard coming along nicely, he had trimmed it down into a neat Van Dyke.

There was a thin volume lying on the night table, he noticed it for the first time. He picked it up and examined the dust jacket: BASIC IMMOB TEXT NUMBER TWO, said the type across the top, and all around the borders ran a design of triskelions filled with running prosthetics. The book was a handsomely designed edition of William James's *The Moral Equivalent of War*, and appended to it was a long essay by Mahatma Gandhi on the philosophy of non-violence and passive resistance. He flicked the pages. Across the bottom of each page were printed three words in boldface caps: DODGE THE STEAMROLLER!

Martine reached for his notebook and slipped it into the jacket of the James-Gandhi volume. He placed it on the night table, the original book he put away in the drawer.

Over the bed there were several knobs fixed to a large wall panel – switches, as he could see from the labels, for the radio loud-speaker and the television screen which were fitted into the opposite wall. He turned on the radio and played with the tuning dial until he found some music.

Programme of jazz recordings: he recognized the tune being played as Louis Armstrong's 'Four Or Five Times'. After that came other Hot Five classics of the

twenties, 'Didn't He Ramble', 'Wish I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Kate', 'Jelly Roll', 'Beale Street Blues'. An all-Satchmo programme! Maybe New Orleans had come back still another time to a world it had never made but somehow inseparably belonged to...

When the disk-jockey programme was over he fiddled with the television, until he got a clear image on the six-foot-square, full-colour screen. A young quadro-amp was giving a lecture to the young Immobs of the Olympic athletic clubs. On a large table before him were all the parts of a disassembled pro leg, he was explaining the structure and function of each.

'With the Games coming up,' the lecturer said, 'all of us ought to brush up on the design of our pros – you can't appreciate the Games at all, fellows, unless you understand something about pro engineering. Now, kids, what say we take a look at the insides of this doodad...'

Number One: the element he was holding now, he explained, was the socket. This was fitted permanently into the stump by cine-plastic surgery, connected up with all the muscles and nerves of the stump. Designed so that any kind of limb could be snapped into it and immediately be hooked in with the musculature and the neural system... Number Two: the atomic-energy capsule, the power source of the mechanism. The movements of the limb were guided and controlled by neural impulses relayed from the brain through the central nervous system, but they were powered by this built-in plant. Which made the artificial limb infinitely stronger than a real one... Number Three: this gadget, consisting of a wire coil and a metal rod which moved in and out of its electrical field, was a solenoid. Translated electrical into mechanical energy. Equipped with a system of levers and linkages which did the work of the original muscles and tendons but with much more power and control. There was a solenoid for each muscular unit of the original leg: one in the thigh, one in the calf, one for each of the toes. In the arm, of course, the setup got a lot more complicated... Number Four: all these tiny objects were thyratron vacuum tubes and transistors. Hundreds of them in each limb, laid out in relays they converted neural impulses into electrical ones to operate the solenoids... Number Five: the oleo-strut shock absorber, in which compressed air, oil, and springs were combined to cushion the impact of a fall... Number Six: the gyroscopes, which controlled balance... Number Seven: the strain gauges. Attached to pads on the fingertips, they duplicated the sense of touch by converting pressure into neural impulses... Number Eight: the thermocouples, which converted temperature stimuli into neural impulses... Number Nine: the cooling system...

'Efficiency!' the lecturer said. 'That's the point. With real limbs, the maximum amount of work the human organism can put out over a sustained period of time, say for an hour or so, isn't much more than one-sixth of a horsepower. But with these self-powered jobs you can sustain indefinitely a level of work amounting to dozens or even hundreds of horsepower. Because the power doesn't come from your body, it comes from the energy capsules. All your body does is direct that power. Man, in other words, finally K.O.'s the machine by incorporating the machine into himself! At last we've got the answer to EMSIAC – the machine that incorporated *man* into *it*. Isn't that something, kids...?'

An announcer came on.

'Ladies and gentlemen,' he said, 'there's great news for all Inlanders tonight. Brother Theo is back! Yes, he returned to his office in the presidential mansion just a half-hour

ago, after weeks of cruising with the Olympic team and taking a much-needed rest from affairs of state. We have the privilege now of bringing you some film sequences of this training cruise which Brother Theo just turned over to us. Don't go 'way now – our boys are in great shape, you're about to witness some amazing action shots...' Martine woke to hear a voice lecturing, the accent had something in it of the Balkan and something of the Slavic...

'To all good Immobs I say this,' Vishinu began. 'Brother Theo is a bad Immob. He lies. What good did it do this man to cut off his arms? He still keeps his tongue and with this tongue he tells imperialist lies and makes trouble. When he says he is skiing on Kilimanjaro it is garbage. When he says he is only coaching the athletes it is garbage. His athletes are also very good, trained metallurgists. He is snooping all over for columbium, not butterflies, he wants for his imperialist masters a monopoly of all the columbium in the world. This is a very dirty wuay for a vol-amp to act...'

Cataclasm; he crawled out of the debris of sleep. Then two things happened simultaneously.

First, a thought that was like a blow. All this amputeeism of Immob, it was voluntary. Vol-amp: that meant, voluntary amputee. Somehow Martine knew that, knew it with finality. All these amps were vol-amps, he knew that too. *It was voluntary!* What good did it do Theo to cut off his arms, Vishinu asked. In that question was the answer to another question

What had happened to Theo's arms? He had cut them off, voluntarily. All this amputeeism was voluntary, and voluntary amputeeism was somehow the essence of Immob. And he must have realized it over a month ago, when he lay hidden under the roof of his hut and, sick with anxious anticipation, listened to Theo speaking with Ubu; Theo's words had made it clear enough then that these men *willingly, eagerly, cut their own arms and legs off*. But he hadn't wanted to face the fact that it was voluntary – all the while anticipating it – from that moment on he had slammed a mental door shut on it and refused to let it out. Maybe that was why he hadn't allowed himself to recognize Babyface: if he had, he would have had to consider why his arms were gone. He had been curious about everything else, had asked all sorts of questions, but none about *how, exactly, these amps got that way* – secretly he'd known, he didn't want to be told. When he'd sent Rambo to the strangers' camp that night, he'd instructed the kid on all sorts of questions he might pop but not a single one about the amputeeism. When Rambo had mentioned Immob, he'd changed the subject. Whenever Jerry the steward had showed signs of bringing it up, he'd changed the subject fast. Until this moment he had refused to think about it, even to acknowledge that there was anything to think about. He had avoided the word 'Immob' even in his thoughts, because somehow or other it seemed to imply a voluntary side to this amputeeism. *It was voluntary*. That, was the horror. But some even more shrivelling and obscure horror lay in the fact that he couldn't bring himself to face it, his memory bank had tried to go into a deep freeze from the moment Theo showed up, every meagre collection he'd dug up since he'd had to fight for tooth and nail...

And in the split second when he realized all this, he also realized something else. He hadn't dreamed Vishinu's voice. It was in the room, it had filtered into his dream from this room, it was there with him now.

He sat up in bed. There was Vishinu on the television screen, big as life, poker-faced, massive, being interviewed by an announcer who was on the thin edge of hysteria.

'Brother Vishinu, why, surely you don't mean to imply –'

'I imply nothing,' Vishinu said bluntly. 'I say it plain. This cruise was not for purposes of athletics, the athletics were only for cover-up, it was a clever imperialist manoeuvre.'

'But Brother Vishinu, how could you possibly know? – I mean, such information, if it is information –'

'You want to say, such information could only come from spies and spies are outlawed by us Immobs. Phuh, spying is not needed. We have friends in various places, they communicate with us. No doubt your own officials have their correspondents equally.'

The announcer made an effort to regain his bland public personality. 'Thank you, Brother Vishinu!' he said with false, faltering heartiness. 'Ladies and gentlemen, you have just heard Brother Vishinu in a surprise interview and quite a surprise it was, ha, ha... This interview was arranged at Brother Vishinu's own request, he said he had something of importance to say to all Inland Strippers, no doubt you all found his remarks as, uh, provoking as we did here in the studio. And now—'

A uni-amp page boy came into the studio and held out a slip of paper. The announcer read the note, then raised startled eyes to the camera.

'Here's an exciting development, ladies and gentlemen!' he said tensely. 'Word has just come from the capital that Brother Theo heard Brother Vishinu's remarks and wishes to reply to them. Hold tight, now – take it away, L.A.!'

The screen was in darkness for a second, then Theo flashed on. He was sitting at a desk, on the wall behind him there hung a large silken scroll with the words, DODGE THE STEAMROLLER!

'I've just been back in the capital a couple of hours,' he said. 'Naturally, I was just as shocked as all of you by Brother Vishinu's words. I cannot and will not question his sincerity, of course, but I most definitely want to question his facts. Brother Vishinu is badly misinformed, and that can make trouble. It was mostly misinformation that led the East and the West to go to war with each other in the old days. Even today, under Immob, it can do lots of mischief between Immob peoples and nations. So let's get the facts straight by all means.'

'What are the facts? Well, the facts about columbium aren't too good, we all know that. We need this awfully rare metal for practically all the vital parts of our pros and there just isn't very much of the stuff around. So we can understand Brother Vishinu's concern about this precious material – we're concerned too. But why should this concern lead to mutual suspicion? After all, it's a problem facing the whole Immob world, and we ought to approach it as one world. Through international conferences the Himalayas and the North Pole have been designated as East Union territory, the Andes and the South Pole as Inland Strip territory. Fair enough, isn't it? Then where the heck is all this imperialism and monopoly? What's imperialistic about divvying things up fifty-fifty?'

Theo was sitting up straight now, talking earnestly. It was incredible: his voice trembled, it had a real ring of sincerity – either he was a consummate actor (this babyface?) or it was all a hopeless muddle...

'A few more facts. There was no ulterior purpose for my cruise. To put it baldly, I was dog-tired, pooped. When the Olympic team was kind enough to invite me along on its trip I was delighted – maybe you know that the Games have always been my first love. And all we did on this trip was what you saw in my films a little earlier – trained, got some sun, visited various places and met various people, and collected quite a few odd plants and animals for our museums and zoos and botanical gardens. Brother Vishinu's correspondents no doubt meant well, but their reports weren't very accurate. All I can say is that it behooves Immobs, above all, to make sure their information is, ah, first-hand.' He smiled at the joke, then reached into his drawer. 'Here, folks, is the columbium we imperialists came back with.' He held an object up: a tremendous iridescent butterfly, floated in a slab of transparent plastic.

'As for the talk about monopoly, cartels, and all that – well, let me put it this way. I was surprised to hear Brother Vishinu use such antiquated words. In the old days, of course, such phrases used to fly about all the time: his forefathers were constantly accusing ours of Wall Street imperialist plots, ours were forever accusing his of Comintern-Cominform-Soviet imperialistic plots. And every so often the accusations would break out into open warfare. Well, communities bound together by Immob don't talk about each other that way. There's no room for talk of greed, plots, bad will, and all that rotten old junk. Our only competition is a fraternal one, symbolized by the Games.'

The tremolo again: he looked as though he were about to bawl.

'Soon the Games will be with us again. Let's go forward in the happy unity they represent and forget this momentary misunderstanding between brothers...'

'It's a lie, Babyface,' Martine said drowsily. 'A goddamned lowdown dirty unmitigated monstrous cerebrotonic-somatotonic bitch of a lie. You weren't butterfly hunting. You were digging.'

'Immob': he was quite sure now that the nonsensical word had something to do with immobilization, with the idea of immobilization, with some thoroughly obscene and improbable absurdity involving the idea of immobilization; quite sure, too, without knowing why, that hidden somewhere in that idea was some incredibly ghastly joke. Code word. Thoroughly inedible.

He switched off the television and turned over on his stomach, closed his eyes, saw Ooda's face, saw her high full breasts. His fingers curled around the pillow, he remembered from somewhere the phrase, 'a soft merchandise'. Then he slept.

PART THREE

The Immobs

CHAPTER 10

The sun, amuck, splashed through the open window. A frisky breeze spilled over his face. He had bolted out of sleep with such a sense of exhilaration that he felt light-headed; now he lay still, in a room all sheen and soft ferment. Marvellous to feel surge of tone through muscles again, the sudden clamour of appetites. Nerve strands bursting with hosannas, opening their yaps and beginning to crow; his –

He sat up and began to laugh. To pinpoint himself in time and space, he had forced his mind to focus on the scene – the Inland Strip – and then the date – July Fourth 1990. It was Independence Day! At least what used to be called Independence Day.

His Bond Street-Champs Élysées duds were so impeccable that when he emerged from the elevator and began to pick his way through the crowded lobby nobody seemed to suspect the psychic loincloth underneath. Nobody even noticed him. With one exception: an extraordinarily beautiful girl with jet black hair and marvellously full lips and an aura of lolligag and mash about her. Dressed in a pink-and-blue diagonally striped dirndl and a low-cut off-the-shoulders peasant blouse, she sat in an armchair facing the elevator doors, busying herself with a sketch pad in her lap; when Martine passed she raised her eyes and studied him coolly for a long moment, then quite unhurriedly went back to her work.

In all his life he had never seen a less coy or more calculating look on a woman's face. Her eyes had not only undressed him but had then gone on, in an access of bookkeeper's thoroughness, to measure each portion of his anatomy and record the more or less vital statistics in some amatory card-index. And he, of course, had replied in kind: measure for measure. At once intrigued and disconcerted by the semaphore of come-on passing between them, he slackened his pace so that he might keep her in sight a moment longer. Sure enough, she raised her eyes and stared again, boldly and unequivocally. He began to address himself urgently: no, no, foreign entanglements were out.

There were amps everywhere on the boulevards, all of them young, most of them in their twenties. Very few men with all their limbs intact were under forty, and those who were seemed to be wearing the scarlet letter of some enormous turpitude: they invariably had a hunched, hunted, defensive look about them which suggested that they were in ill repute and knew it, felt the disdain which bellowed at them from all eyes as they skulked along. These untruncated heretics were obviously the troubled ones – slackers? Immob's 4-Fs? – around here.

First observation: a man with his own legs had no footing here; if past forty he was a dotard, if in his twenties or thirties a pariah. And it was equally striking that those who had the maximum number of artificial limbs also had what, for lack of a better word, might be called the best standing: the quadros were gazed at worshipfully and with palpitating greed by all the women, from tremulous teen-agers to maudlin-eyed matrons. From the way these amps lazed around, from their air of having infinite time on their Plexiglas (or whatever) hands, it was a fair guess that the quadros, as well as

many of the tris and even the duos, had few workaday affairs to occupy them: they were the leisure class.

Once this idea occurred to Martine he found evidence to substantiate it on all sides. Those who did the menial jobs – tossing flapjacks in restaurant windows, clerking behind store counters, running elevators, driving buses and taxis – were non-amps; most of them, in fact, were women, and more than a few were Negroes.

So it was clear: there was a ladder of status with a carefully measured quota of eliteness doled out to those perched on each rung. All of which, to be sure, had been true of Martine's people for as far back as he could remember, but in pre-Immob times the marks of social standing had been different ones. There had been many standard indicators of one's degree of Jonesness, from the conspicuousness of one's consumption and the whiteness of one's collar to the telltale shape of one's proboscis and the generation in which one's ancestors got up off their emaciated and much-booted European rusty-dusties and took it on the westward lam. Now everything was simplified, there seemed to be just one spectacular badge of status: the number of plastic arms and legs displayed. Conspicuous consumption had apparently given way to conspicuous mortification of the peripheral flesh (a good old American practice), conspicuous maimery.

And before long Martine observed something else. These side-walk charades of sahibism and pariahdom unfolded in an atmosphere drenched with slogans. There were slogans everywhere, assaulting the eyes and eardrums; they blared from loud-speakers, they were lettered on buildings, on store fronts, on newspaper vans, on women's scarves and bandanas and dresses, on lapel pins and scatter jewellery, on banners strung across the boulevards like the electioneering signs Martine remembered from the old days. These Immobs were the sloganizingest people since the invention of the catchword, which no doubt occurred simultaneously with the invention of the word. And what slogans they had spewed up!

HE WHO HAS ARMS IS ARMED, one slogan proclaimed.

WAR IS ON ITS LAST LEGS, shrilled another.

MAKE DISARMAMENT LAST, a third advised.

As a prosthetic footnote to that idea, the public was also advised that DISARMAMENT MUST BE TOTAL AND PERMANENT.

TWO LEGS SHORTER, A HEAD TALLER, one sign said provocatively.

ARMS OR THE MAN, was the flat statement on another.

PACIFISM MEANS PASSIVITY, boomed the speaker in front of a radio shop.

NO DEMOBILIZATION WITHOUT IMMOBILIZATION, Martine read from the inscription on a girl's blouse, directly over her breasts.

That one startled him, it seemed to be the clue to something. Now that he allowed himself to think about it (and why, why, hadn't he thought about it until now: it had been a full month since he'd first heard Theo speak the evocative syllables?) he realized that the word 'Immob' had overtones too: Immob, immobilization, there was certainly a connexion...

And everywhere, leering down from roof tops and yapping up from inlaid sidewalks, the schizoid motif: DODGE THE STEAMROLLER! It was far from unpleasantly hot but he found himself sweating profusely. By the time he sighted the park, a huge

circular patch of greenery at the hub of the city, his shirt was soaked through around the shoulders and he felt rivulets trickling down his armpits.

In the centre of the park was a statue, a fifty-foot-tall marble enormity perched on a great slab of concrete. The bold geometer's lines of this stone mammoth were strongly reminiscent to Martine, they seemed the caricatured end-product of the massive-monumental-modern style, the cartoony gigantism, which for so long had been the keynote of both American advertising and display and Soviet propaganda.

Martine was standing alongside the statue now. It was a many-times-life-size replica of a machine: a steamroller, unmistakably a steamroller. Stretched out supinely in front of it, his legs crushed by the great cylindrical roller right to the hips, right to the genitals, was the oversized body of a man. An agonized expression contorted the face, the neck muscles stood out like guy wires, the arms were flung beseechingly into space, almost like – except for the nails: the steamroller took the place of the nails – those of Christ on the Cross. Cut into the base of the statue were the exasperating, belly-tightening, throat-shrinking words: DODGE THE STEAMROLLER!...

And somebody was shouting the words. 'Dodge the steamroller! Oh yes! Fine idea! But how can we minorities dodge anything so long as we're denied our full amp rights?'

It was a beefy red-faced woman in a severe tweed suit; she was standing on a platform to one side of the statue, addressing a small crowd through a microphone. Above her was a banner reading, LEAGUE FOR THE EMANCIPATION OF IMMOB WOMEN: EQUAL AMP RIGHTS FOR ALL!

'We minorities', the haranguer continued, 'have to get together in a united front and fight this thing through! Women, Negroes, all the victims of discrimination. Unless we go to real extremes we'll never get rid of our extremities... Now it's a real pleasure to introduce our guest speaker – Brother Bethune of the N.A.A.C.P. – he's going to say a few words about the Negro problem. Brother Bethune!'

A tall, lathy, coloured man came up the steps and took his place at the microphone. 'We're in this united front with the League all the way,' he boomed. 'We of the National Association for the Amputation of Coloured People know what it means to be denied all human rights. If all the locked-out minority groups can get together like so many fingers to form a mighty, invincible fist, we will smash through the wall of discrimination and gain our full amp rights, the great good fight will be won...'

So democracy had *not* quite triumphed: it remained a set of old saws even after surgery had come along with its new saws –

'Doc!'

He was so absorbed in his thoughts – rather, in his utter, appalling lack of them – that at first the voice which came from behind him did not register. But it was insistent.

'Hi! Dr Lazarus!'

Of course: *he* was Dr Lazarus, parasitologist extraordinary, plagued now by a most extraordinary parasite of a word which had bored into his brain and wriggled there. He turned and saw a mono-amp coming toward him, unruly red hair blazing in the sun, stack of books under one arm.

'Jerry!' Martine said. 'How in hell did you get here?'

They shook hands and the boy explained. So many passengers had left the S.S. *Wiener* at Miami that the skipper had decided to cancel the seaboard leg of the cruise and proceed to dry dock for some long overdue repairs; many of the stewards had received extended vacations; Jerry had hopped a plane last night and here he was, with three months in which to attend lectures and bone up for his civil service exams.

'It's a real break,' Jerry said. 'This means I'll be here for the Olympic Games. I would have given my, well, the nose off my face to see the Games.'

'I thought you were going to say – you would have given your right arm.'

'I started to,' Jerry said sheepishly. 'Some of those old-fashioned sayings still come up now and then, no matter how much linguistic reconditioning a guy has. It's awful hard to erase old words from the brain.'

'Yes. Words aren't amputated as easily as arms or legs.' Hardly aware of what he was saying Martine added: 'Maybe the only way you can really get rid of bothersome old words is to eat them... Look, tell you what, if you're going somewhere I'll walk along with you for a while. I'm just getting some air.'

'You planning to go to the Games?' Jerry asked as they cut across the park.

'If I'm here. Unless they're called off or postponed because of that business last night.'

'You mean Vishinu's speech? Aw, not a chance. Those Union guys have been talking like that, only not so rough, for years now, my pop says. It doesn't mean anything much.'

'It used to mean a lot in the old days.'

'That was before Immob,' Jerry said. 'Immob really unites people.'

'Vishinu didn't sound very united to me.'

'When Vishinu talks that way, beating his gums about imperialism and monopoly and all that, why, it's just a verbal hangover from the time of wars and armies and all. It's like my almost saying I'd give my right arm for something.'

They had crossed the park now and were standing on the kerbstone of a broad avenue, waiting for the light to change.

'How do you find things around here?' Jerry asked. 'I guess the old place must've changed a lot since your day.'

Plus ça change, plus c'est la maim chose. Plus Va change, plus c'est les mêmes shows.

'Yes, it's changed.'

As they started across the street Martine took hold of the boy's arm and began to talk intently. 'Listen, Jerry, I've been away for so long, I'd like to put a few kindergarten questions to you.'

'Shoot, Doc.'

'Well, suppose I were one of the African tribesmen I've been living with – say the chief of the tribe, a fellow named Ubu –'

'I like names like that, Hannah, Asa, Otto, they're the same backwards or forwards.'

Martine suddenly remembered, for the first time in three decades, a palindrome that had once been told him by an elder of the Mormon Tabernacle: 'Lewd did I live & evil I did dwell.'

'That's right,' Martine said. 'Palindromically speaking, it's much more symmetrical to be called Ubu than, say, God. No balance there, backwards that's doG. Well, just imagine that I'm this chief named Ubu. He's never seen an amp or even heard of Immob, then one day you show up with your pro. First off he wants to know: How did you lose your leg?'

'I'd set him straight fast, Doc. I *didn't* lose it.'

'I know, but how would you explain it so that it makes sense to a complete outsider like him?'

Jerry looked a little bewildered. 'That's a cinch,' he said. 'I'd just tell him that I went down to the Immob registration office like anybody else, on my sixteenth birthday, and passed all my entrance exams. One week later my turn came and I reported for surgery.'

'And what about the pro?'

'Well, when the stump was all healed I went back and had another operation. This time they inserted the permanent socket, tied in with the muscles and nerves of the stump. And when I recovered from *that* I went down to the Neuro-LoCo Centre and had my pro fitted. Then I went through nine months of tough neuro-loco training, passed my coordination tests, and got my certificate as a first-degree amp. Nothing to it.'

'That's the how of it, all right. But Ubu might want to know something else: Why? People who don't know anything about Immob might be a bit taken aback by the idea of anybody *volunteering* to have a leg cut off.' Martine shuddered: it was the first time he'd said the word aloud.

'Uh, I suppose so. Primitive people, you mean. Well, I'd just point out to this guy that demobilization doesn't mean a thing without immobilization. There's no pacifism without passivity. I'd put it to him that way.'

'Not bad – but you'd have to enlarge on that a little.'

'O.K., I'd explain that disarmament can't amount to much unless, well, a man is really disarmed. Arms are what men fight with, and legs are what take them to the battlefield, right?'

'I see. But suppose Ubu said it was a contradiction to remove a man's arms and legs and then fix him up with even better artificial ones?'

'Oh, come on, Doc. Even Ubu couldn't be that naïve.'

'Naïve?'

'All thumbs in the brain. Muscle-bound between the ears. Listen, remember that clenched-fist emblem the communists used to have? Well, in the old animalistic days they, everybody, used to be slaves of the clenched fist – a real hand always wants to make a fist and slug somebody, and it can't be stopped. But the pro, it's detachable, see? The minute it starts to make a fist, zip, one yank and it's off. The brain's in charge, not the hand – that's the whole idea of humanism.'

'Pretty neat.'

'Sure. Through amputeeism you make a man into a perfect pacifist. All right. You going to leave him flat on his back? A pacifist's got to get around to have any effect, otherwise all his charisma is wasted.'

'We can't waste any charisma, God knows. Now. What would you tell Ubu about – about the steamroller?'

'Oh, it's got to be dodged,' Jerry said gravely. 'That's the main thing.'
'Right,' Martine said, his stomach fluttering.

Blur of colour flitting among the pedestrians across the street, pinks and blues in a provocative ripple of skirt. Martine caught it out of the corner of his eye but just as he was about to turn his head and look, something happened.

They were crossing the street, they were almost at the kerb. Suddenly Jerry's artificial limb erupted with a series of loud explosions as he was beginning to mount the kerbstone. Instead of accomplishing the movement naturally and gracefully he halted in the middle of it, poised on his real leg, and the pro snapped upward with such force that the bent knee hit him squarely on the chin. The boy was thrown so badly off balance that he would have fallen if Martine had not reached out hurriedly and grabbed him by the elbow.

The streets were crowded, quite a few people had seen the incident. Martine noticed something strange: everybody in the immediate neighbourhood was looking at Jerry and grinning. It was the first time since his arrival that Martine had found any hint of a comic sense among these people.

'Goddamn,' Jerry said furiously. 'Oh, balls. I'll never learn.'

'What happened?'

'I didn't coordinate right.'

'How come? I thought you went through a pretty exhaustive training programme.'

'Sure, only some cortexes take to this advanced coordination better than others. Even in the best of cases it takes an awful lot of progressive exercising, along with drug-induced hypnosis, various kinds of auto-suggestion, and so on. You see, if the neural directions your brain sends down are the tiniest bit out of line, what you intended to be a crook of the finger might turn out to be a hefty right to somebody's jaw, and what you meant as a wriggle of your big toe might be a spine-crushing kick in somebody's ass.'

'That being the case,' Martine said, 'it's a lucky thing everybody with pros is a pacifist.'

'That's no lie. What happened just now, I slipped back into pre-amp coordination and sent out the kind of impulse you would to step up on a kerb with a real leg.'

'Very interesting – your kinaesthetic centres went nostalgic on you.'

'Maybe, but according to the neuro-loco guys it's a lot tougher to be a mono than a duo or a tri than a quadro. That's because with the mono and the tri the neuro setup of the body isn't symmetrical. On one side there's an artificial limb and on the other a real one and the brain has to keep on sending out two entirely different sets of impulses at the same time.'

'Lopsided,' Martine said. 'Like being God on the one hand and Dog on the other.'

'It's a bitch,' Jerry said.

'Why not take off both legs or both arms at the same time and keep your symmetry?'

'Heck, that's out, this step-by-step induction is a kind of initiation. They want you to learn your coordination the hard way and then they give you the symmetry, kind of as a reward.'

'Years ago,' Martine said, 'secret societies like the Masons had a system like that. They had different degrees of membership and you had to get into it gradually. It took a lot of work.'

'So does this,' Jerry said. 'I can't tell you too much about the neuro end of it, though. Metallurgy's more up my alley.'

'Metallurgy,' Martine said. 'That reminds me. What about this metal called columbium?'

'Well, you can't build pros without it. The reason it's so important is because it's the only metal whose alloys will stand up under real terrific temperatures.'

'Is it really so rare?'

'You're darn tooting it is. During the fifties everybody began to make a lot of high-powered jet fighters and bombers and they discovered that columbium was the only metal whose alloys would hold up in a jet engine's combustion chambers. Well, between the Second and the Third the aeronautical engineers cooked up certain things that would pinch-hit for columbium in jet engines. But in an atomic power plant, which gets a hell of a lot hotter than a jet engine, there's simply no substitute for columbium. It's a funny thing, we're so advanced technologically that we can work out substitutes for damned near everything under the sun, including arms and legs, but we can't find anything at all to replace the almost non-existent metal that's needed for our substitute arms and legs. Looks like Nature played a big joke on us cyberneticists.'

'Yes,' Martine said, 'it was very unkind of her to give us so many arms and legs, so much chromium and steel to make saws with which to cut these arms and legs off, and so little columbium to build bigger and better arms and legs. But where is this stuff found?'

'Most of the deposits, such as they are, are located in out-of-the-way places. The main ones have all been divvied up between us and the East Union, of course. Now we're getting the idea that more deposits may be found at the Poles, so the Strip has been assigned the Antarctic regions and the Union has the North Pole. The trouble is, we haven't had a chance yet to explore the Poles very thoroughly. Boy oh boy, that's something I'd really like to get into when I pass my civil service exams. That is, if I couldn't get into the Lake Victoria Dredging Project, but *everybody* puts in for that. Next to Victoria, I'd like best to do my Moral Equivalents in Polar exploration.'

Lake Victoria? Dredging? Martine frowned. 'If all the possible sources of columbium have been divided equitably, why all this tension?'

'Oh, lots of reasons. For example, there's a suspicion that some deposits may exist along the southeast coast of Africa and maybe on some of the more mountainous islands of the Madagascar group. Do they go with the South Pole? Then there's an outside chance some will turn up on the edges of the Humboldt Glacier in northwestern Greenland. Does that go with the North Pole? Besides, since we haven't had a chance to do much systematic looking yet, neither one of us knows for sure whether the other didn't get the better Pole.'

'As far as columbium goes, the Strip and the Union would seem to be poles apart.'

'Only because of the semantic hangover,' Jerry said earnestly. 'Poles are apart only in the old vocabulary. Immob supplies the Hyphen.'

They were now approaching a haberdashery establishment which seemed to specialize in garments for amps. On display in the window, draped on amp dummies, were fine tweed and gabardine suits, slacks, and sports jackets, all of them with truncated sleeves and legs. To the rear of the window was a long placard along the top of which were drawn rows of miniature steamrollers, interspersed with triskelions, in a pattern of decorative waves; this sign carried the company's slogan: SHOW OFF YOUR PROS TO BEST ADVANTAGE -WEAR BROOGS BROTHERS CUSTOM-MADE SHORTIES. Reflections of passing pedestrians paraded across the window; among them a pink-and-blue dress swirled momentarily, then disappeared into the crowd again.

'About the Olympics,' Martine said. 'I'm especially interested in the dexterities and discernments.'

'They're keen,' Jerry said.

'Theo's really good at them, isn't he?'

'He's the greatest.'

'The d-and-d's must be hard to master.'

'Don't let anybody tell you different. The sensory parts of the cortex were never intended to register such fine impressions as the neuro system of the pro can transmit and the kinaesthetic parts weren't built to send out such delicate impulses as the amplifiers can receive and act on. That poses a real challenge to the brain; it's got to catch up with the machine it runs.'

'Sounds like these pros can be something of a headache.'

'Oh, you're not kidding,' Jerry said soberly. 'Sometimes I get terrible migraines.'

'Maybe the brain just can't catch up with the pros.'

'It will, the headaches are just growing pains. There was an article in *Readers Compress* just the other week pointing out that, according to some research they've been doing up in the Neuro-LoCo Centre, the brains of many Immobs are already larger and heavier in certain areas than those of non-amps, and that eventually Immob will lead to an entirely new kind of, brain, once we get through this transitional period. Of course, I don't remember the technical details very well, all that's pretty much over my head.'

Martine laughed at the phrase but Jerry's face remained serious.

'I gather that the East Unionists don't show up very well against us in the Olympics,' Martine said.

'No, they just haven't got the engineers or metallurgists or neurologists or cyberneticists to stand up to ours. Wait'll the Games, you'll see, we'll beat the shorties off them.'

On the next block, across the boulevard, was a pale green skyscraper. When they reached the corner Jerry stopped and jerked his thumb in the direction of this building.

'That's where I'm heading,' he said. 'That's the M.E. University.'

'M.E.? Mechanical Engineering?'

'Oh no, M.E. stands for Moral Equivalent. Say –' He looked at Martine with sudden enthusiasm. 'Look, Doc, why don't you come in with me and visit around in some of

the classrooms? The summer session's on right now and we're having pre-exam reviews today.'

'I don't know,' Martine said cautiously. 'I'd be rather out of place, wouldn't I?'

'Not a chance, we have loads of visitors all the time, nobody'll even notice you. The last few weeks especially, we've had these East Union artists and other tourists wandering all over the place.'

'Artists from the East Union?'

'It's part of the cultural exchange programme between the Strip and the Union. When the Games are held in New Jamestown a lot of Unioneers come over here and when they're held in New Tolstoygrad a lot of our people go over there. Haven't you seen all these foreign-looking people around town with their sketch pads and everything?'

'Yes – yes, I guess so. I just didn't know who they were.'

'Well, that's it. What do you say, want to come in with me?'

'If you're perfectly sure –'

'Sure I'm sure. Tell you what, I'll sit with you in the different classrooms and if there's anything you don't understand I'll tip you off.'

'O.K. I warn you, though, I may need a lot of tipping off. Most of this brain-building stuff is way over my head.'

At the top of the stairs Martine turned and saw the girl in the dirndl skirt and peasant blouse crossing the street. She came up the pathway that wound through the University lawn, seated herself on a bench near the entrance, opened her sketch pad flat on her knees, and began to draw. On the stone back rest of the bench was a representation, in bas-relief, of a steamroller. The pattern of her full-cut skirt, Martine now noticed, consisted of diagonal rows of tiny steamrollers, some of them pink, some of them blue.

CHAPTER 11

The lecturer behind the table was a scholarly-looking young man, a quadro.

He began to talk. Wiener. Professor Norbert Wiener. A name to remember and to cherish. Back in the days of the Second, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, this mathematical genius had called together colleagues from many fields and with them created an entirely new science required by the times: cybernetics. He had invented the name himself, from the Greek meaning 'steersman', and forged the first definition, 'the science of control and communication in the animal and the machine'. Most remarkable of all, he had had the vision to see that, once engineers knew enough about c-and-c systems, it would be possible – more: it would be necessary – to build machines which would duplicate, and then improve upon, even the most complex parts and functions of the animal.

The greatest human function to usurp, to duplicate, ultimately to perfect, was that of thought itself – for if the brain could perfect itself in an electronic model, it could then imitate this model and thus become perfect itself. Wiener realized that the most important machine to develop was the calculating machine, the reasoning machine, the so-called robot brain. With his intuitive genius he had somehow dimly sensed the Immob future which cybernetics would eventually usher in. So he had concerned himself from the beginning with duplicating other parts and functions of the human animal – in the machines called prosthetics.

'The loss of a segment of limb', Wiener had written in 1948, 'implies not only the loss of the purely passive support of the missing segment or its value as mechanical extension of the stump, and the loss of the contractile power of its muscles, but implies as well the loss of all cutaneous and kinaesthetic sensations originating in it. The first two losses are what the artificial-limb maker now tries to replace. The third has so far been beyond his scope... The present artificial limb removes some of the paralysis caused by the amputation, but leaves the ataxia. With the use of proper receptors, much of this ataxia should disappear as well... I have made an attempt to report these considerations to the proper authorities, but up to now I have not been able to accomplish much.'

Of course he had not been able to accomplish much, the lecturer went on. His had been a brutalized war-bent society, all too ready to spend billions developing the A-bomb – but quite reluctant to allocate even a penny to work out adequate prosthetics for those maimed in its periodic wars. It had remained for Immob to perfect artificial limbs superior to natural ones.

'What'd you think of him?' Jerry asked as they walked down the corridor.

'I had a sort of negative tropism to him – guess I'm not prepared to see the light yet.'

The next lecturer was a philosopher. Remembering the philosophers he had known during his own student days, Martine rather expected that, as against the cyberneticist's hammerblow style, this man would be on the wispy and wishy-washy side.

But Martine was dead wrong about this Immob philosopher. The young quadro plunged headlong into his subject as though he were regarding reality through the physicist's electron microscope rather than the metaphysicist's muzzy smog.

Where, he wanted to know, did the philosophy of Immob start? With William James – more concretely, with the immortal *The Moral Equivalent of War* which James wrote, incredibly enough, in 1910. Here, at least in embryo, was to be found the core of the whole Immob concept – the idea that the heroic, derring-do energies of youth must neither be bottled up nor drained off by war, but must be given adequate outlets in peaceful, constructive projects which capture the young imagination.

Wherever Immob operated – in the East Union orbit as well as the Strip orbit – one could see Moral Equivalents which pitted man against the elements rather than against his fellow-men. At this very moment brigades of mono-amp youths, serving for two-year periods without pay, were seeding and dispersing clouds to control rainfall, throwing up mighty dams to stem and divert rivers, exploring Lake Victoria's depths: man against water. Others were working on projects in which mountains were literally moved and valleys filled in with atomic explosives: man against earth. Still others were helping to build and test rocket ships which eventually would break away from the earth and, free orbit, catapult into space toward the moon and the nearby planets: man against the air and the ether and the exasperating clutch of gravity. And there were those who were risking their lives every day to test new types of personal armour and non-inflammable suits which one day would allow human beings to bore through to the infernal centre of the earth or land on the boiling surfaces of other planets and come away unscathed: man against fire.

And the result? As men through mutual effort conquered and humbled the universe, they speedily lost the feeling of alienation from their environment and came, through mastery of Nature, to feel at one with it. And this in turn caused men to feel less alienated from each other: masters can mingle freely and exuberantly, while slaves can only skirt each other and cower in lonely skin-encapsulated terror. A mature kind of megalomania was now becoming possible. Now the universe was truly, literally, becoming an appendage to man's ego. Omnipotence was rapidly becoming mankind's everyday experience, infantile myth was yielding to cybernetic might. Thanks to the boundless heroism generated by Moral Equivalents, men were coming to terms with the once nauseatingly distant and indifferent universe and recapturing the exhilarating sense of the oceanic. And such men do not fight with each other, they embrace. Moral Equivalents were a strategy to restore human megalomania by smashing the 'Its', the steamrollers.

'I couldn't follow him on that last point,' Jerry said. 'He's too deep for me.'

'Me too,' Martine said. 'He seems to have a theme song: *How Deep is the Oceanic?* I wonder, though, if Vishinu hears him singing.'

'Oh, sure he does. Why, at this very moment there are lecturers in universities all over the East Union who are saying exactly what this guy just said, word for word. Matter of fact, that last prof wrote a textbook on his subject, *Community and the Sense*

of the Oceanic I think it's called, that's used as an advanced M.E. text in the Union same as here.'

'Do they really teach exactly the same things over there?'

'Well, some of their philosophers like to sound off more on Tolstoy and Kropotkin and Pavlov than William James. Then their cyberneticists are a little sore about Wiener having been an American, they claim they had their own Wieners a long time ago and one bird even argues that he's got documents to prove the Russians invented the first artificial leg. But mostly it's the same.'

'Maybe', Martine suggested, 'Vishinu feels unoceanic toward Theo because he thinks Theo's a bit too oceanic about the Indian Ocean. That may be why everybody's at sea today. Where do we go next?'

CHAPTER 12

Farther down the corridor they came to a door on which were printed the words: PANIC CONTROL LABORATORY: YOGA BREATHING AND MUSCULAR RELAXATION. Through the glass panel Martine could see a row of cots inside on which some twenty mono-amps and duo-amps were stretched out, all of them in the nude, all with their pros removed. He stopped and studied the scene.

'Do amps have to relearn everything?' he asked.

'Oh, sure,' Jerry said. 'People never knew how to breathe and sleep before. War comes from jerky respiration, muscular tension, and insomnia.'

'There used to be some simple-minded people around', Martine said, 'who had the idea that jerky respiration, muscular tension, and insomnia sometimes came from war. From war and from the rumours of war.'

'Somebody should've told them about the James-Lange theory of emotions – we don't run because we're afraid but we're afraid because we run. Carry that a step further and you've got a physiological approach to the problem of war.'

Martine pulled out his handkerchief and dabbed at his forehead. Sweating; extreme muscular armourizing in the throat, the back of the neck, the shoulders: breath shallow and forced – he had all the symptoms of panic, sure enough, a gang of tropisms were acting up in him. How to dodge *these* damned internal steamrollers? But the moment he put the question to himself in that form he felt his neck and shoulder muscles clamp still tighter. He was in a hell of a spot, semantically and psychosomatically: his big internal steamroller was the word 'steamroller' itself – a contingency for which neither Mr James nor Mr Lange had allowed.

'Could we go in and have a look around?' he said. 'It's fascinating.'

'Come on,' Jerry said. 'There's still a few minutes before the last lecture.'

There were dozens of electrodes fastened to the body of each student, to toes and fingers, thighs and forearms – where there were any left – pelvis, neck, forehead, just about everywhere. The wires from these terminals were plugged into rows of sockets alongside each cot and seemed to be connected up with banks of tonus indicators on the wall behind, one series of dials for each cot.

The instructor, a young quadro-amp, turned his head when the visitors entered, cautioned them with a finger against his lips to remain silent, then went on with his class.

'All right, men,' he said. 'We'll take it again. Just concentrate on the diaphragm. Stop feeling that you are breathed in and out of by some wind machine you don't control. *You* breathe. *You* make the diaphragm stretch and slacken, *you* force the lungs open and shut. No "It" breathes through you, *you* breathe. Stop being tyrannized by your diaphragm! You can bend it to your will! Through it you can slow up your pulse rate, throttle the thyroid and the pituitary and the adrenals, stun the parasympathetic nervous system, anything. You are master of your own metabolism! Your body is your

instrument! Learn to control it and you can walk on hot coals, stick pins through your tongue. You've seen it demonstrated over and over again in hypnosis – a psyche, a hypnotist's psyche, uses a human body as a toy, paralyses it, raises boils on the skin, removes warts. The next good Immo step is to make yourself your *own* hypnotist, put your *own* psyche in your body's saddle. Concentrate on that. Remember, you're in charge. Think now of your diaphragm, that helpless, will-less, impotent strip of membrane. Now you're going to put it through its paces. Ready now. Everybody ready. One. Two. Three. Breathe! In... out. In... out. Diaphragm up... diaphragm down. Lungs open... lungs shut. Do it yourself... do it yourself. Body slow down... body slow down. Heart slow down... glands slow down. In... out. Muscles loose... nerves loose. Iiiiiinnnn... ooooouuuuut. Steady, now. One... two... one... two...'

All the students had their eyes closed. With each in-sucking of air twenty chests rose, twenty abdomens were pulled in until they were tight cups of flesh – with one boy down near the end, the abdominal walls fell away until it seemed they must be pressing the intestine flat and making contact with the base of the spine. Martine watched the dials on the tonus indicators. All of them had begun to drop when the breathing exercise got under way, in some cases almost to zero, in others just a few degrees.

The instructor walked up and down the aisle. He watched the indicators and in a soft, rhythmic singsong gave pointers to each student individually. 'Croly,' he said, 'your embouchure's tied up in knots. Concentrate on the lips, the cheeks, the lips, the cheeks... Anderson, your toes are all bunched up, watch the tonus in those toes, watch the tonus in those toes... Schmidt, you've still got a lot of hypertension in the pelvis, the pelvis is retracted, the pelvis is retracted... Dunlap, for God's sake, relax those sphincters, take it easy, man, relax those sphincters, or we'll have to send you back for more narcosuggestion...'

'There's something I don't get,' Martine whispered to Jerry. 'Why do they all remove their pros?'

'Simple,' Jerry whispered back. 'What're the animal emotions? Fear and rage. What's the bodily state that induces 'em? The possession of arms and legs. Because, see, so long as you've got arms they'll want to be used as weapons against others – and because everybody else's arms want to be used against you, your legs will want to run.'

'But wouldn't that go double for pros? They're much more powerful than real limbs.'

Jerry looked outraged. 'You must be kidding, Doc. There's one thing about a pro that makes it entirely different from a real limb – it's detachable; see, I already told you.'

'You mean – Immo doesn't do away with panic, it just makes it detachable?'

'You're getting the idea. In this lab guys who are first-degree and second-degree amps learn that they can begin to control their panic by detaching their pros and then subduing the glands and nerves and muscles through Yoga breathing and progressive relaxation. It helps to build up the ego, which in itself is a sure cure for animal panic. Props up the shaky megalomania. Naturally, it's just for the transi–'

'One... two,' the instructor chanted. 'Iiiiiinnnn... ooooouuuuut. Dunlap! Watch those sphincters, boy!'

'–it's just for the transitional period.'

'All right, men,' the instructor went on. 'That's all for today. You can put your pros back on now.'

The students opened their eyes, sat up on their cots, yawning and stretching. All except one, the young man down near the end whose abdomen had seemed to cave in entirely during the breathing exercises. The instructor walked down to his cot, took him by the shoulders, and began to shake him.

'All right, Higby,' he said. 'Higby. Come out of it now. Higby! Snap out of it!'

Almost all of the indicating needles behind Higby's cot were down to zero. Suddenly they all jumped and began to jerk wildly. The young man opened his eyes with a start, blinked rapidly several times, then heaved himself into a sitting position.

'Good work, Higby,' the instructor said. 'That makes ten days, for ten days in a row you've relaxed so completely at the signal that you've lost consciousness. You've got the knack of it now. Men!' He turned around and addressed himself to the class. 'I have an important announcement to make, men. Higby has now mastered the breathing and relaxation techniques perfectly – something that practically never happens before the quadro amp stage. Never again will he be so enslaved by his body that he'll have to lie down in bed and wait to *fall* asleep. Sleeping will never be a passive falling experience for him again. He can now send his Atman soaring into the Brahman any time he wants to. He'll never again have to *lose* consciousness, he'll simply thrust it away from him. Higby will never again know panic. He has dodged the steamroller. I'm going to give him his P.C. certificate and what's more, I'm going to recommend that he be allowed to go on to full amputeeism, he's earned it.'

The other members of the class had plugged their pros back into their sockets. They all stood up now, still in the nude, intense emotion on their faces. Turning toward Higby, they all began to applaud wildly, they shouted phrases like 'Bravo!' and 'That's the stuff, Hig!' and 'Good going, kid!' The instructor stood alongside Higby's cot, a pleased smile on his face; Higby sat quietly, a little sleepy and bewildered but tremendously moved, his lips trembled.

'What a break,' Jerry said enviously. 'A Panic Control certificate and a recommendation for quadro at his age! That kid's got the makings of a real champ psychosomaticist.'

What, the final speaker demanded, is Immob? Immob is the cyber-cyto dialectic – the dwindling distance between cybernetics and cytoarchitectonics. The bridging of the gap between the mechanical and the human – the discovery of the Hyphen between machine and man – thus enabling man finally to triumph over the machine because it's *man* who has the Hyphen and not the machine. There was always a great paradox in pre-Immob history, the lecturer pointed out. Why should it be that the human brain can produce perfection only outside itself – in the machines it conceives and builds? If it can conceive and project such perfection, why can it not apply the same grandiosity of vision to itself, rebuild itself? The answer is that it can, once it stops being cowed by its own creations. The slogan, 'Physician, heal thyself!' yields to the Immob admonition, 'Cyberneticist, redesign thyself!'...

'The great work along these lines', the lecturer continued, 'was done by a man you all know about. Although a very young scientist before the Third, only at the beginning of his career, he had already managed to trace many neuronic networks which had never been imagined before.'

The lecturer turned now and waved his hand dramatically in the direction of an Immob cytoarchitectonic map.

'This is the map of maps,' he went on. 'Over its terrain will be fought the wars of the future. The cyber-cyto wars. The man of whom I am talking knew that. He gave us the main elements of this map as a living testament to his vision. What further earth-shaking discoveries might not have come from his inspired scalpel if his life had not been cut short, almost at the moment of its beginning, by the EMSIAC war! And yet, in handing down this map to us, he did, in a sense, triumph over EMSIAC. For, armed with this revolutionary tool, we can now march forward into the cybernetic future in which we shall become our own EMSIACs, the human brain will overtake and outstrip its own projected greatness. Yes, the Immob world will never forget its debt to the greatest cybernetic hero of all, its towering genius and immortal martyr. He, more than anybody else, was responsible for the cyber-cyto revolution of Immob. Dr Martine was the first and greatest adversary of the steamroller...'

Steam hissing, roller rumbling. Iiiiiinnnnn... ooooouuuut.

'There's a break for lunch now,' Jerry said.

Let me tell you about my aberration –

'Want to come up to the cafeteria and put on the feedbag?'

Feedbag's clogged. It makes my sphincters very tense. The riddle of the sphincters, *I* say, not Oedipus, is to take the fool by the horns –

'Hey, Doc.' Jerry stopped and looked hard at Martine. 'You look kind of funny, you're awful pale. You got something on your mind? Sounded like you were mumbling something to yourself.'

'I'm sorry, Jerry. Yes, there is something on my mind – I mean, something's trying to put itself on my mind... What were you saying?'

'Just that it's time for chow. How's about it?'

'Sure.'

What was it he was trying to remember, what confounded mess was churning, turning, burning, yearning, norning in his anachronistic unconscious? What the hell did the fellow mean, whooping it up about Martine that way! Did a guy become a hero just because he wrote a few technical papers on the cortical-thalamic circuits in the higher primates? A martyr? Something was very definitely the martyr. With Martine...

On the roof, forty-odd stories up, they found a table to one side of the huge glass-enclosed penthouse restaurant. The whole city was stretched out below, wheels within wheels: directly to the right was the circle of park at the hub, with the statue of the steamroller hunched massively in the middle.

He was hungry, and the turkey sandwich was wonderfully tasty, but after a moment he put it away and sighed: looking down at the statue, he found that he'd lost all interest in food. What was it about that mammy-jamming symbol that upset all his gastric functions?

'All that talk about Martine,' he said.

'Great man!' Jerry said reverently. 'Did I tell you, I was born on 19 October? My mom says with a start like that I can't help but be a world beater.'

19 October. Oh, God, yes, and back on the ship one afternoon Jerry had said something about *another* date, he'd said, why, sure, *everybody* knows somebody who was born on 16 July. And – back on the island all the amp athletes had worn big blue 'M's on their sweatshirts. 'M's which could hardly have stood for Man...

'Like Martine. He beat it right out of this world on 19 October.'

'Didn't he, though? Plop into immortality.' Martine decided to change the subject: he was beginning to sweat badly again: Helder had snored so goddamned loud. 'These lectures,' he began.

'What'd you think of them?'

'They were meaty, all right.' He stared at the slivers of turkey protruding from his sandwich. 'They contained plenty of food for thought.' He was silent for a moment, blank. 'I want to ask you an important question. Remember that African bushman I told you about a while back?'

'Yup, what about him?'

'Well, I was trying to imagine how he'd react if he'd sat through this morning's lectures. He'd be awfully impressed, of course, but all the same I think he'd sense a certain contradiction.'

'A contradiction? Seems to me all the theories fit together pretty neatly.'

'You bet, it's perfectly amazing. Square concepts are plugged into round theoretical holes and, by some miracle of non-Aristotelian logic, they seem to fit. But a naive guy like Ubu might still say that the two halves of the overall theoretical picture don't seem to dovetail.'

'Which halves?'

'The Yogi half and the Commissar half. Let me explain what I mean – seeing it through Ubu's childish eyes, naturally. Immob was founded on the idea of immobilization, right? That is to say, the new ideal was simply quiescence, the passive condition – Yogi do-nothingism.'

'All that's kid stuff,' Jerry said. 'Where's the problem?'

'I'm coming to that. Now, this Yogi tendency is founded on a real disdain for the body, it's an attempt to humiliate the body, crush it, petrify it, escape from it. But there's another side to Immob. The Commissar side. The feverishly active, striving, fast-moving side. All that seems to be based on adoration for the body, not a rejection of it. Anyhow, the upshot is that the immobilized acquire greater mobility and the passive get around more than ever. To an outsider like Ubu, you see, all this might seem a bit inconsistent.'

Jerry stared at him. 'Why?'

'Look, people start out truncating themselves in order to disengage themselves from the world – and they wind up capable of greater engagement than ever. Ubu would flip his wig trying to figure out how a programme for detachment metamorphoses into a programme for the oceanic.'

Jerry frowned, he seemed bored by the whole discussion. 'I'd give your Mr Ubu a very simple answer,' he said. 'I'd tell him to stay the hell out of politics.'

'Politics?' Martine said in bewilderment.

'Sure. What you're talking about, this so-called contradiction Ubu would hit on, that's the whole bone of contention between our two big parties.'

'You have parties?'

'Natch, haven't you heard about the Pro-Pros and the Anti-Pros? They're just what their names imply: the Pro-Pros are in favour of prosthetics and most of the Immob big shots belong to it, while the Anti-Pros have been dead set against prosthetics from the start because they think such developments foul up the original principles of Immob.'

'I gather', Martine said, 'that you belong to the Pro-Pros.'

'Gather again, Doc. I don't belong to anything. Politics, any kind of politics, makes me sick – too verbalistic an activity, it's for blabbermouths. But all the same, I think the Antis are a bunch of dizzy extremists. What are you going to do with a guy after you make him into a hero and give him all this charisma – tuck him away in a basket without even a pair of thumbs to twiddle? Is that the thanks he gets for his sacrifice?'

'Ubu', Martine suggested, 'might say that, as he understands Immob, amputeeism is supposed to be a privilege and not a sacrifice.'

'Quibbling,' Jerry said firmly. 'What's the sense in kidding ourselves? The whole thing's nothing but a semantic difficulty. In the Age of the Hyphen we're bound to work out ways of bringing such polarities together. Through dialectic materialism-idealism, I mean.'

'You think you'll reconcile all polarities? Even the North and South Poles?'

'Sure thing. The split is just semantic. Isn't the real silent world a mighty solid hyphenation of north and south? Take the equator, for example, it's only an Aristotelian construct of man's, it exists only on the map, not the territory. Vishnu may forget it but the territory's been a pretty compact little unit all along.'

'So it has. But then, so is an eight ball.'

'Right.' Jerry yawned. 'Well, I've got to get down to the cyber lab. Want to come along to see what it's like?'

'Thanks for the invitation, but I've got some things to do this afternoon. I hope I meet up with you again, Jerry – it's been very helpful talking to you.'

'Tell this Ubu to read some Martine. It'll give him a new slant on things.'

Hissing of steam in diaphragm, rumbling of roller in sphincters: Helder's loose lips flapping – 'I'll do that,' Martine said. 'Happy cortico-building, and don't let it go to your head.'

He'd left not a moment too soon. Another minute with Jerry and he would have lost control completely, already toward the end there he'd felt the convulsive tremors beginning in his viscera. The morning's pedagogical fare had been the most enormous joke he'd ever heard or imagined, very possibly the greatest and most obscene joke ever conceived of by mortal would-be man: and nobody had laughed. Nobody had chuckled. All those hyphenated sobrieties! Those oceanic pomposities! Everybody had the drag-ass bring-down cyber-cyto blues!

Walking away from the University, down through the spacious gardens and past the girl with the pink-and-blue skirt and the sketch pad – not really seeing her, not seeing anybody, moving blindly and mechanically – he found that his mind was reeling.

'Not a smirk,' he said aloud to himself, wonderingly. 'Not so much as a twinkle in anybody's eye. Oh God, oh Montreal, oh Martine.'

PART FOUR

Dodging the Steamroller

CHAPTER 13

Martine must have been zigzagging through the streets for fully a half-hour when he turned a corner and came upon the department store with a great neon sign on its façade: MARCY'S GENERAL MERCHANDISE. As he approached the nearest window he saw that a clump of people had gathered in front of it. There was nothing inside but a long row of baskets, each one containing a large doll.

Something began to bother him. Just as he was about to make an opening for himself in the crowd and pass through, one of the dolls, the one at the very end of the line, the one which seemed to have its large round blue eyes fixed on him – this doll moved.

It blinked.

Unmistakably blinked.

He moved a few feet, then stopped. He had the sensation that something intolerable was happening, that he was being trapped. The doll's big blue eyes had moved, they were still fixed on him, picking him out from the crowd. When he turned and looked squarely at the doll with an air of outrage, the doll's whole head moved so that it could look squarely back.

This, he felt, was a scene, some shimmer of improbability, that he would much rather avoid, but he remained rooted to the spot and forced himself to face the fact – it was not a doll, it was alive, its lips were moving, all the doll-sized figures in all the baskets were alive and their lips were all moving too. They were alive, these dolls, and dangling before each one was a microphone. Each one was alive and speaking into its microphone, addressing a group of spectators outside. The low drone of their voices came to Martine now through the traffic noises.

His impulse was to fight his way to the kerb and run but he stood there, his legs limp. The live doll at the far left, its eyes never leaving him for a moment, was speaking to him, directly to him, he heard the one voice above all the others. He did not want to hear, he did not want to stay, but slowly, thinking of the perversity that makes a man poke his tongue into an aching cavity, he made his way to the window and stood there looking down at the figure in the basket.

The blue eyes gaped up at him, pools of bland accusation or maybe just neutral sheets of mirror reflecting his own guilt, some obscure guilt, something to do with snoring and not snoring, and the lips moved and words came softly into his ears.

'We have lost the true way,' said the doll that was not a doll, no expression ruffling its doll-like alive features. 'It is late – the time for loom weaving is past.'

'The time for loom weaving is definitely past,' Martine whispered huskily, mechanically. 'Gone forever.'

'I am glad you agree,' the living doll said.

It gave Martine a start: obviously there must be microphones installed somewhere on the street to pick up voices and carry them inside.

All these figures were quadro-amps – without prosthetics. Their limbless bodies, ovaloid, spheroid, stripped of geometric irrelevancies, were hidden under blue silk-edged baby blankets, which was why it had been easy at first glance to take them for dolls: only their heads were exposed. These were the basket cases, the ceiling gazers, and navel explorers.

Martine looked down the row of baskets. Some of the amps were still talking softly, magisterially, into their microphones, others had drifted off into a trance too, they lay like infant corpses, lips fallen open and eyeballs tipped as though to stare at their own insides. Martine turned away with a curse.

Now for the first time he noticed a large booth in the interior of the store, festooned with drapes of bright bunting. It was a recruiting desk, he could see, above it a large sign urged,

The Human Race Needs YOU!

Dodge the Steamroller

Register Now for Immob

and in front of the desk there was a line of young men, waiting to affix their signatures to a registry book. They all seemed bemused, their thoughts far away as men's thoughts often are at the moment of great and irrevocable decisions; there was something robotlike, 'It'-propelled, about the way they shuffled along and the absent-minded air each one had as he stepped up to take the pen offered by a smiling blonde young lady clerk. One of the applicants, Martine noticed, stood in line staring at his hands, examining them wonderingly – fascinated, no doubt, by the spectacle of appendages which, as their last act in the world, were about to sign their own Moscow confessions and death warrants.

Automatically Martine's eyes lowered and came to rest on his own trembling fingers. 'You are already one of us in your heart.' It would be a double irony, he thought with a sudden vicious jolt in his gut, if his hands, hands of the world's most skilful aggression excavator, were to sign their own lives away in a burst of surgical abandon. There was some sort of ghastly fascination in the idea, his legs were taut with the urge to move in the direction of the booth and fall in line. Why this sweating, choking, nauseating guilt which had been plaguing him all afternoon, all the creepy word-gutted afternoon? Was it because he was intolerably reminded somehow that his fingers, his cunning fingers, had done terrible things with a scalpel? Did the incredible loathsome word 'steamroller' somehow remind him of the crimes his fingers had perpetrated for eighteen years with a scalpel? Was that why, in a surge of masochism, he now, contrary to all logic, to all life impulse, toyed, despite his conscious moral horror, with the idea of surgical mea culpas? Or – was it because of something else his fingers had once held – in a lower bunk under a blanket of snores, a sackcloth of snores – sweatingly, wordily, heldishly – something, a fountain pen...

'He must be dead,' he muttered. 'Sure, he's *got* to be.'

Looking for something to distract his attention, any stray object, he turned his head and caught sight of the rack of books fastened to the wall on his left. There, he saw, were the Basic Immob Texts, containing what were clearly the classic works of the movement; familiar names leaped out tauntingly at him – Freud, Korzybski, James,

Tolstoy, Swami Prabhavananda, Aldous Huxley, Nietzsche. Etcetera, etcetera. The very first one, the one marked Basic Immob Text Number One, bore the title, in large letters, DODGE THE STEAMROLLER.

Eyes unfocused, mind unfocused, he reached for a copy of the book and shoved it in his pocket. Then, body trembling, legs so weak he was afraid they would buckle, he picked his way through the crowds to the door, straining with the effort to keep his eyes away from the booth, a sickening turmoil in his stomach. 'You are already one of us...'

'But *Theo* isn't dead,' he said to himself. 'Then –'

He hurried along the boulevard, panting. When he came once more to the great statue at the hub, he reached into his pocket and pulled out the book, at the same instant aware even before the words came into sight that his breath had quickened to a desperate chug and his whole knotted body was filmed with clammy sweat and his gut was a hopeless writhing rope of anxiety; aware of this extraordinary upset now culminating the distress of the whole vile day, aware of it and wondering why it should be so and yet somehow not wondering but knowing and yet not knowing and in terror of the unknown undodgeable knowledge. And then his eyes fixed on the cover of Basic Immob Text Number One and knowingly they drank in the sickening abominable knowledge, squirming in outrage that was somehow prepared, stunned, but not without anticipation and a preset for the stunning –

Whammo! Thunderclap in his head. All the drawers of all the filing cabinets tumbling out and spilling their screeching turkeys in a vast upheaving and at last, as he struggled to keep above the surface of nausea, not to sink, not to faint, at last, as the convulsion sped down, down to his stomach, the collected works of Martine were complete again, the crucial volume had been slipped back into place and it was a torment and a relief too, it was what he had been fleeing from all day and yet somehow seeking too, dodging and yet dogging, in misery and revulsion and need he had all day secretly been looking for this key volume and now it was there in his fingers, the fingers from which it had come a long long time ago while the son-of-a-bitch snored. He read with blurred terrified anticipatory knowing-dodging eyes the words on the cover of the volume:

Dodge the Steamroller

The Notebook of

DR MARTINE

Edited and with an Introduction

by Dr Helder

PRESIDENT OF THE INLAND STRIP

'Of course,' Martine said. 'Naturally. President.'

Directly across the drive which circled the statue was a clump of trees, to one side of a row of benches on which a few people were sitting. He hurried across, blind to

everybody and everything, and at last, at last, hidden behind a thick eucalyptus, he bent over and retched – horribly, endlessly, gaspingly, shudderingly, eating his words and spewing them out at last and straining with each heave to force the guilt up with them. Thinking that this was surely the greatest bellylaugh belly-emptying laugh of all time and yet he could not laugh, he had no laughter left, now he was crying uncontrollably and broken-heartedly.

He stayed there for a long time, doubled over. Finally he straightened up and wiped the tears and muck from his face. Then he found a seat on a nearby bench and began to read.

From Dr Martine's Notebook

(MARK I)

(BASIC IMMOB POCKETBOOK EDITION)

*18 October 1972. With Flying Hospital Unit X-234-BL
Belgian Congo, north of Stanleyville*

Almost midnight. Dog tired. Can't sleep. Hell of a battle going on somewhere around Tunis, casualties pouring in. On duty in surgery plant for almost eleven hours, spent last three of them patching up Babyface's noggin, what was left of it.¹

The kid's face haunts me. Dedicated, that's probably it. Dedication is mother's milk to this young onward-and-upwarder – he's a priest in an anti-gravity suit. Johnny One-Note – no doubt he looks exactly the same, exudes waves of goodness, whether he's haranguing people about signing the Peace Pledge or erasing Paris from the map. I've seen that kind of unswerving intensity on only one other human face: Helder's.² Such built-in rapture can only be described as theological, the neon of belief. Teddy Gorman. Christian name Theodore, according to his papers. Wonder why they didn't nickname him Theo?³

Lying in the bunk plane now, skinful of ache, wondering if I'll ever sleep again. Wondering if I'm going batty.

Infernal clicking from the ticker-tape machine up forward – EMSIAC, electronic chatterbox. No Hamlets in EMSIAC's vacuum tubes, he's even more single-minded than Babyface and Helder. Only EMSIAC's really sane: knows exactly what he wants. Which is enough in itself to raise the whole question of sanity.

Rest of the crew's asleep. Characteristic of yes men: so long as they do their little duties dutifully, nod vigorously to the world and EMSIAC, they have ready access to the Land of Nod. It's nihilists like me who turn insomniacs – keep a sharp eye on the world during the day and that eye refuses to shut at night.⁴

Noddism : the state of modern man. He says yes, and he sleeps.

¹ Babyface: Teddy Gorman (Theo). Even when he was unconscious and close to death, there was about his face something shining and incorruptible which came through the blood and grime. It was this, no doubt, which prompted Brother Martine to use such a term of endearment. - Helder.

² The comparison is too complimentary: Brother Martine's friendship sometimes blinded him to my shortcomings. The truth of the matter is that, during all the months I worked with young Teddy Gorman in Tri-P (the Peace Pledge Programme) I found his selfless ardour a constant source of inspiration, but hardly equalled it myself. - Helder.

³ A brilliant and insightful suggestion, entirely characteristic of Brother Martine's quick grasp of the profoundest spiritual truths. After the war, when Teddy Gorman and I began to organize the peace movement again, I reminded him of these words and pointed out that, since Martine had given him his life, it was only fitting that our great martyr should be allowed to give him his name too. From that time on he has been known by the infinitely more meaningful name of Theo. - Helder.

⁴ I apparently neglected to mention to Brother Martine that I too suffered quite badly from insomnia in those days. On the night of 18 October, although Brother Martine could not possibly have known this, I was able to sleep only thanks to a triple dose of barbiturates. - Helder.

Helder's bunk is right above mine. He's snoring away like a buzz-saw, the pig.⁵

Since I can't sleep, I've been reading. Got several things with me I've been dipping into: Norbert Wiener's *The Human Use of Human Beings*, von Neumann's and Morgenstern's *Theory of Games*, Berkeley's *Giant Brains*, McDonald's *Strategy in Poker, Business and War*, Père Dubarle's prophetic little paper on cybernetics. I thumbed through all of them long before the war, and brought them along when I was drafted – plus a volume of poetry by Rimbaud. They make nice hammock reading now.

How can all the noddings sleep? How can that pig above me snore away?⁶ Least they could do would be to lie here with their eyes open, listening to EMSIAC and grinning. Really, it's the funniest goddamned thing I ever heard of. And I never thought it possible – that's a laugh too...

Wish that damned machine would stop jiggling. Or is it really inside my head?

Wish Helder would stop snoring. Can't get him out of my mind.⁷

Did the greatest patching job of my career tonight. On Babyface, I mean. He interests me, this Babyface: seems to have such a statistical preference for wiping out the capitals of the world. Great little *machine à boom-boom*. He's undoubtedly the most efficient agent EMSIAC has, by a long blast; far and away the greatest hero of the West in this war, and just turned twenty-one too. And to think that he was once a leader of the pacifist youth movement – perfect *machine à être gouverné*...

For three hours I suctioned and sutured and sewed, fitting together the bloody fragments of his brain. Rather like a jigsaw puzzle in aspic. And all the time I kept telling myself that such a brain would be worth salvaging on only one condition: if I could shuffle its parts around so that, once it started functioning again, it would operate with one compulsion – not to carry out EMSIAC's bidding but to *destroy* EMSIAC, to take all the H-bombs that were left and ram them down EMSIAC's throat. It was worth the bother only if I could give this robot machine a statistical preference for an indefinite turbulence in human affairs and a statistical revulsion with all Leviathans. But I didn't know which cortical-thalamic pathways to fool with in order to produce this effect – in which Brodmann areas does one find aggressiveness, in which cortical centres yes-manism and the nodding reflex?

For three hours my fingers were inside Babyface's skull, itching with frustration. I'm not a scientist, an artist, a truly knowledgeable man. Only a tailor of protoplasm, working with needle and shears on human tissues. The only things surgically worth doing, I cannot do.

⁵ Here and there Brother Martine expresses himself in a gruff soldier's vernacular. The form of such references must not be confused with their content: what looked like sheer viciousness on the surface was, more often than not, tremulous love underneath, a love which we found it hard to express forthrightly under the brutalizing circumstances of war. Not the least argument against war is precisely this, that it does not allow men to express their love for each other warmly and directly. - Helder.

⁶ I did sometimes have considerable difficulty in nocturnal breathing, due to a severe sinus infection which produced a chronic post-nasal drip and catarrhal congestion of the upper respiratory tract. I had mentioned this condition to Brother Martine once or twice, but apparently he had forgotten it. - Helder.

⁷ I shall always treasure this evidence of Brother Martine's concern for me. Naturally, the feeling was reciprocal. In those difficult days my thoughts were never far from my comrade; if I had not taken such a heavy dosage of barbiturates I would have been awake at that very moment, sharing his agony of mind. - Helder.

Don't even know where to sink my scalpel in Helder to stop that snoring. Except in his throat.⁸

World War III, it's clear, is the first real war we've ever had. The essence of warness. War brought for the first time from the realm of concept all the way into the realm of thumping fact. For it is the first homicidal chess game in which the full gaming board has been used and all the pawns thrown into action with perfect mathematical precision.

It was bound to happen, of course. Once men stopped manufacturing gods, they began to manufacture machines. Whence EMSIAC, the god-in-the-machine, the god-machine...

We could have predicted it. If we'd had our eyes open, we would have seen it coming. EMSIAC is simply the end development of something that's been threatening for a long time in human affairs, especially in modern times. Hobbes called it the Leviathan – I'd call it the Steamroller. War – this present war, this epitome of warness – is only the Steamroller come of age.⁹

I'm not entirely sure I know just what I mean by that, but I think I've got hold of something. I'll just ramble on a bit, maybe it'll come clear. At least it'll take my mind off Helder's sound-effects...¹⁰

After all, what's the great evil in war and in the totalitarian systems which make war? It's not the killing and maiming of people, no matter how much agony that entails. No: it's the Steamroller Effect. The flattening of human spirit, I mean. What the steamroller does to the human spirit is immeasurably worse than anything shrapnel and atomic blast could possibly do to the human flesh, and infinitely more lasting. Why? Because of the humiliation. Because the victim had no say in the matter. Because the loss of an arm or leg or a pair of eyes is a thousand times more unbearable when it's involuntary – when the decision is made not by the victim but by the steamroller. It's the willy-nillyness of the thing. The smothering of the 'I' by the 'It'.

It's interesting, for example, that in World War II amputees began to refer to themselves as *clipped*. The word had about the same overtones as it does when it's applied to a duck that's been hit by a hunter. You say the bird's been winged or clipped, and what you mean is that some outside agency over which it had no control and of which it wasn't even aware has suddenly swooped down on it and knocked the hell out of one of its vital parts, leaving it crippled – without so much as a by-your-leave. That's the steamroller. 'It', the robber of free will and dispenser of fates.

What's so terrible about all this? Isn't it actually a relief to unburden oneself of responsibility and leave decisions to some machine?

Well, there's an unfortunate twist to the thing. The machine doesn't simply decide *for* its inventor – it eventually decides *against* him. It has a built-in malice against its sire which must come out sooner or later. For a very good reason.

⁸ This remark leads me to believe that, after all, Brother Martine *did* remember, at least faintly, that my difficulty in breathing was caused by a chronic congestion in the upper respiratory tract. - Helder.

⁹ The most important paragraph in the history of recorded speech. This is the first reference in literature to the Steamroller. - Helder.

¹⁰ I shall always be proud to think that in some small and humble way, even if only by my presence at this historical moment, I helped to inspire the brilliant observations which follow. - Helder.

From the beginning man has been cursed with a chronic need to believe in the myth of the steamroller; he needs it as he needs oxygen. The worst psychic flaw in man has always been his tendency to overwhelming self-pity, his deep masochistic component – his enduring fiction that he is set upon and victimized by a menacing outside. Man is the animal that collects injustices and keeps a score board of hurts.

Rimbaud sensed all this; he sensed a lot of things. At the age of nineteen – backward child: he hadn't yet wiped out a city, nor even a whistle stop – he shouted, 'Don't be a victim!' This, at the very height of the Industrial Revolution. But what a silly bastard he was, really. This wish was coupled with another: he wanted to be – an engineer! Intent on dodging the steamroller,¹¹ he yearned to become a designer of steamrollers. Naturally; he was the perennial victim type himself: didn't he woo gangrene and the syphilitic spirochete?

Oh, the steamroller must be dodged, no question about it. But not by improving its lines. And not by running away to Africa as Rimbaud did, to map uncharted territories (or to the lobotomy labs, to map uncharted neural pathways). The maps will only serve as guides for the steamroller, as witness what our armadas are doing at this very moment to the whole bloody continent of Africa (as witness lobotomy)...

Is there any other way? Sure. The idea came to me just a couple of hours ago, right after I finished sewing up Babyface's scalp. By this time Helder had sawed the jagged bone splints off the kid's stumps and sewed flaps of skin over them, so the job was done. Helder asked me to give him a hand in lifting Babyface from the operating table on to a stretcher, and I did.

Two things happened.

First, I slipped my arms under the boy's body and lifted as gently as I could. Immediately my stomach clamped tight and I was sick all through me. The reason was, of course, that this boy – a big fellow, judging from his torso and football shoulders: close to a 200-pounder, I'd say – was so revoltingly *light*.

And then, as we were easing him down on the stretcher, I suddenly became aware that his eyes were open. And fastened on me; at least they seemed to be.

I knew that was silly. It would be hours before the anaesthetic wore off, he couldn't be looking at anything: no doubt the cortical centres controlling the blinking reflex had been damaged and the lids had just popped open mechanically. Still, I couldn't shake the feeling that he was looking straight at me. And I thought: Suppose he's coming to? Suppose he is just now becoming aware of the fact that he has no legs? All the while staring at me? He wouldn't be rational at this moment, of course: since I'm the first living object he'll see, he might very naturally assume that I was responsible, personally, for the loss of his legs. Naturally: at such a time a man needs some living thing to blame, and I would be his personal EMSIAC for the moment.

He didn't blink, he didn't say a word – he just looked, or seemed to be looking. I couldn't stand it. I looked back, horrified and fascinated, trying to figure out what those unblinking eyes were trying to convey to me: accusation? terror? cosmic revulsion? I couldn't tell.

¹¹ First appearance of this phrase in the world's literature. - Helder.

Afterwards I took a turn about the clearing. I kept thinking about the disgusting feel of that body in my arms, I kept seeing those ball-bearing eyes that were trying to say something to me and couldn't. I began to hold an imaginary conversation with those eyes, reading into them all sorts of wild things. Things I had to refute – my sanity depended on it....

ME: Why are you staring at me?

BABYFACE: You look a little green around the gills. What's wrong?

ME: Nothing. Not a thing.

BABYFACE: Don't pull my leg – oh, sorry, it's a little late for that, isn't it?... I can guess what the trouble is, though.

ME: Can you?

BABYFACE: Yes. It must be pretty upsetting to pick up a full-grown man and find he weighs no more than a sack of potatoes.

ME: Well, yes, it was a bit of a shock.

BABYFACE: Funny that your least essential parts – least essential in terms of staying alive, anyhow – seem to carry the most weight. Surely as a doctor you knew that a man's legs account for two-fifths of his total poundage?

ME: Of course I knew it – as a statistic, that is, an abstract datum. Cerebrally, not kinaesthetically. My nervous system wasn't quite as well coached as my intellect.

BABYFACE: It's the other way around with me. *My* nervous system is becoming aware of what happened to me, the stumps are beginning to hurt like hell in spite of the morphine – but my intellect's having a tough time trying to catch up with the anatomic reality... Tell me, Doc. How much more of me do you think you could hack away before I kicked the bucket – kicked it metaphorically, that is? How light could you make a man, by whittling away all but the absolutely essential parts? What's your guess?

ME: I don't know – close to half of the body could be cut away, I'd say. But look here – you seem to have an entirely false idea of what's happened to you. *I* didn't cut off your legs. Nobody around here did.

BABYFACE: Then who would you say is responsible?

ME: The fact is that your legs are several hundred miles from here, somewhere on the North African coast, mixed up with a few shreds of your *dura mater*. I couldn't have done that to you, could I? I wasn't even there.

BABYFACE: Who did?

ME: The simplest way to explain it is to say that a certain robot brain called EMSIAC directed certain planes and guided missiles to proceed to the area around Tunis and bomb your legs off. The enemy's EMSIAC did this to you, if anybody did.

BABYFACE: Not very convincing, Doc. For one thing, I wouldn't have been anywhere near Tunis to be shot at if *our* EMSIAC hadn't sent me there – with instructions to bomb the *enemy* airmen's legs off, along with their heads.

ME: All right, I'll accept your qualification. What you can say, then, is that two EMSIACs were having it out and you got caught in the middle. That's still no reason to be sore at *me*.

BABYFACE: Isn't it? Don't you work for one of these EMSIACs?

ME: Sure. So what? You seem to forget that you work for it too – we're fellow workers.

BABYFACE: I *used* to work for it. We *were* fellow workers.

ME: All right, *were*. You forget, too, that until this afternoon you and I were doing very different jobs for our mutual boss – you were going around blowing up people and getting blown up yourself, I was just trailing along to patch you up whenever you came undone at the seams.

BABYFACE: You're letting yourself off a little too easy, Doc. Hear that EMSIAC clicking away? Have you ever said no to one of its clicks?

ME: No, but it only tells me to save lives.

BABYFACE: Only when that's part of its plan to snuff out other lives. Frankly, I don't give a shit whether EMSIAC tells you to drop a thermonuclear bomb on Paris or stuff somebody's meandering guts back into his abdominal cavity. The point is that *whatever* you do, you do under orders. So don't give me that crap about saving my life: what do you think you would have done for me if EMSIAC had ordered you to let me bleed to death? You're a humanitarian by dictation from above – so long as those goddamned clicks say this rather than that.

ME: I don't blame you for being bitter but, Christ, use a little logic. If *you'd* said no to EMSIAC this morning, when you were ordered to Tunis, you wouldn't be here minus your legs now.

BABYFACE: Never mind all that. All that was this morning. Just take now. Now I'm lying here without my legs. Do you hear? Without my legs, without my legs, lighter than a sack of potatoes. Lying here thinking only one thing, that it's all a pack of shit unless you stand up to EMSIAC and tell it to go – itself.¹² Thinking that nothing makes sense but that. And *you're* still saying yes to it – you're going along with one ear cocked for the clicks, so you won't miss out on your instructions. You say yes to the thing that took my legs off, that I'll never say yes to again in my life.

ME: That's easy for you: you won't have to. You'll probably be a hero. You can rest on your laurels and your pension.

BABYFACE: So now we're on opposite sides of the barricades. *You're* the enemy, the only enemy I can see. Because you're EMSIAC's agent and yes man. You acquiescent tailor boy. You obedient hemstitcher. You heel-clicking humanitarian. – you.

ME: Have it your way. You're partly right, of course – anybody who doesn't manage to say no to EMSIAC one way or another is guilty of everything EMSIAC does, one way or another. That's pretty much the normal state of affairs at the moment: *nobody* says no, so *everybody's* guilty. Maybe, in the ultimate sense, I do bear responsibility for your legs lying up there around Tunis – but in that ultimate sense *everybody* is responsible, the whole human race.

BABYFACE: Don't give me that everybody's-responsible crap. Follow that line of thought a little further and it's bound to wind up in an orgy of gabble about no-man-an-island-is and all that slop.

¹² In all fairness to Brother Theo I should perhaps mention that he never actually expressed himself in this uncouth manner: he was always a most proper and well-spoken young man. Brother Martine obviously had no way of knowing about Theo's grace and gentility. - Helder.

ME: Right, that kind of sentimentality would be a bit absurd – the only thing that would make any sense right now would be a programme for severing one's connexion with the foul mainland and becoming as inaccessible an island as possible... However. What's more to the point is that you've got to scream, you've a supreme right to – and you've got to scream at me because EMSIAC's much too remote and impersonal and you don't even know where it's at. O.K., call me all the dirty names you can think of. I'll play scapegoat for you if it relieves your anguish any. And that's one service EMSIAC *didn't* order me to perform. That's an entirely self-willed bit of 'humanitarianism', for whatever it's worth.

BABYFACE: Why are you so sure I'm using you for a scapegoat? Aren't you falling back on a clever formula to dodge responsibility again? Turning the spotlight on me and away from yourself?

ME: Nothing of the sort. I know that you need a scapegoat for the simplest of reasons – I know that *I* need one. In that respect all men are pretty much alike today.

BABYFACE: No man an island is, after all? Oh, brother.

ME: No man unsteamrollered is – put it that way. And we've all got the urge to strike back somehow, if only to prove that we don't really like it, didn't arrange it ourselves. But how in hell do you strike back at an invisible cold mountain of metal and electronic tubes – assuming the will to strike is there? Kids can get some satisfaction out of kicking chairs and bicycles they've skinned their knees on, but that kind of animism won't work for grown men. Besides, even if it would do some good to kick EMSIAC, we can't – where is it? We need living targets to vent our venom on. Go ahead: spit at me. I wish to hell I could do some spitting too.

BABYFACE: You've got something there, I'll have to admit. There's some kind of fury growing in me that isn't simply a reaction to *what's* happened to me, although that's bad enough. The most maddening thing isn't the *what* but the *how*, the fact that it was done *to* me – I wasn't even consulted.

ME: Now we're getting somewhere. That's the reason every war is self-defeating – the steamroller of war never consults any of its victims, and everybody's victimized.

BABYFACE: You mean war, all war, by the nature of the case, is one kind of EMSIAC or another?

ME: Sure. Of course, the combatants cook up some pretty fancy slogans to sugar-coat what's going on. But no matter what banners are waved, or who wins, the people on both sides emerge slugged, insectlike, spiritually flattened. Each war brings the human race a little closer to the insects, whose lives are all 'It' and no 'I'; at the end of the war people feel less human and more insectlike, very much like the hero in that Kafka story who wakes up one morning to find that he's turned into an enormous cockroach. Interestingly enough, Kafka wrote that story during the First World War.

BABYFACE: Why do people feel more and more like insects?

ME: The insect's life is all compulsion, and war is the last word in compulsion. All through the slaughter people have been impelled and propelled by vast impersonal forces, agencies beyond their reach. That's a characteristic of modern life in general, of course. Every day of their lives, even in peacetime, people feel that they're pushed around and mistreated – at work, in school, even back in the nursery, where the myth of mistreatment really starts when the kid's grandiosity takes a beating at the hands of reality. But when war rolls around the whole thing is dramatically stepped up and takes

on spectacular new dimensions – now they feel that they've been drained of all self-determination and reduced completely to the status of puppets, robots, mechanisms, beasts of burden, cannon fodder. All those sodden will-less things that move only when forces from the outside give them a shove, they are lost and bewildered when guidance doesn't come 'from above'. That kind of passivity, of will-lessness, is a regression to the helpless mewling and puking state of infancy, which is an unbearable blow to a grown man's dignity. Especially because, in secret, it's so avidly sought after by everybody.

BABYFACE: I don't follow your references to infancy and the nursery.

ME: It's nothing complicated. What was thrown off in infancy – the feeling of puniness, of being a defenceless object – creeps back on the battlefield. With a difference. The resentful infant – resentful because it feels, usually quite without justice, that it's been denied and cruelly mistreated – could only yowl and bite and scratch a bit by way of expressing its rage. Pretty harmless. The soldier, resenting the same enforced passivity, can do something more: he can kill. In a sense, war is an institution which allows men-regressed-to-infants to murder their mommies, the job they muffed in the nursery. The irony, of course, is that the helplessness in the nursery wasn't brought about by the infant – it's just a neutral, objective fact that the kid can't accept neutrally and objectively. But war is man-made, self-imposed helplessness. This is a passivity not dictated by nature but manufactured by those who fume against it. That is the surest sign that the deepest emotional undercurrent in war is a masochistic one, for all the show of bluster and outward-turned aggression: for the thing about it that most infuriates men is really produced by them. They must have a dim realization that they brought this state of affairs about themselves, and that must make them more furious than ever – and more determined to pin the blame on someone or something else.

BABYFACE: What you're saying is, people resent being steamrollered, in war or any other way – even though, or, rather, *because*, they engineered the whole thing themselves – and have to take out their resentment on somebody. If only to prove that they *do* resent it, don't really *like* what's happening to them.

ME: That's just about it. People have to prove that they're not passive victims, but active doers and managers. They have to prove that they don't like being mauled just because, deep down, they keep the nursery myth alive – so much so that they go on perfecting more and more efficient instruments to do the mauling. That's why they fight. The enemy's a convenient scapegoat. War not only humiliates people, it provides easy targets for them when they get elaborately and fumingly sore about being humiliated...

BABYFACE: That figures, all right. People secretly turn pain into pleasure – and reach for the brass knuckles to prove they don't enjoy it. It's kind of a startling idea, but it figures.

ME: The baby and the gangster are Siamese twins. Obviously, then, the important thing is to avoid the feeling of being victimized, set upon from the outside, shoved around – the myth mustn't be propped up by a stage-managed reality, by itself it's enough of a steamroller. Right?

BABYFACE: It makes sense. Suppose I'm huddled up in a foxhole and a remote-controlled buzz bomb starts to swoop down on me. If it comes right on without

a by-your-leave and clips off my left leg, I'm bound to feel that I've been pretty badly treated. If I were given even a tiny bit of choice, I'd immediately feel a whole lot better.

ME: There's no denying it. If you've got to make some sort of sacrificial offering to the steamroller, it would take a lot of the sting out of it to be allowed to name what it's to be – arm, leg, ear, nose, testicle, or what-have-you. As the existentialists used to say, within a determined situation you retain some dab of freedom... But let's go a step farther. Can't the amount of choice be expanded?

BABYFACE: I see what you're getting at. Say, this is really an idea. Maybe you could work out a new way of fighting war in which there weren't any victims at all, no steamrollers. In which all the casualties *volunteered* for their wounds.

ME: That's it! Just to bring the individual will back into the picture. Give the 'I' some stature alongside the 'It' again.

BABYFACE: Let's see now. What disturbs a clippee, obviously, is that he had no choice. Maybe he would rather have lost an arm than a leg? But there's more to it. Maybe there was some other guy around who would have welcomed this maimed state because it seemed to him to offer a whole lot of advantages – no work, the security of a pension, and, three squares a day, an excuse to be passive in a socially approved way and have women waiting on him, and so on – whereas the guy who *did* get clipped doesn't care for it at all, having a taste for other things like work, earning his keep, and lording it over women instead of being dependent on them. Well, if the population had been polled, the amputeeism and paraplegia and all other damagements could have been distributed to each according to his need.

ME: Neat! Marx corrected by Freud. To each according to his need – not his *economic* need but his *masochistic* need. Because some people have a special taste for suffering and should obviously be allowed the lion's share of it.

BABYFACE: Very democratic. Takes the individual into account. Real human dignity to the thing.

ME: Nobody could then say: I was clipped. Exit the steamroller.¹³

¹³ Note this passage well: here, for the first time in human thought, the concept of voluntary amputeeism is being formulated. But a question arises: why did Brother Martine link this new humanist strategy to the idea of masochism? Did he really mean that voluntary amputeeism was nothing more than a device for satisfying some deep-seated human need to suffer and be maimed, without the traditional mechanics of bloody steamrolling war? The ironic formulations used here might lead the reader to such a conclusion - but that would be to overlook completely the delicate and complex personality behind these formulations. The references to 'masochism' must be taken as a jocular touch, designed to lighten a profound and heartfelt idea - a programme for the salvation of the human race, Immo. More than once Brother Martine confided in me, even during our student days, his fear that, possibly because of his Mormon training and, in a broader sense, because of the whole 'barnstorming' Western ethos of which he was a product, he had what he called a 'messianic complex', an urge to be a 'world-saver'. (Sometimes he even suggested, in his usual joking way, that I too had a touch of this spirit, perhaps even more than he did! We laughed about it many times. How I wish I had seen through his scoffing manner and realized that, with his delicate indirectness, he was really urging me on to a bolder course.) He need have had no such misgivings - it is glaringly clear now that he was the man fated to save the world - but in his great humility he *did* have them, and they prompted his ironies and psychoanalytic witticisms. It only remained for us, Theo and myself and the others granted the great good fortune to be his faltering disciples, to study this notebook, break through its thin shell of irony, and draw from it its glowing humanist premises in their pristine magnificence. As, of course, he intended us to. We did not find it hard; where there is a will there is a way. - Helder.

BABYFACE: How, exactly, would you get people to volunteer? What kind of pitch would you use?

ME: That's a cinch. As you yourself pointed out, there are plenty of guys who would be quick to see the advantages – by which I mean, there are plenty of guys who are that self-damaging, who revel that much in mistreating themselves, especially when they are officially encouraged to do so. Of course, you wouldn't put it on the basis of mistreating oneself – that would be giving the game away. It would have to be suggested that the volunteers wouldn't be hurting themselves but actually doing themselves and the world some good. You could easily do that with a few well-chosen slogans, such as – oh, I don't know, slogans to the effect that there's no demobilization without immobilization, pacifism means passivity, arms *or* the man: anything that makes a wound into some kind of boon. And then, of course, as you've suggested, you could offer special inducements to the recruits: cash awards, bonuses, pensions, hero status, medals and decorations, membership in exclusive clubs, leisure, women, all in proportion to the degree of amputation or other forms of crippling. How many men were actually clipped in World War II – 25,000, 30,000 on our side alone? How many in World War III – many hundreds of thousands around the world? Hell, you could round up millions and millions of volunteers if you just put a heavy enough stamp of social approval on it and offered enough juicy come-ons. You'd get precisely the same results that you get from war now, except that everybody would be happy and feel himself the dignified master of his own fate. And, secretly, revel in the enormous amount of pain he'd arranged for. That way, maybe a sorehead word like *clipped* would never even be thought of. Not when the guy's a *voluntary amputee*. A vol-amp. We might call these guys vol-amps. Short snappy catchwords like that always go over big. Vol-amps. ImmoBs. Limbo – we might call our brave new world Limbo. The great moral equivalent of war might be vol-ampism. You know William James's essay, *The Moral Equivalent of War*? That might be the new Bible in Limbo.¹⁴

BABYFACE: Eventually you might bring about universal disarmament that way. You might even go the whole hog and make up a slogan about disarmament being impossible with arms around.

ME: The human race would finally come out of its trance, straighten up, push its shoulders back. Maybe even puff its chest out and begin to strut a bit. The battering's over with.

BABYFACE: No more quaking in the cellar, waiting for the bomb to land. No, sir. You just step up to the operating table after plenty of deliberation and say very deliberately, 'Just chop off one arm, Doc, the left one, just up to the elbow, if you don't mind – and in return put me down for one and two-thirds free meals daily at the Waldorf and a plump blonde every Saturday.' Or whatever the exchange value for one slightly used left arm would be – that would have to be worked out by the robot actuaries.

ME: Oh, it would be conducive to self-esteem, all right. Death to sluggish fatalism. Matter of fact, we'd have to revise our whole traditional concept of tragedy, which has been poisoned by fatalism and a sense of steamrolling menace. Without any more

¹⁴ First appearance in literature of those inspired key words, *vol-amp* and *Immob*. The word *Limbo*, of course, is not to be taken seriously - it was one of Brother Martine's typical jokes, designed to hide his intensely serious purpose. See previous note on the word *masochism*. - Heider.

Fates harrying you than you've applied for, all the old-time dramas of people being tormented by circumstance will look downright silly. Without the steamroller, Sophocles begins to look like a calamity-howler. Now all the steamrollers are within.

BABYFACE: It's bound to liberate all the optimistic energies of man. Even the worst masochists and self-pityers will turn a new leaf. Instead of getting a little beating every day, piecemeal, in dabs and driblets, they get a hell of a big beating all at once. So they can afford to relax and cheer up, the damage is done.

ME: Just by deliberately losing one or more extremities per man, we'll all be a head or two taller overnight. Say, that might do for another slogan.

BABYFACE: Sure, there'll be a whole new race of men, fully human men. It'll be real inspiring to watch it being born.

ME: But there's a slight matter we've got to attend to first. We've got to stop this war, and I don't see how we can do it without putting the present EMSIACs out of business – after all, there's no way to talk this thing over with the present EMSIACs and get them to see things our way, the actuarial way. So here's what I propose. You'll be sent home as soon as you can be moved. When you're well again, and fitted with artificial limbs, take a look around. You'll be a great hero then, the bigwigs'll do just about anything for you. Find out where our EMSIAC is – and then get yourself a plane, go up, and drop all the H-bombs you can get hold of on it. Just to clear the air, you see. Then when the shooting's stopped, we can start talking up our new pacifist programme, it'll catch on like wildfire.

BABYFACE: All right, Doc, I'll do that little thing. I wish, though, that while I'm off saying no to EMSIAC, you'd find a way of saying no to it too – I'd feel a whole lot better if I knew you were risking something too... O.K., I'll knock EMSIAC out if I can. Then I'll sit back and watch this new race of men being born. And while I'm watching I'll be eating – swilling tons of food, I understand amps work up a bitch of an appetite. And while I'm watching and stuffing myself, I'll keep on having fantasies. I'll think, maybe I eat so much because something weird and sensational is happening to me. Maybe, I'll think, I need all that energy, more than I ever did when I was all in one piece, because an unbelievable biological process is taking place inside me – maybe all that energy is being stored up behind my stumps, big reservoirs of protoplasmic fuel, and that's why the stumps itch so much – sure, maybe when the stores of distilled steaks and chops and pastries get big enough the miracle of the ages will take place in my body – regeneration! While the human race is being regenerated, my legs will be regenerated, it's a time of progress and miracles all around! Limbo everywhere!. The stumps will grow and grow, drop down like a kid's testicles, forced into budding by all the excess grub I eat, and I'll have two fine legs again! While the whole human race learns to stand on its own two feet, against all the steamrollers, my own feet will be getting reborn against all the steamrollers! Sure, I see it now. I keep slipping off my pyjama bottoms to examine the stumps, especially when they hurt or itch. I think, I'm going to have two first-rate legs again and this time *I'll* decide, all by myself, entirely on my own, standing on my own two legs, just what I'm going to do with them. By the time they're full-grown again there'll be a new fully human society without steamrollers, a new society specifically designed with a statistical revulsion for willy-nilly amputeeism and a statistical preference for voluntary amputeeism, so as soon as they're alive and kicking again I can just walk down to the recruiting station on the corner and have them sawed off again – of my own free will now, just to save my

dignity and prop up my ego... I contract my abdomen as I lie there, I clamp my intestinal muscles hard, straining to give birth – to force those leg-buds out like you force toothpaste out of a tube, so I'll be ready for the new vol-amp adulthood of man when man reaches it finally. I want them so goddamned much, just so's I can walk up to EMSIAC and yell, see, I got them back, I *willed* them back, and this time no son-of-a-bitch is going to tell me what should be done with them, this time I'll make up my own mind, see, and take my own sweet time about it. Then maybe, who knows, maybe I'll sit down and saw them off myself, right in front of the machine, just for the hell of it... That's what I'll be thinking all the time the human race is getting born in Limbo, month after month and year after year. Only there'll be a little hitch – the legs never *will* start growing. I'll keep probing them, measuring, massaging – and all the stumps will do is ache, and itch like hell, while the human race is growing up and amputating itself all over the place... You bastard. All you do is talk, talk, talk. The only thing that would make you into a human being would be for you to say no to EMSIAC, and all you do is talk, talk, talk, while EMSIAC keeps on clicking. I'm sick and tired of it. You've got lots of fancy words but what it all adds up to is this – you're standing there on your own two legs and I'm lying here without legs. I'll never have legs again. I'll never stand on my own legs again. I've been steamrollered good and proper; it won't get undone. You dirty fancy-talking son-of-a-bitch – why should you have your legs when I lose mine? Bastard. You dirty bastard. – you. – you. -you...

POSTSCRIPT

So ends Brother Martine's notebook. Soon after the last entry was made, at exactly 3.31 A.M., a formation of enemy bombers arrived over our encampment. By 3.33 the H-bombs were going off.

Some planes survived, among them the one in which I was bunked with Brother Martine and the one in which Brother Theo was lying still unconscious. We had received the alert far enough in advance to put into effect our anti-gamma and anti-blast precautions.

When I was awakened by the alert I noticed that Brother Martine was gone from his bunk – only his fountain pen and notebook were there. Later, when Theo and I got home, we sat down to study this notebook seriously. We soon realized, of course, that in his usual persiflaging manner our martyr was enjoining Theo to destroy our EMSIAC and thus say no to 'It'. Brother Theo accepted his historic assignment and carried it out flawlessly: he discovered the location of EMSIAC deep in the Black Hills, hidden behind Gutzon Borglum's enormous faces of Washington and Jefferson, and bombed it out of existence. Thus was Immob born. But the daring feat had effects which we could not anticipate, although they were undoubtedly a part of Brother Martine's inspired plan.

Each EMSIAC, of course, was a chess player and nothing but a chess player; and, as such, it was able to cope with any situation so long as it was confronted with an opponent with similar statistical preferences and revulsions. But neither EMSIAC had been designed to cope with a chess-playing situation in which the opponent was suddenly eliminated from the picture altogether: it was built to play a two-handed game, not solitaire. Therefore, once the American EMSIAC was destroyed, the Russian

one was faced with the one predicament it could not anticipate or deal with: a game without an opponent. Its feedbacks were overloaded, it was thrown into a quandary, it had the electronic version of a nervous breakdown.

When the Russian soldiers and airmen became aware of the fact that their guiding brain had suddenly developed palsy – and there was no ignoring it: the machine was babbling, humming, mumbling schizophrenic nonsense – their sense of awe was immediately dissipated, they realized that even EMSIAC was not infallible. In the turbulence which resulted, a young Russian airman named Vishinu – Theo's opposite number, the man who destroyed New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Washington – was encouraged to engage in the same daring adventure which Theo had successfully carried out. He located his own convulsed EMSIAC under the Taj Mahal and bombed it out of existence.

So, in a matter of forty-eight hours, the war came to a spectacular close, as Brother Martine, with his genius for seeing all things, had no doubt known that it would. And the air was cleared to begin the agitation for the pacifist programme which our martyr had so meticulously worked out for mankind's salvation. Such were the miracles wrought by one man's 'banter'!

What, however, about Brother Martine? After the bombing there was no trace of him anywhere in the encampment – although all of us were required to wear on our persons certain heat-proof and radiation-proof name plates and other marks of identification. It can be considered established, then, that at 3.33 he was neither in any of our planes nor outside in the encampment area.

What happened to him? We can answer the question very definitely. After the bombing we made an extraordinary discovery. Surgery plane 17-M, which on the night in question was unoccupied, was gone. Vanished into thin air, as it would not have if it had been destroyed by bombs. That, in any case, was out of the question: it was on the outermost rim of the target area and would not have been severely damaged at all.

There is only one conclusion. One man had vanished, and one plane. Obviously the man had vanished in the plane. On an unauthorized flight. The first unauthorized flight ever known to EMSIAC. The first flight in which a man, by engaging in a desperate act of will, said no to an EMSIAC, the will machine.

This is not just the sentimental speculation of one man grieving for another. By no means. There is abundant evidence to support this theory. First, the psychological evidence: as his last notes indicate, Brother Martine's mind was filled with the idea of saying no to EMSIAC, in some spectacular gesture or other, at the moment when he put his notebook in an ostentatious place and stepped out of the bunk plane. But that is not all. Among the survivors of the raid were a few of the men who were on radar-scanning and guard duty during the night, and two of them reported that, just a few minutes before the attack, they were startled to see a plane take off from a point on the northern edge of the encampment, precisely where 17-M was stationed. The reason for their surprise was, of course, that EMSIAC always informed them in advance of all flights scheduled during their period of duty, and they had been told nothing about this particular flight. The guards had no way of investigating, since EMSIAC's red-flash emergency alert had already reached them and they had to take up their defensive positions. In the excitement of the next few minutes they quite forgot about the unscheduled flight, and recalled the incident only when we began to search for Brother Martine and 17-M.

More still. EMSIAC, of course, kept completely detailed punched-tape coded records of all units deployed on all fronts. Now, all these records were preserved in underground storage vaults, where they were instantaneously available whenever EMSIAC had occasion to consult its memory banks. These vaults were remarkably sturdy affairs, and just about all the reels of tape stored in them were found intact after Theo destroyed EMSIAC itself. And when we instituted a search, after the war, we found on one of these reels EMSIAC's complete data on the peculiar movements of 17-M between the hours of 3.27 and 3.39 on the fateful morning of 19 October 1972. This roll of tape is now on view in the Library of Congress, preserved in a helium-filled glass case along with other mementoes and documents pertaining to our great martyr – including, of course, his brown-and-white plastic fountain pen and the original manuscript of his immortal notebook.

What do we learn from the EMSIAC tape? Many, many things. That 17-M *did* take off from our Congo encampment that night, at exactly 3.27, on an unauthorized flight. That this was exactly two minutes after EMSIAC had begun to send out its red-flash alert to us about the impending attack. That, because the compartment of EMSIAC concerned with our flying hospital squadron was so heavily taxed at the moment with the problem of the alert, it did not have any circuits free to cope with the unauthorized flight of 17-M until several minutes later, just after the attack began. That finally, when its instructions to the pilot were ignored, EMSIAC at 3.38 took over the plane's automatic pilot, which had been set on steep climb and a southeast course, and fixed it on a half-turn, preparatory to returning it to base; at the same time, considering this breach of discipline a matter of the utmost urgency, it switched from ticker-tape communication to electrovox and began issuing oral instructions to the pilot to return for court-martial. (Judging from the coded records, EMSIAC was momentarily confused by 17-M's flight, an act of disobedience more flagrant than any it had so far encountered: two circuits backfired and blew before a course of action was decided upon, and it is clear that two or three times, when the electrovox began speaking, it stuttered.) That, a few moments before 3.39, EMSIAC's self-protective batteries became aware that the EMSIAC receiving apparatus in 17-M was somehow being tampered with, that the container was being struck violently; the electrovox immediately assumed that the pilot of the runaway plane was attacking the communications system and began instructing him to desist, telling him that resistance was useless. That, at precisely 3.39, the communications box in 17-M went dead and all contact with the plane was lost.

What does all this tell us about Brother Martine's last moments? The subjective side of the picture is clear. Upon leaving the bunk plane, his mind brimming with agonized thoughts about Theo's desperate injuries and the necessity for some nay-saying gesture against EMSIAC, he proceeded to the unoccupied 17-M; and there, at 3.25, he heard the red-flash alert coming from EMSIAC. In a split second he saw that his chance to say no to EMSIAC and affirm some human value had come, and he decided on his heroic course of action. He turned on the jets and took off at 3.27.

What was the meaning of this unprecedented action? It was, first of all, a defiance of EMSIAC's express instructions to assume defensive positions. Clearly Brother Martine intended deliberately to disobey EMSIAC, for the reasons philosophically developed in the imaginary dialogue with Brother Theo. But the gesture was not simply negative; our hero was too idealistic a person to commit any act out of mere nihilism. No, he had

something infinitely more noble in mind; as an intimate of his over the years, I can vouch for that. Brother Martine knew that in this desperate emergency his comrades were in the gravest danger, and he knew, with his entirely instinctive heroism, that he could make of his masterful no-gesture an act of ultimate bravery and self-sacrifice. Defying EMSIAC, he went forth entirely on his own, by his own self-willed decision, to do battle with the enemy bombers. It meant death for him, of course, but, just possibly, life for some of his comrades on the ground. And life for countless millions of others who, taking courage from him and stirred by the immortal words left behind in his notebook, might finally stand up to EMSIAC as he himself had done in one last blaze of glory.

This hypothesis clarifies the most puzzling aspect of those twelve minutes that shook the world. What about the strange blows on the EMSIAC communications box in 17-M? EMSIAC's immediate conclusion was that the pilot was responsible; he was breaking discipline, he was a criminal, and therefore everything untoward which happened in his plane must automatically be the result of his criminality, part of the enormous crime. But that shows the fatal weakness of EMSIAC's utterly logical police-mind. It simply could not grasp a matter of indiscipline which arose from motives beyond the realm of police mentality. It never occurred to EMSIAC that the occupant of 17-M, after an initial act of defiance, might go on to commit an act of stupendous, self-sacrificing humanity. And that the blows on the communications box might have eventuated in that act of humanity, rather than in further 'criminal' excesses.

Our hypothesis makes sense of these blows. It was not Brother Martine hammering at the box, an utterly irrational, nihilistic act which was totally alien to his personality. Obviously he had, at 3.37 or thereabouts, engaged the enemy. No doubt he was immediately subjected to a merciless bombardment of torpedoes, shells, rockets, guided missiles, and everything else the enemy planes carried; and, no doubt, some of these missiles struck the communications box when they tore into the 17-M's interior. It was the enemy who was raining blows on EMSIAC! But EMSIAC, with its one-track police mind, infuriated over this one violation of discipline, could imagine only that the terrible 'criminal' inside the plane was attacking it. There, indeed, is an irony which Brother Martine's sensitive and complex mind would have savoured to the full.

At exactly 3.39, we can assume, Brother Martine's plane was badly hit, and he was wounded mortally – trying to destroy EMSIAC and save his comrades and all of mankind. Let us never forget it; Brother Martine's last act was an affirmation of life and human goodness and a gesture of supreme contempt for EMSIAC and all the 'Its'. It was an assertion of free will, of self-determination, of decision and decisiveness as against all steamrollers. Brother Martine for all time dodged the steamroller – in one split second he snatched initiative back from the machine and reinstated it in the human soul. By this one act alone, he spelled out the death sentence for EMSIAC and all such steamrollers.

What happened to the 17-M after 3.39? Brother Martine was certainly dead, or dying; the craft was badly damaged; it could hardly have stayed in the air for very long. Where could it have crashed? When Immob was established, one of the first M.E. projects we organized was a series of expeditions to search for traces of the plane in the Belgian Congo, Kenya, Tanganyika, the Rhodesias, and so on; every square foot of these territories was combed through, without results. It is out of the question, therefore, that the 17-M could have fallen anywhere on land.

The hypothesis soon arose that the plane could not have disappeared so completely unless it had dropped into a body of water. Which one? The Indian Ocean, off the coast of Somaliland or Kenya or Tanganyika? We soon ruled out that possibility – a jet as badly damaged as the 17-M must have been could hardly have remained airborne long enough to make such a trip. But – there was another body of water, a very large one, over two hundred miles long, much closer to the encampment: Lake Victoria, in northern Tanganyika Territory! Less than four hundred miles from the scene of that historic battle, this lake lies directly east-southeast from the scene, which is exactly the course the 17-M was flying.

There is no more mystery: the 17-M lies at the bottom of Lake Victoria, and within it are the remains of Brother Martine. For the last several years Immo's top-priority M.E. project has been the Victoria Dredging Project: we have already probed more than half of the lake's bottom, and before too long, we can rest assured, we shall find Brother Martine's remains and give them a hero's grave. Yes, it was in these peaceful blue waters, in the shadow of snow-capped Mt Kilimanjaro, that our martyr came to the end of his anguish.

We need not weep for him. Let us, rather, eternally honour the memory of this true messiah for the inspiring symbolism of the way he chose to die. He not only died for us, he left behind a lesson for all men in how to live. He is not gone; he has but become the ocean; let us humbly drink.

HELDER

PART FIVE

Love and Columbium

CHAPTER 14

He was finished reading, at last. He sat on the bench, staring dully at the book in his lap. Everything was clear. He understood now his agitation of the past few hours – of the past week, the past month. Of every minute of every day and night since the man named Theo had first made his brachycephalic way to the Mandunji village.

It had started there – although a niggling disquiet had come over him weeks before, with the first reports of the queerlimbs who had been sighted off Madagascar. At that moment his memory had begun to grind again, trying to pump long dormant words back into awareness so that he would be forced to eat them. For a month the words had been trying to break through the censorship of his fear and nausea by reminding him of the forgotten pegs from which they dangled: 10.10, scalpel, 17-M, EMSIAC, bunk plane, Helder's snoring, Helder, pen with which he wrote in notebook, notebook. For the past hour he had been eating all his old forgotten words, every last gallows-humorous syllable – all his moth-eaten old jokes, as mauled into a philosophy under Helder's parasitic-inspirational aegis. He knew now what united him, tragically, with the giraffe.

It was all clear now. When Theo had stepped jauntily into the village, he had brought with him some vital fragment of Martine's buried identity – something that was inextricably entwined with all these forgotten words and their pegs. At that moment Martine had suddenly known, with a knowledge that went beyond all logic, that he had to leave the village. Only for purposes of safety, he had thought then, but actually to follow this trace of his buried personality – like a man poking an aching tooth with his tongue – back across the Atlantic as far as it would lead – fighting against the shock of recognition all the way. Now he had found what he was looking for in this joke-book-become-bible, some essence of himself which had been flickering feebly for nearly eighteen years under the incognitos. Its name? He could not fully recognize it as yet, he did not quite have the name for it. But at least the shock was done with. Somehow, at the death-ridden heart of Immob, he had found himself – was about to find himself.

He looked up, somebody was watching him. It was a girl on the bench across the way. The girl with the sketch pad: he noticed it without surprise, almost with relief. She had her pad on her lap and she was drawing – glancing over at him from time to time, then going back to her work. She seemed not at all concerned when he caught her eye.

The thought came to him: he had to have a woman.

He stood up, no more dizziness, crossed the drive to her bench. She was not disturbed by his approach, did not even bother to close the pad when he leaned over to see what she was drawing.

It was a charcoal sketch of himself, very cleverly done, showing him reposing in a little basket. He was without arms and legs, there was a beatific, saintly expression on his face.

To his own surprise, he managed a smile. 'A very good likeness,' he said. 'I'm afraid it's a little flattering, though.'

'I must draw what I see,' she said. Her voice was husky, with only the slightest trace of accent.

'Do I really look that good? Good enough to be in a basket?'

'Of course. I look for what is inside a person – I'm not taken in by appearances.'

'Appearances? You mean I'm an Immob and don't know it – an ambulatory basket case?'

'Something like that. You don't fool me for a minute.'

'I'll bet you say that to all the boys.'

'The ones who are worth recruiting. Not that there are many past forty.'

'Recruiting?'

'Sure. I'm from the East Union – one of the artists over here on cultural exchange.'

'I don't know too much about all that, I've been out of touch with things.'

'Well,' she said, giving him a queer look, 'if you really don't know about the setup I'll explain. We've had this cultural exchange ever since the Strip and the Union went Immob. Only the Strip artists who visit us are mostly just sightseers, while the Union artists who come over here are more active in a propaganda way, just as we are at home.'

'It was always more or less that way,' Martine said. 'Our tourists used to travel with capital, yours with *Das Kapital*.'

'Yes, my people have always been more interested in mass enlightenment.'

'Does this recruiting really work?'

'Well, somehow or other it seems to hit people awfully hard when they see a picture of themselves in a basket – especially when it's drawn by a woman. That alone often does the trick, without any discussion of principles at all.'

'I see, I see.' Martine rubbed his forehead and frowned. 'And so you – you've been following me around all day, haven't you? From the time I passed you in the lobby of the Gandhiji?'

'You'd make a wonderful Immob, I sensed that from the first. Also – you're an exciting man.'

'Maybe I'm what you call an exciting man *because* you think I'd look so wonderful in a basket.'

'Every real man would, silly. There's no contradiction.'

'A real man', Martine said, 'might prefer a woman to be attracted to him because she'd like to go to bed with him. Not because he brings out the surgeon in her.'

'The problem is purely semantic.'

'Oh? Then – come to bed with me now. While I've still got my appearances on.'

The girl's eyes opened wide. 'Go to bed with you? You're asking me that now – hesitantly, as if it were in doubt? Strange man!'

'You mean you won't. You're offended.'

'Offended? This gets stranger and stranger! But of course I'm going to bed with you – I thought you understood that when you came over and sat down here.'

'I – well, I wasn't sure. There've been a lot of changes I don't know about.'

'As a matter of fact, you puzzled me this morning in the Gandhiji. I wondered why you didn't speak to me then.'

'Good Christ,' Martine said, 'you don't mean that if I'd stepped up and asked you then, out of the blue, you would have said yes?'

'No, that's not what I mean at all.'

'What, then?'

The girl began to laugh. 'You really have been out of touch, haven't you?' she said. 'Why, any fool can see what I mean. *I* would have asked *you*...'

An hour later Martine gulped down the last of an excellent T-bone steak, dropped his knife and fork, and settled back with a sigh. In the park he had mentioned that he was ravenously hungry, and the girl had promptly led him to this café-restaurant, an enormous basement decorated like the salon of an old Mississippi steamboat – the first touch of architectural nostalgia he had come upon anywhere in New Jamestown. Now he grunted in contentment, doubly happy to find that the turbulence in his gastric affairs was quite gone, and looked up at his companion, savouring her along with the cigar and the Napoleon brandy.

And still he was not altogether at ease. Sitting opposite a very beautiful woman without a speck of reluctance in her make-up – the adolescent's dream girl – he was annoyed to feel a trace of reluctance in himself. Maybe because he sensed that, like so many of the girls he'd known in his adolescence, she had such a trigger-quick erotic response because the thing was to her a quite casual business – and he, even in his most flamboyant self-proving days, had never been able to take it quite casually. When the woman was this cavalier in her handouts, the suspicion arose that what she had to offer was less a rare gourmet's delicacy than a soggy free lunch. What was wanted in her was not a coldness, to be sure, but some deep wariness, an air of discrimination, so that a man might feel he was chosen because of some special worth and that he had somehow through his special worthiness *forced* the choice -that the act was not entirely a thing-in-itself which could be performed equally well and with equal meaning, or lack of it, by interchangeable parts and parties. Martine shuddered: he remembered a Greenwich Village girl who, when issued a casual invitation to drop in at his place for a drink, arrived carrying two suitcases. And then he smiled. There was something outrageously funny in the reversal of roles here; he was complaining about the female's brutalized attitude toward sex exactly as, for centuries, the female had complained about the *male's* brutalized attitude...

'I guess I ought to know your name,' he said.

'Neen.'

'Mine's Lazarus. Dr Lazarus.'

'I know. The desk clerk at the Gandhiji told me.'

'What else did he tell you?'

'Nothing much. Just that you're some kind of medical man. Judging from your clothes and your luggage, you've apparently been away from the Strip for some time. And, judging from the questions you ask, you aren't very familiar with what's been

happening in recent years. At least, you don't *seem* to be.' The peculiar, sly look crept into her face again.

'Do you always compile dossiers on likely bed partners?'

'I like to know who I'm sleeping with. It helps.'

'Sure – but a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing.'

'So can a lot of ignorance.'

There was a bandstand over to one side of the night club, and next to it an elevated dance floor; now a dozen Negro musicians appeared with their instruments, all of them gotten up as traditional plantation darkies and levee roustabouts, in ragged dungarees and with gaudy kerchiefs wrapped around their heads. They seated themselves on the stand and at a signal from their grinning leader – a duo-amp: the only one in the group who was any sort of amp at all – they burst into a raucous, bouncy rendition of 'Muskrat Ramble'. It was old-style New Orleans four-beat jazz, religiously patterned, note for note, after the records of Jellyroll Morton and King Oliver and Louis Armstrong and Sidney Bechet.

As soon as the band started to blast away, dozens of couples made their way to the dance floor; the platform began to quake under their wild prancing and galloping. Almost all the men who undertook to dance with their partners were quadros – assured, haughty-looking ones: evidently this club was a hangout for the elite – and the gyrations they went through resembled nothing Martine had ever seen, although there were in them echoes of many way-back dances from the Charleston and the triple lindy down to the applejack and the mambo. The men, once they had twirled their women away to one side, did multiple flips and somersaults which they came out of in spectacular splits; they shifted from feet to hands and back again, without missing a beat; they spun like tops, did handstands and lightning-fast cartwheels; and all the while their partners could do nothing but stand by, swaying gently to keep the rhythm. Now, obviously, the men could perform feats of caperous coordination with their plastic limbs which the girls could not hope to duplicate with their real ones; and so a popular dance had come into being in which the man was the fiery, contemptuous show-off and the woman, no matter how expert she might be, essentially a spectator, caught up by her partner at odd moments and then flung aside as he began to strut his cybernetic stuff again. There had been more than a suggestion of the battle between the sexes in old jazz dancing; now it had become the whole thumping spirit of the thing, because of the tremendous anatomical inequity between the partners. More reversal of roles: women had become the aggressors, men, the exhibitionists. This male flashiness, indeed, went beyond kinaesthetic stunts, the men displayed their limbs and their clothes were loudly coloured. In the end as in the beginning: in most primitive societies, and almost everywhere in the Western world until the eighteenth century, it was the men who got themselves up flashily, preened, and strutted... It was an arresting scene – with some seventy or eighty quadro bodies flying about, the whole stage seemed like a fireworks display.

'That's quite a dance,' Martine said. 'What is it?'

'It's called the Cyber-Cyton Hop,' Neen said. 'Phuh.'

'Don't you do it in the Union?'

'Certainly not. We like a little more dignity in our amusements.'

'You don't go for jazz?'

'I hate it, we all do. For a long time before Immob, you know, your music and dancing were officially banned from my country, and we still find them offensive. We like sturdy folk dances and songs you can whistle, we reject tics and sounds that seem to come from an asylum. Jazz is degenerate.'

'Me,' said Martine, 'I like a bit of degeneracy now and then. Takes your mind off things.'

'Immob', the girl answered, 'aims to elevate the mind, not distract it. All this is plain animalism. Were our marvellous pros invented for Immob man in order that he might hop around like a kangaroo with the itch?'

'Considering how down you are on things animal,' Martine said, 'you've got some pretty strange notions for this evening's recreation. Or did you mean that we were going to play mandolin duets and discuss Tolstoy in bed? The collected works of Martine?'

'Don't be funny,' Neen said. 'Sex is animalistic only when it's done by animals. For true Immobiles it becomes something altogether different.'

'That's what I'm afraid of.'

'You're afraid', said Neen, 'for the same reason an orangutan is afraid to stop fingering himself and write a sonnet.'

'Maybe it's not fear,' Martine said. 'Maybe it's commonsense. He may know that once you invent the sonnet you very probably have to go on and invent the hydrogen bomb and policemen and EMSIAC and *dementia praecox*.'

'And, in the end, Immob.'

'Yes, in the end, most likely, Immob. His literary reluctance may be based on that too. That may be why he doesn't even keep a notebook.'

Martine signalled to the waiter, a pleasant-faced young Negro in a crisp white jacket, and paid the bill. On their way out Neen stopped and pointed to the dance floor.

'Look at the orang-utans,' she said. 'There won't be many couplets coming out of them. They don't have the time – they're too busy fingering themselves.'

'Is that fun?' Martine said. 'With plastic fingers?'

A tall Negro in a brocaded uniform swept the door open for them, grinning, and they passed out into the street. It was dark now, the proselytizing dirigible was blinking out its message above, luminous sheets of window gave off a rich milky glow from the store fronts; it was a cheerful, ingratiating scene, taken just visually.

'Something puzzles me,' Martine said idly. 'Except for the musicians back there, and a few menials, there don't seem to be any Negroes around town.'

Neen snorted. 'That surprises you?' she said. 'You *don't* remember your country very well – if you're really surprised.'

'I remember that even in the best of times they were treated pretty much as second-class citizens. Not that that's any reason for you to feel so superior. Your country, even in the best of Soviet times, had some fifteen or twenty million of its second-class citizens in slave labour camps. But, anyhow, there were certainly Negroes around. And some of them, after a hell of a struggle, were even beginning to push their way up a bit. But now, with Immob, I would have thought –'

'Think again. The reason you don't see any more of them is that they're all underground.'

'What? You mean they've started some kind of subversive movement?'

'Not exactly – most of them are working in industry, which is all underground now. They're the new proletariat, pretty much.'

'But how can that be? What with atomic power plants and robot brains, there can't be many workers needed in industry any more. Even when I was a kid the big plants had been pretty completely robotized.'

'There's plenty of dirty work even in a highly mechanized factory. Besides, we have the strong impression that the Strip industrial engineers have avoided mechanizing their plants all the way, precisely so that Negroes and other "undesirables" might be put to work and kept out of trouble – and sight.'

'Aren't Negroes eligible for Immob, then?'

'Oh,' Neen said scornfully, 'they're eligible, all right. According to the law, that is – just as in the old days, according to the law, they were eligible to vote, go to school, run for office, and everything.'

'Then how do some Negroes get to be Immobs?'

'By doing what they've always done when they couldn't get what was coming to them – they arrange to do it for themselves as best they can. They've set up their own Immob clubs, and along with them their own surgery centres, pro-fitting centres, neuro-loco training centres, and all the rest of the Immob institutions. Some of them, of course, come over to the Union to have the operation.'

'Why do they bother with Immob at all?'

'When you're in Rome – that applies to the pariah too, you know. Especially to him. In a caste society, the bottom dog has very little choice but to follow the example of the top dog: what other example has he got to follow?'

'Why do you work up such a sweat about the caste system over here? Don't you have one back home?'

'Certainly not,' Neen replied spiritedly. 'Naturally, some people have better jobs than others. But with us, people don't get up to the top because their skin's a certain colour or their nose a certain shape, it's all on a democratic basis. You know, a lot of Negroes have migrated from the Strip to the Union and risen to positions of real importance. For a long time our people have lived by a very simple proposition: From each according to his ability, to each according to his need.'

'As I remember,' Martine said, 'there have been other societies which subscribed to that idea. As I also remember, the principle usually worked out something like this: From each according to his ability to manoeuvre and scheme and bribe and toady his way into the bureaucracy, to each according to his need for power and special privileges – that is, if he had the aforementioned ability.'

'We don't have any bureaucracy. If the important people get where they are because they deserve to, what's bureaucratic about them?'

'The fact that they're important – even if they deserve it, and most important people don't. Their mere existence is a steamroller to the unimportant.'

'What nonsense! Take me – as a recognized artist with lots of privileges, I guess I'm fairly important, but how did I get that way? Because I'm a *good* artist. Over here my ability wouldn't get me very far – I've got half a dozen different bloods in me. According to your lily-white standards I'm fit only to be a dishwasher or bed-maker.'

'I wouldn't say that you've entirely dispensed with the bedmaking functions,' Martine said. 'Couldn't your success also – couldn't it have just a little bit to do, too, with the number of beds you've managed to make? Your talent for compiling dossiers on worthy bed companions?'

'I pity you,' Neen said calmly. 'Only a person who hasn't shaken off the old materialistic values could make a remark like that.'

'It seems to me', Martine said, 'that only a pretty materialistic young woman could sleep around the way I suspect you have. I predict you'll go far wherever you are: To each according to her agility.'

It was a silly outburst, of course; he meant the condemnation to indicate a purely aesthetic pique, not any lofty moral one, but still, it was silly. The trouble was that he was getting angry: with the girl because she made herself available with a handshake and a brisk exchange of amenities; with himself because he knew this couldn't be any good and still he was going through with it. For better or worse, no matter how much the prospect annoyed him, annoyed one side of him, he was going to take this girl: all his senses bellowed now for some thalamic excess, to correct the cortical excesses of this complicated day.

'In any case,' he said more mildly, 'the point is that there are hierarchies in both the Strip and the Union. However they've come about – in both cases, it seems to me, they're the products of some pretty old values that have hung over from pre-Immob days. But no matter where they come from, they must still look and feel like steamrolling hierarchies to the bottom dogs. In your country, as here, the cat still cases the king. And spits, when nobody is looking.'

'Only in the Strip,' Neen said stubbornly.

'Really? If your people are so high-minded and unmaterialistic, how do they happen to be just as greedy for columbium as my grasping countrymen?'

'Oh, that,' Neen said exasperatedly. 'You pretend not to understand anything, don't you? Obviously we've got to interest ourselves in this metal because the Strip is trying so hard to corner a monopoly on the supply. We've no alternative – it's a case of self-defence.'

'Which, I gather, is exactly what the Strippers say in reference to the Union.'

'Sure. Only they're lying.'

She tilted her head a little to one side, her marvellous dark slanted eyes narrowed, she regarded him once more with that quizzical look. 'Ask your dear Theo,' she said. 'Ask him what he was doing in the Indian Ocean, in case you don't know.'

They had reached the entrance of the Gandhiji, Neen halted there. 'I'm stopping here too,' she said.

'That's very convenient. Are we going to my place? I don't have any mandolins.'

'My rooms are very comfortable. Let's go there.'

'I hope you write a good sonnet,' he said, following her through the door.

CHAPTER 15

Under her skirt she was wearing only a skin-tight pair of briefies, a garment which had started as an abbreviated leotard and atrophied almost to a G-string. Her body was even more exciting than he had imagined. She was not at all dark but there was a suggestion of something-not-quite-white in her complexion, a faint tint of the olive to confound the pallor of the peach.

Neen came across the room. She was excited, nostrils wriggling like twin caterpillars, full lips parted with the effort of breathing, breasts rising and falling energetically, eyes saucered and too bright. When she leaned down over him he knew immediately what she wanted and he braced against it, determined in a spurt of wilful maleness that she was not going to have it her way.

'What's the matter, tootsie?' she whispered. 'I thought you wanted me.'

'I do,' he said. 'My way. Right now I feel a bit old-fashioned.'

'But there is only *one* way.' She was not being funny: she meant it.

'No. That is a surprisingly animal rigidity for a humanist. Has no one ever taught you your place?'

'You don't like it like this?' There was real astonishment in her voice.

'Very much. Sometimes. But not now, not this time.'

'You must not fight, lollypop. Don't fight Immob.'

His hands tightened on her shoulders. 'Oh? It's Immob I'm fighting?'

'The Immob in yourself. Let yourself go, sex is no more a struggle now. Melt, honey, give in to the melting in yourself...'

There was nothing to do but kid it: 'You don't recognize hierarchies anywhere,' he said. 'Listen, it's a mistake to take over the man's role entirely, to try to. There really is a certain difference between us, universal suffrage quite aside. A writer named Thackeray – he was an extremist, of course – once said that the queen has no business to be a woman.'

She was frigid, of course, a man-eater, a man-displacer; only a frigid woman would have to make such an issue of the top billing – but he had allowed himself to get mixed up with such a woman, and now, against all his foreboding, he was excited too, abominably so...

'Lie back,' she whispered. 'Let it happen, honeybunch. No struggle.'

So there was a choice to be made: was he man or Immob? He released his hold on her, filled with contempt for himself. All right, he thought. She was used to going to bed with men who didn't have arms and legs, who removed their arms and legs, that was it. He would just pretend that he was foot-loose and arm-loose and fancy free too. Anything to oblige a maneating lady. Just to get the feel of the thing, nibble at the oceanic. Position *wasn't* everything in life...

But what happened then was more astonishing still. 'Oh, lamb chop,' she sighed and suddenly turned to stone, a figure from an old Corinthian bas-relief, and he was forced to remain still too. They were frozen on the neck of an old Grecian urn, urn from the ice age, deep frieze, but one did not giggle at such a solemn immobilized time.

'Don't try,' she whispered. 'Just be still, lovey-dovey, be still, honeybun. No effort. Let it happen.'

And then began something even weirder: still unmoving, Neen now began a powerful rhythm. That was all – a situation of complete petrification, joke marbled by some misogynist Praxiteles. It excited him strangely – and irritated him too: he did not relish that part of him which could be aroused in this passive way – and he could sense the turmoil growing in her too...

For long minutes it went on, intolerably, hypnotically. All the while his mind raced through a maze of irrelevancies: he recited a line of poetry to himself, 'Feather-footed through the plashy fen passes the questing vole', remembered a photographic study of the Taj Mahal on a picture postcard, wondered if the lichens were getting bigger in General Smuts' ears, tried to recall the taste of pistachio ice cream, thought of the numerical value of pi. The excitement was getting more and more feverish, but it was like something spied on by periscope in the next county – there was about all this a horrible frustrating Itness, some interloper tinkering with the body's engine while the master mechanic squatted pouting and uninvolved on the sidelines. It was unbearable, he despised himself for harbouring this standoffish scoffing inner commentator who kept up a steady flow of icy analytic narration while the rest of him was straining with need, he hated himself for fooling with a woman who could involve nothing but his glands and thalamus; and now his heart was hammering madly –

And a new agitation in her: and she said, in words that seemed to be caught deep in her throat and rasping harshly as they struggled to get out, muffled in her throat, she said, 'Yes. Yes. Now, now, lamikins, now.' Suddenly she was not the mover, something in her that was not willed was taking over – it was not intention tremor but the upstart tremor which drowns intention. Holding a man prisoner, beholden to no man for her triumph, involved with her partner only insofar as she had momentarily borrowed him as a necessary prop in the burlesque ritual, herself responsible for everything, the doer, the precipitator, she had brought about the intensest of fulfilments for herself – and without losing his clinical data-hungry eye for a moment, and furious with himself for the eye's unblinking endurance, he felt the galvanizing effect of it, the pulse somehow flowed over to him and suddenly, in a quick upheaval – 'Now, ootsums,' she whispered – trying savagely to free himself, filled too with hysterical laughter that he should be caught in such a trap and so unutterably helplessly done to – now he too felt the fury tearing through him – stampede –

A shock and a shudder.

Billowing blackness, the Taj Mahal wavering wanly in the middle of it.

Then no more swirling and he opened his eyes and watched the room jell into uprights again.

Burlesque. The most frustrating and humiliating erotic moment of his life, he thought with a grimace.

Phuh...

And then, rather amazed at himself, he began to laugh. Neen looked at him in complete bewilderment.

'Have you gone crazy, dewdrop?' she said.

'It's funny,' he gasped. 'I just thought of something funny. You know what you were saying about ImmoBs not being animals in sex? You were perfectly right, you know.'

'Of course. I told you you'd see.'

'I do, I do. Where in the whole wide animal kingdom is there a female who pre-empts the whole role of the male? It's the most unanimal-like thing I ever heard of.'

Martine began to laugh again. 'The next step is for women to deny the physiological facts of paternity, nudge the man out of the conception picture entirely, just as primitive woman does. In the end as in the beginning... It's the funniest goddamned thing I ever heard of,' he gasped. 'It just struck me – that statue, that statue at the hub.'

'What about the statue, you fool?'

'It shows a man being flattened by a steamroller. Don't you see? ImmoB was supposed to get rid of the steamroller. Instead – oh, it's unbelievable – you've gone and installed another steamroller, in and out of bed. The New World has kept its promise. Woman is the new ImmoB steamroller, even your soapboxers refer to it as *she*...'

When he got over it he sat up and looked at her. He was quite serious now. 'Martine was right,' he said. 'A man *should* dodge the steamroller. By all means.'

He took her by the shoulders; before she could squirm out of his grip he had her pinned down, his fingers digging in until he could feel the bones of her arms through thin casings of compressed flesh...

Stupid business: he grimaced in distaste for what he was about to do. He had always been bored by the chin-jutting he-man who felt obliged to establish his masculinity by sheer force of main and muscle – why work so hard to prove you're one thing unless you're really the other? Of course, he had no taste for it. Gestures, all gestures, were so goddamned silly. And yet –

'You've had your fun,' he said. 'It's my turn now.'

She fought him, her body writhing with the effort to break his hold, but he was determined. Equal rights – he was not asking much, just equal rights. It was not going to be exactly the best he'd ever had, but it was better than nothing. And didn't she really want this after all? Rape was a pretty difficult business without a bit of ambivalence in the woman. There was another case: Rosemary. Immediately he dismissed the name from his thoughts... Of course she would not fall in with his movements, allow him the freedom his whole being called out for, but at least he was not entirely tied down by her immobility now, he was able to achieve some caricatured semblance of the act – even against her will it was now something of an act rather than an imposition, a petrification.

Rosemary... There was no responsive yieldingness in her, and yet the feeling of being somewhat in control again was enough – he was, in spite of everything, rising to another climax which was entirely free from her dictates. In a matter of a very few minutes, not the thirty or more minutes of the first time but only three or four, he was there, getting there, filled with the triumph of getting there – and in a kind of terror, trying to ward off the culmination that came from his pace-setting and not hers, sensing no doubt that if his timetable were allowed to fulfil itself it would make a mockery of

hers and all the fine-spun theories built on it, she pressed, resisted, seething with antagonism. Even while he felt the climax coiling in him, he thought with despair and contempt which was also self-contempt that it was all a farce. His whole being cried out now for the feel of Ooda beneath him, the warm and glowingly alive Ooda who went along not in resignation but in response, seeking not to usurp but to blend and mingle, not to resist and oppose but to supplement and react and flow with him. He wanted only to be with Ooda now. Thinking that, and filled with ghastly laughter to know that he was even capable of thinking at this moment – and with the name Rosemary rattling around somewhere in his head – he came. And it was good in a way, an affirmation. A great abominable joke too, but still.

It was a bad moment for her, he could sense. It was all beyond her control, it was a reproach. Anything in a man not engineered by her was a reproach. But something wholly unexpected was happening. For the first time she stopped opposing him and crumbled into softness and now she too, against her will, overwhelmed in spite of herself, the engine of her body snatching the controls away from her will – she began to respond, for once passive and open to emotional suggestion from the outside. But it was not the same as before, not at all the same. She could not yield entirely. It started deep within her, a powerful quaking pulse at her core: he could feel it. But – forced to abandon the male role, forced to yield her drawn-out timetable too, she was driven to assert her male wilfulness in the only way left – frantically she clapped her body against his, shifting her whole focus from the intaking receiving core of her, driving with her phantom maleness; the last castrate manoeuvre. The inner throb grew feeble, died away. It was not, although it had started out to be, the genuine full reaction of the wholly yielding, wholly warm woman – she, or her ornery unconscious, had executed a diversion to defeat him at the last moment, at the price of her own full satisfaction. It was a last desperate gesture against passivity, a peculiar double-edged denial-of-frigidity-through-frigidity. 'Oh, lamb chop, lamb chop,' she whispered but there was venom in the endearment – and a tortured unspoken question.

It left her, as it was bound to and intended to, filled with mixed sentiments; Irene, too, when with great difficulty she had reached the same derailed climax, had been emotionally akimbo, ecstatic on the surface, raging with unuttered denunciations just below. She looked up at him now with an uncertain expression in her eyes – the eyes never fully carried off the lie of lustiness – wavering between wonder and hostility; feeling the partial edgy contentment of the maimed woman who has had an ersatz pleasure and would like to consider it the real thing, the partial hatred of an unsatisfied woman to whom protest is more important than fulfilment and who would like to hurl the blame for it at her partner. But at this moment it was hard for her to know exactly what to blame him for: the experience had been largely frustrating for her, but it had also been totally new. She had experienced a sudden loss of emotional face and focus. She hardly knew whether to scratch his eyes out or curl her arms around him. Perhaps she would like to do both – she did neither. Something had happened to her, she'd had a touch of the steamroller, it had left her concepts quaking.

The room was a battlefield, littered with the corpses of gestures and symbols, all sorts of stupid irrelevancies. Rape: Rosemary. He struggled to drive the words from his mind.

'Maybe we should have stuck to the mandolins,' he said.

Long silence.

'You've got an awful lot of aggression left in you, patootie,' she said finally.

Good: she was retreating into ideology.

'Ain't it the truth,' he said. 'My oceanic quota's awfully low.'

'It comes from a lack of Moral Equivalents. Before you get to Immo you'll need plenty of indoctrination.'

'I'll see a doctrine about it first thing in the morning.'

'Listen, sugar,' she said urgently. 'Just what kind of a medical man are you, anyway?'

'My specialty is peeping-tometry, that's a branch of optometry. No, seriously, I specialize in tropical diseases. Spent a long, long time doing research in Africa. That's where I've been all these years.'

'What's your real name?'

He stiffened. 'I told you. Lazarus, Chester P. Lazarus. Pleased to meet you.'

'Stop lying!'

He looked at her in astonishment. 'What?'

'Don't lie to me – you've been playing dumb all evening and I've been playing along with you, but there isn't much time left for games. I know you've been off in Africa, but what were you doing there? You were looking for columbium, weren't you?'

He was too dumbfounded to answer, he just stared. 'Columbium?' he said at last. 'You've got me mixed up with a couple of other pole vaulters. I don't even know what the silly stuff looks like.'

'*Listen.*' She sat up and swung her legs over the edge of the bed; her expression was serious. 'Maybe you didn't understand me, *there isn't much time*. You've got to tell me the truth.'

'But that is the truth,' he protested.

'You're queer,' she said, looking at him speculatively. 'Your head is full of ideas that come right out of the dark ages but I don't know, there's something about you. I like you – you irritate me, but I like you. I felt something different with you, screwy, I don't know whether I go for it or not, I haven't had time to evaluate it from a non-Aristotelian point of view but it's intriguing.'

'You mean I've stopped you in your tracts?'

'Don't you see, I want to help you. I'll save you if I can.'

'What the hell are you talking about?' he said.

'Just this. You are connected with Theo. You had something to do with his phony Olympic training cruise in the Indian Ocean. You know plenty. Tell me, otherwise it will be bad.'

'Do you mean,' he said slowly, 'do you actually mean – you followed me around all day, you brought me here and even – it was all because you thought –?'

'Are you going to tell me?' Her voice was hard now.

'There's nothing to tell, you idiot.'

She shrugged. 'All right. I gave you your chance. You can't say I didn't try.'

She stood up and walked across the room to a door, not the one leading to the hall but another. Without bothering to put a robe on she opened the door and said, 'I can't get anything out of him. You'd better take over.'

Two men came into the room: Vishinu and the Eurasian who had been with him on the plane from Miami. They came over to the bed and stood there looking down at Martine.

'So, Dr Lazarus,' Vishinu said. He had an automatic in his hand, muzzle fitted with a peculiar sleevelike sort of flange. 'Good. You will loosen up your tongue now a little, I'm sure. You will tell us very many things about your friend Theo, oh, yes.'

CHAPTER 16

Vishinu a sat down on the edge of the bed. His pros crackled, it sounded as though somebody were shelling peanuts. 'Cover up, please,' he said, pointing. 'We are interested in your viewpoint, not your view.'

Martine pulled the sheet around him.

'Better,' Vishinu said. 'Now let us sum up. Here is the picture. Theo goes sightseeing around the Indian Ocean and Lake Victoria – you are not seen anywhere with him. Then Theo comes home on a liner – you are on board too but you stay in your cabin the whole trip, very ostentatious. You even arrange to board a different plane in Miami so you will not be seen with him. Unfortunately for you, however, I am passing through Miami the same day and I have reports on you and I begin to get very interested in you. Then you register at the Gandhiji as Dr Lazarus but there is no record of any Dr Lazarus in any of the medical directories. Conclusion: either you are a doctor whose name is not Lazarus or your name is Lazarus and you are not a doctor. Conclusion: either way you are concealing something. What? That you were not in Africa to study tropical diseases? But you *were* in Africa. What, then, were you studying that makes you so secretive? Columbium, perhaps? Like your friend Theo, who you avoid?'

'Go on,' Martine said. 'Your mind fascinates me.'

'Not as much as yours fascinates me,' Vishinu said. 'I am always fascinated by the mind of a man who says he studies bugs when he studies only rocks.'

'Your research is pretty spotty too. If you'd looked farther you would have found that I'm not listed in any of the directories of metallurgists or mining engineers either. I couldn't tell a piece of columbium from a scoop of pistachio ice cream.'

'Now, now,' Vishinu said. 'Not necessary to quibble. The members of your Olympic team are never listed as metallurgists or mining engineers either, but that is what they are, good ones, too. It is a very clever system, sir. We naturally know all about it – we have been using it for some years ourselves.'

'You forgot to mention that in your telecast last night. Immob must make you absent-minded as well as absent-legged.'

'Ah, do not be too harsh on us, my dear unregistered doctor,' Vishinu said humorously. 'What can we do? So long as your country insists on playing its old imperialist-monopolist game, we must take countermeasures. However, let us get down to business. Obviously you had no reason to be around Africa unless you were looking for columbium. We can consider that established – very, very few Inland Strippers travel abroad these days unless they are mixed up with columbium some way or another. The same with us Unioneers, of course, you have forced us into it: all our ambassadors, our lecturers, our exchange students, our athletes, our artists.' Here he stopped and waved in Neen's direction. 'All, unfortunately, are either looking for columbium or for their opposite numbers who are looking for columbium. So we will have to face it: you were in Africa because of columbium. From this it follows that you

also have something to do with Theo, because he was there for the same reason. Now you will tell us about Theo. Everything. I am afraid we shall have to insist.'

'I'm afraid it won't do you any good,' Martine said. 'I'd be very happy to tell you all about Theo but I don't know a thing about him. Not a thing. I've never even met the man.'

'I see.' Vishinu looked at him thoughtfully for a moment. 'You are not a gossip – most admirable, but a little unfortunate under the circumstances. Dai, my colleague here, is a spetz in making gossips out of strong silent men. After Dai gives you a demonstration you will gossip, I assure you, like old ladies over the back fence. Oh, yes.'

The Eurasian took a short, thick rubber truncheon from his hip pocket and held it at his side.

'You can't get information out of me that I don't have.' Martine sat up, the sheet still draped over him. 'Look, would you have any objection if I put my clothes on? It's getting chilly in here.'

'Please. You will make a much better-looking cripple in your nice tweeds than in your birthday suit.'

Vishinu spoke a few words in a foreign tongue to Neen. She immediately went to the chair on which Martine's clothes were lying, felt expertly in all the pockets, then brought them over to the bed. Martine began awkwardly to dress. At the same time Neen took a robe from the closet and slipped it on.

'What is your decision?' Vishinu said finally. 'Shall we begin with the, ah, ceremony?'

'You put me in a difficult position,' Martine said. 'I don't have anything to tell you – that's the truth, but you won't believe it. On the other hand, I'm obliged to face another fact: no matter what you believe, you can't let me go.'

'How do you deduce this remarkable fact?'

Martine sank into an easy chair. 'It's simple enough. Spying is forbidden everywhere in Immob, I understand. Don't tell me everybody does it, that's another matter – the point is that it's a terrible crime for anybody to get caught at. And you have now made it clear to me that you, chairman of the East Union delegation to the Olympic Committee, are the head of a very large spy ring. It makes no difference if Theo is too, I can't prove that. But I can prove it about you, at least I can call attention to it. So it's obvious: you can't leave me any way but dead. Therefore –'

'I do like your mind,' Vishinu said. 'Very much. Continue.'

'So even if I did have something to tell you, which I don't, why should I? I'm a dead duck either way you look at it.'

'Not necessarily. For one thing, you would avoid much pain before the end. A good deal, take my word. But there does not have to be an end, there is another way. Tell us everything you know – not as a double-crossing spy but in order to save the cause of Immob and civilization.'

'Don't tempt me. I'm a sucker for saving civilizations – it's the Mormon in me.'

Vishinu leaned forward and began to speak seriously, ignoring the interruption. 'Do this. Then come over to our side as many courageous Strippers have done, many Negroes and others too. You will be safe. We will slip you out of the country and take you to the Union to wait.'

'Wait?'

'Not for long. Five, six months now, not more, the showdown will come soon. Then the treacherous bureaucrats who have grabbed power in the Strip will be taught their lesson. There will be a place then for you, you and all the other true Immobs of the Strip. You will return then in glory. You will be a hero to your people, another Martine. It will be worth it.'

'What, exactly, is happening in five or six months?' Martine hoped they would not notice that his voice had become tight and strained.

Vishinu pulled a cigar out of his breast pocket, lit it, and puffed for a moment, then took it between thumb and forefinger and waved it at Martine like a baton. 'Yes,' he said. 'When you leave this room you will be either a corpse or a recruit to our side. Yes, I can tell you something. The Theos and the Helters are going to be taught a lesson.'

'They will learn not to be greedy for everything,' the Eurasian said.

'And to mistreat Negroes,' Neen said.

'And to bring back all the old crap, the old imperialistic crap,' Vishinu said. 'To act as though in the West is everything good and the East is only for savages and barbarians. To think that because they are so good with machines and laboratories and efficiency systems everybody else is so much garbage. To spread around the idea that technics and material values is civilization and a man with two helicopters in his garage is better than a man with a thousand dreams in his head. To fool themselves that those who jump a few feet higher in the Olympics should be the lords of the world and get all the columbium. Yes, my friend, they will be taught. We have been patient, but when it comes to stealing all the supplies of columbium – well, we will not sit by and let it happen. We are going to remove the imperialists in your country and put back Immob, true Immob. And those Strippers who help in the great work will have their reward for it.'

'Another war to preserve peace?' Martine said. 'This is where I came in. I mean, this is where I went out.'

'The Strip has declared this war behind the scenes,' Vishinu said forcefully. 'It is here whether we want it or not. Now it is only a strategy matter. Either we sit back and let your Theos and Helters stamp us into the ground, or we attack out of self-defence, before they do. It is the only choice open to us.'

'Couldn't you just lie down and passive-resist?' Martine said. 'Grunt a few Oms?'

'Don't talk nonsense,' Vishinu said. He was getting impatient. 'Such gabble is for schoolkids and Anti-Pros. We have these crackpots in our country too, but we keep them where they're harmless.'

'Oh? And if they're not harmless?'

'Simple: then we arrest them and bring them to trial for their crimes. You have not heard of the East Union trials? These Antis and their fellow conspirators confess to everything, sabotage, spying, counter-Martinism, imperialist plotting, terrorism, degenerate bourgeois democracy, deviationism, Talmudism, homeless cosmopolitanism, troglodytism, Aristotelianism, and so on. Everything.'

'Aren't those pretty big crimes for basket cases?'

'Sabotage and terrorism', Vishinu said, 'can be moral as well as physical. There is such a thing as passive sabotage and terrorism. This is the worst crime of all.'

'Say,' Martine said, turning to Neen, 'This is a side of Union democracy you forgot to tell me about. It looks like passivity can be pretty dangerous after all.'

'Do not deceive yourself,' Vishinu said. 'Passive resistance is a nice idea – if you want to feel the steamroller on your belly.'

'I most definitely don't,' Martine said. 'Not even yours.' His fingers played aimlessly with the row of pencils in his breast pocket, then he slid one of them out and began to chew reflectively on the eraser end. Vishinu was watching him closely, the Eurasian tightened his grip on the truncheon. 'And I see only one way to dodge your particularly persuasive kind of steamroller.'

'Namely?' Vishinu said.

'By making myself particularly passive,' Martine said.

He bit off the eraser with his teeth, spat it out; before Vishinu could reach him he had upended the pencil and swallowed its contents.

He stared into the flaring mouth of the automatic, inches away from his head.

'What was that?' Vishinu said furiously.

'Don't worry. Just seven cc's of trance. Anti-steamroller juice.'

'I advise you, do not play games with me. What was it?'

'*Rotabunga*, plus a few other things,' Martine said. 'It's very popular among the Ubus, a tribe I lived with in Africa. Would you like to know the ingredients? First there's $C_{17}H_{22}Cl-$ '

'Never mind,' Vishinu said harshly. 'What does this stuff do?'

'There are various mixtures,' Martine said. 'This particular mixture, Rota Three, is a pretty nifty pacifist snake oil. In exactly three minutes I'll be totally anaesthetized. In another eight or nine minutes I'll be almost totally paralyzed, except for the blinking reflex, certain restricted movements of the vocal cords, and a few odds and ends.'

'You think this solves something for you, you fool?'

'For at least twelve hours it does. You seem to be fond of demonstrations – shall I give you a demonstration? The anaesthesia is beginning to set in. Watch.'

Martine unfastened his tie clasp, a strip of solid gold. He held it out, demonstrating its sharp pin. 'Nice, isn't it? Used to belong to the British consul at Johannesburg.' He lit a match and dipped the pin in the flame. 'Sorry to waste your time,' he said apologetically. 'Sterilization, necessary surgical precaution. No sense risking infection.' He took the pin firmly between his fingers and jabbed it into the palm of his other hand. Then he extended the hand, palm down: the point of the pin was protruding from the other side. 'See?' he said. 'I'm now the insensitive type. It's quite a good trick – almost as good, I'd say, as the Indian fakir's sleeping on spikes.'

Now he pulled the pin free, stuck his tongue out as far as it would go, and drove the sliver of metal all the way through its fleshy tip. 'How's 'at? 'Akes talking a 'fiddle bi' di'icuilt bu' it'th quite d'amatic, idd'n it?' With a quick gesture he removed the pin from his tongue. 'Gentlemen, for the next twelve hours you can make a salisbury steak out of me with your revolver butts and blackjacks, kill me if you choose – but you can't hurt me. Flail away, father confessors. Incidentally, I'd like to talk to you later, when you've got a minute, about getting the agency to handle this stuff in the East Union. Bet I could

make a fortune selling it to your basket cases – the ones you've decided to extract a few confessions from. Sure cure for confessions.'

Vishinu yanked the pin away and plunged it into Martine's upper arm, over and over. Martine sat without moving.

'You'll never get me to say Uncle Vanya,' he said. 'I'm stubborn – it's the Mormon in me.'

'He's right,' Neen said, puzzled. 'He doesn't feel a thing.'

'Important to send in a report on this right away,' Vishinu said. 'No doubt all their operatives carry this new stuff with them. We must take countermeasures.'

'Seven cc's of alienation,' Martine said. 'You can't reach me, the real me. *Rotabunga* should be the national beverage on Independence Day. Do you mind if I lie down? Musculature's going flabby now, that's the next step.'

He stood up, made his way waveringly across the room, and flopped down on the bed with a deep sigh. 'Religion the opium of the people?' he said. 'Wrong, *rotabunga* opium of the people. Sleep the opium of the people. Opium opium of the people. Lobotomy and amputeeism opium people but *rotabunga* better, reversible. Those who take opium of people can be unopiumed but people can't be unlobotomized or unamputated. Am I boring you? Excuse me, hard to talk, lips getting heavy...'

'It must go to his head,' Dai said. 'He talks crazy.'

'He thinks he's being funny,' Vishinu said. 'He has a very big sense of humour.'

Neen came over to the bed and stood looking down at Martine.

'Hello, sweetheart,' Martine said thickly. 'I wish to thank you for a wonderful evening. You must come up and see my mandolins sometime. Miss Oceanic. Miss Oceanic of 1990. Sorry can't smile at you, embouchure's frozen stiff as a board as a pelvis. Just consider please that I am mentally smiling at you. Broad grin. Miss Position-Is-Everything-In-Life. Only mistake you make you don't give a guy a slug of *rotabunga* before you start steamrolling him. Great little pacifier, passive-fier.'

'Twelve hours,' Neen said. 'What are you going to do with him?'

Vishinu looked thoughtful. 'He may be lying about these twelve hours,' he said, 'but we must wait. Take this.' He handed Neen the revolver. 'Watch him – and be careful, you don't know when he'll get over it. Dai and I will see the agent from the L.A. and get his report. Also, we will search this pig's room. We will look in from time to time.' He leaned over and slapped Martine's face hard. Martine's eyes blinked once, that was all. 'We will slap him and stick some pins into him from time to time,' Vishinu said. 'The moment he feels even a little tickle, life will begin to get very, very sad for him. You hear me, Dr Lazarus? You are going to be very, very sad.'

Vishinu and Dai went toward the door.

'Bye,' Martine said to the ceiling. 'Don't take any wooden expressions. Unioneers have such wooden expressions and not only expressions. Suspicious of man with frozen embouchure. Tonus written all over map pretending it's territory. Oriental inscrutability balls. Oriental tonus from jowl to jowl, it's no Occident...'

The door slammed.

'You shut up,' Neen said. She pulled a chair close to the bed and sat down, the revolver held warily in her lap.

It was his first experience with Rota Three, any of the rota mixtures. For all the thousands of times he had observed its effects on others, both in preparation for surgery and as a general sedative, he had never tried it on himself, preferred being limber to limp. No feelings now, soaring, gliding, body an inert lump he had sloughed off in Manichean despondency, slough of despond, body lying back there on earth somewhere and he did not *feel* the movement, only *perceived* it. *Knew* it. World as Idea, Omful of Idea. Pure Reason. Sheer delight. Sheer Om.

'Om,' he said experimentally. Hearing dim now, words far away like soft bubbles under water. 'Oooooommmmmmmmm.' Very far away but he could hear it as it echoed ripplingly through space, gondoliered through his semicircular canals, bouncing off Jupiter, ricocheting off Saturn.

He flowed out unfeeling.

'Hey,' he said. Thought he said; hearing fading fast now, could hardly make out sound of voice drowned in swish of stardust rumble of meteors. 'Don't look now but somebody stole my skin.'

'I can't stand much more of this,' Neen said. Seemed to be saying. Sight fading too: blurred words came from pinkish blur presumably Neen poised on russet blur presumably chair. 'Are you going to keep this up for twelve hours? I'll go crazy.'

Would be good to go limp ride with it just riding but too risky. Would lose consciousness if stopped talking stopped thinking. Had to fight keep awake keep in touch. Rota would wear off in two three hours. Had to be awake in control of it when it happened. Had to follow process as cortex spinal cord came back to life. Otherwise might give it away with telltale squirming stretching. Goner that way for sure. Could not let them know when stuff was wearing off play dead only chance...

'Sorry to make such nuisance myself,' he said. Talking almost unbearably difficult now, face mask of pulpy papiermâché, tongue thick slice of aspic, lips flaps of cotton wadding. 'Just got Word Word is Om. Listen.' Couldn't move eyes now but staring up at India-rubber ceiling sensing vague smudge that must be her over near Saturn; voice seemed to be coming from echo chamber under floor. 'Mistake for woman make herself man all Commissar no Yogi all alp no sea. False phallus. Phallusy.'

'You've got to stop it,' Neen said. 'Stop talking crazy. I've had as much as I can take.'

Wavery blur moved closer now, she must have stood up. Seemed now through gathering fog in room she had bent over was fumbling with him somehow, couldn't feel it but some swimming shape that could be hand reaching out to where his chest had been. Yes, yes, saw it now as through milk, fingers fumbling at his pocket, pulling false pencils out, could just barely see bright reds greens blues of pencils rising into pink haze that was her face shimmied there for moment came down again. Smelling, sure, smelling what was in pencils.

'Listen,' he said, hoped was saying. 'Immob fine but big mistake. Apply it to women not men automatically end war between nations. War between nations only extension war between sexes. Language of love language of military. Sex is war games. To demilitarize sex men must stop feeling competition from women castration penis envy all that world needs less momism more Omism. Trouble is –'

'If you don't stop, I swear, if you don't stop I'm going to pour some more of this stuff down your throat. I don't care if it kills you. You've got to stop it.'

'Trouble's simple,' forced laggard lips to say. 'Man resents once being dependent on woman spends whole life denying it proving lead in pencil instead *rotabunga* women helpless dependent on him. Bad for ego saw off legs made him dependent on women again better saw off women's legs make them helpless babies he's got to take care of show he's not big baby. Trouble with Immob –'

'I swear I'll do it. The whole works. Right down your throat.'

'Immob symbolic castration quadruple castration. Women all basket cases only solution better amputate clitoris let man be little Commissar in bed doesn't have to play big Commissar on battlefield finally peace in our time.'

'Tell me,' Neen said. 'Tell me this. Why are the pencils different colours? Are there different solutions in them?'

Thought managed to make lips say yes, own voice inaudible hers still filtering through faintly. Seemed she heard nothing saw no movement.

'*Tell me!* Can't you hear me? Are they different solutions?'

Yes, yes, yes, screamed.

Om, Om, Om.

Nothing happened.

Leaned over him now, blob of face inches from his eyes. 'You've stopped talking. Maybe you can't talk any more. But your eyelids are still blinking. I want to know if that's automatic or if you can control it. If you can make your eyelids move at will, blink right now. Blink twice. Fast.'

Concentrated, poured all dwindling thought into lids. Please God, prayed, make them blink. Take steamrollers off eyelids.

'Very good. So you can blink when you want to. That means you can hear me. Good. Now listen carefully – I'm going to ask some questions. You answer yes or no: one blink yes, two blinks no. Blink once if you understand what I just said.'

One blink.

'Fine. Now tell me: do the different colours on the pencils stand for different drugs?'

One blink.

'Is one of them an antidote?'

One blink.

'Which one, the blue?'

Two blinks.

'The green?'

One blink.

'How fast does the antidote work? Is it a matter of minutes?' Two blinks.

'Hours?'

One bunk.

'How many hours? Blink the number.'

One blink.

'One hour? You're sure you're not lying to me?'

One blink.

'If I give you the antidote, will you promise not to make any trouble when you come to?'

One blink.

'It doesn't make any difference of course. Vishinu and Dai should be here long before that. Even if they're not I've got this revolver –' Aware of faint movement near his nose. '– and I won't hesitate to use it. All right. Shall I give you the whole pencilful?'

One blink.

'Here it is. I'm pouring it between your lips. Try to swallow.'

Tried to remember where throat was, concentrated on memory of process called swallowing, felt nothing, remembered nothing.

'O.K.,' Neen said. 'I think I got most of it down. Now we'll wait.'

Flares in eyeballs.

Soft kettledrumming in ears.

Itch, somewhere. Vague itch somewhere around right shoulder blade.

More. He was no longer free-wheeling thought. Aware of being a thing of mass now, felt body pressing down against the mattress and mattress fighting back. Knew himself subject to the laws of gravity again.

Heaviness in shoulders, legs, arms, even tongue and lips and eyelids. Pressure in the groin. Bodied forth and unsaintly again, capsuled once more in tonus. He could feel. Back from ataxia. Be down to get you in ataxia, Norbert.

Terror: if he could feel maybe he could move. Now that itch is here can spring be far behind? Mustn't move. Must only ascertain whether, and to precisely what extent, he was capable of moving. Springing.

He concentrated on his feet and without taking his eyes from the ceiling he felt that his shoes were on. Good. He could wriggle his toes, at least, without being observed.

He moved his big toes up and down, right one, left, pressing against the inner soles and then against the canvas lining in the caps.

They moved without trouble.

He tried retracting his tongue into his throat. Then he pressed it against his teeth, making sure the throat muscles did not move with it.

Tongue in good working order. Hurt, from the pin.

One hand, he became aware, was lying under his body, which was twisted in an S-shape on the bed. He tried moving the fingers on the bedclothes. They moved.

Generally and motorically speaking, he seemed to be in pretty good shape. If he undertook some broad, complicated movement or series of movements there was a fair chance he could carry them out more or less efficiently.

Excellent. So now he knew where he stood, lay.

Now without his eyes wavering he began to concentrate on Neen, on the presence of Neen. Immediately he knew from the mass of colours off to the right, on the very edge of his vision, that she was still sitting there and that she still had the gun in her hand.

Any sign of Vishinu or Dai in the room? As nearly as he could sense, no sign of Vishinu or Dai in the room.

'Can you hear me?'

Neen's voice. He froze inside, fighting the impulse to turn his head and look at her. Fighting especially the impulse to blink. Better to let her think he was unconscious, at least completely insensate. Might arouse her suspicion – she might come closer to investigate.

'I'll give you one more chance. If you hear me, blink.'

Silence: then a movement to the right told him she was standing up and coming toward the bed. He concentrated on the perforations in the laminated squares of the lumi-ceiling: must not look at her, must not look at her.

'All right,' she said. 'Maybe you're lying and maybe you're not. I don't believe you about its taking a whole hour and I'm going to find out.' She was standing next to the bed now: must not blink. 'If you can hear me, listen. I've got the pin in my hand. I'm going to stick it into you as hard as I can. If you don't scream and hit the ceiling, O.K., I'll admit I was wrong. When you wake up I'll apologize.'

All a question of split-second timing now. Everything depended on the niceties of coordination now. O.K.: tense, the inward crouch, ready – set –

He didn't move, didn't blink, as the arm rose to the level of her head and poised there for a moment and then plunged downward. When the pin tore into the flesh of his thigh he yelled with the pain of it and something else that was not the pain of it and even as the sound burst from his mouth his free hand was coming down hard, edgewise and palm held stiff, down on that other olive-tinted hand with the gun in it.

The gun went off – no sound but a soft ping: flange must be a silencer – the bullet burrowed through the bedclothes without touching him, even before the smothered sound died away the gun had dropped to the floor with a thud and he was up beside her and twisting her arm behind her back. Pressing so hard she was forced to bend over double, he stooped and picked up the gun.

Twisting, twisting the arm brutally until she whimpered. In a rage – wondering all the while he was hurting her why the image of the pin in her plunging hand still clung to his eyeballs, why it made him want to kill this woman.

'If you want to stay healthy', he said, lips still heavy and inert as though numbed by novocaine, 'don't try anything. I'm a little wobbly but I can move fast. And I've got the gun.'

'You bastard.'

'Sticks and stones,' he said. 'You'll never get a rise out of Lazarus that way.'

He pushed her into a chair, backed over to the bureau, and felt around in the top drawer, found a scarf. Then he pulled her to her feet again and fastened her hands behind her with several tight loops. Only now did he become aware of the sharp pain in his leg, he reached down and pulled the pin out. He looked around and in a moment saw what he wanted – the collection of pencils, they were lying on the coffee table next to the bed. He scooped them up.

'Listen, kiddo,' he said. 'You go for this equal rights kick. Well, I'm going to give you some equal rights – seven cc's of the oceanic, the real cosmic McCoy, exactly what I've just had. Prepare to mingle. Think in other categories.'

He shoved her down into the chair again, tilted her head back, forced her mouth open, and emptied one of the pencils into her throat. When she choked and tried to spit the fluid out he squeezed the muscles of her neck until she had to relax and swallow.

'It's been nice,' he said. 'In case I don't run into you again – don't take any wooden legs.' He pulled all the sheets from the beds, rolled them into a ball, and walked to the door leading out to the sun deck. 'Incidentally,' he said, turning, 'in case you're interested, I *am* a doctor, and I think Martine's jokes about masochism were pretty damned good, even if they *were* a little obscure. Ta-ta, Rosemary. Sweet oceanic dreams. I'll send you a postcard from the Taj Mahal, lamb chop.'

His hands were shaking so badly that he had trouble turning the knob on the door.

Shaking – with intention tremor? He knew why they were shaking. It was because, incredibly, he had called her Rosemary.

CHAPTER 17

He was on the forty-third floor, two floors above his own. With the aid of two sheets knotted together and secured to a cylindrical concrete column, he was able to slide down to the sun deck below; then, with the remaining sheets, he repeated the operation. He now had to cross three terraces to the left – easy enough, since the doors connecting them were unlocked. Thanks to the hour, no one was home in any of the rooms he passed. The first light he came upon was in his own room; inside he saw Vishinu and Dai moving around.

Squeezed against the wall to one side of the window, he watched as the two men searched through his belongings. The contents of his valises and bureau drawers were strewn over the floor; the shaving-lotion and toilet-water bottles in which he carried his supplies of *rotabunga* lay unnoticed on the bureau; stacks of bills were lying on the carpet near the armchair, apparently even large sums of money did not interest the Unioneers. His notebook, concealed within the dust jacket of *The Moral Equivalent of War*, was still where he had put it on the night table.

Vishinu pulled a flannel suit from the closet and began to go through its pockets. The London label did not impress him: he could not know that the suit had come from the wardrobe of the last Russian trade representative stationed in Johannesburg, a gentleman who had preferred to have his clothes made on Bond Street rather than on the Nevski Prospekt.

Dai walked across the room to the night table and picked up the volume lying there. Martine froze, crammed the knuckle of his forefinger into his mouth: this could conceivably be the turning point in Immo history, its Waterloo, the sacking of its Rome, its Gettysburg. Then Vishinu apparently said something to his associate – the Eurasian shrugged, put the book down, and followed his superior from the room.

Martine took his finger out of his mouth and looked at it: there were drops of blood on the knuckle, the whole hand was quivering. Blood: he'd called the girl Rosemary, it was crazy.

They would discover he was gone in a matter of minutes, no time to lose. Best to dispense with luggage altogether, he might have to move fast. Inside the room he hurriedly filled some more pencils with the *rotabunga* mixtures, then poured what remained in the bottles down the sink. He stuffed his pockets with bills, grabbed his notebook, slipped out as soon as he had made sure there was nobody in the hall. In a moment he reached the emergency stairwell and began the laborious climb down.

By the time he reached the ground floor his legs were aching and he was dizzy with the turnings, but he did not stop to rest. He hurried out of the hotel through the rear exit. The next step, obviously, was to get out of town – but how? Buses, trains, and planes were out: no telling where he might run into one of Vishinu's ubiquitous 'tourists'. Best to play it safe and pick up a car. He needed a car. As soon as he had posed the problem he knew the solution: earlier, in his wandering around town, he had noticed several rental agencies.

Two blocks from the hub, on Henry Adams Street, filled with flickering thoughts about virgins and dynamos, he found an agency that was open: TOM MURRAY'S ROBO-RENT. With the help of a clerk he quickly picked out a fast touring car, a duraluminium dewdrop mounted on three wheels. The clerk prepared the necessary papers and gave them to Martine to sign. He wrote out the first name that came to mind: 'Brigham Rimbaud'.

'Thank you, Mr Rimbaud,' the clerk said. 'Ah, do you have some means of identification with you? It's just a formality, of course, but these machines are pretty expensive and—'

'I'm in a hurry,' Martine interrupted. 'I haven't had time to go home and pick up my papers. Look, I'll tell you what I'll do.' Before the man's astonished eyes he counted out several bills of large denominations and handed them over. 'Five thousand,' he said. 'That'll cover the cost of the car, won't it? I'll leave this as a deposit, so you won't have to worry about my papers.'

The clerk gave him a briefing on the operation of the machine – the dashboard was loaded with gadgets he had never seen but he had a quick mechanical mind and he got the idea fast. Minutes later he was speeding out along Tolstoy Boulevard, palms sliming sweat on to the wheel.

He drove for over an hour, mind a turnip; then he checked the mileage indicator and saw with a start that he had come almost 150 miles. Time to pull up and figure out where he was going – buffeting along aimlessly like this, without knowing where the Strip began or ended, he might find himself in deserted country or in some devastated area which hadn't been rebuilt after the war, and he had with him no food whatsoever and no weapon but the automatic he had taken from Neen. What was indicated, obviously, was at least one quick trip into a fair-sized town to pick up some clothes, some rifles and ammunition, and other vital supplies. After that he could hide out almost anywhere.

Lights up ahead: a wayside eating place called ROYALL SMITH'S AUTO-EAT, the 'auto' apparently standing for 'automatic' as well as 'automobile'. From the lumi-walled central building of the establishment there fanned out in every direction a series of belt-conveyors; the customer simply drove up to the terminal point of a belt-line, studied the menu, inserted the indicated number of coins in the slots opposite the desired items (if he didn't have change he could get it from a separate machine), pressed a button to register the order, and waited for a couple of minutes until a tray came riding out from the kitchen.

There were only two other cars on the grounds when Martine turned in, their occupants paid no attention to him. He studied the menu, burst out laughing when he noticed tapioca pudding listed among the choices. No, he thought. No. This was no time for tapioca. He decided on coffee and doughnuts, and while waiting for his order unfolded the large map of the Strip which the Robo-Rent clerk had given him. It was devoutly to be hoped that in this non-Aristotelian society the map to some extent resembled the territory.

He was startled to see the physical dimensions of the Strip. It could hardly amount to more than one-twelfth or one-fifteenth of the overall territory of the old States. Even more striking than its size was its location: the Strip ran roughly north and south, its southernmost tip hundreds of miles from the Gulf of Mexico and the western boundary

almost a thousand miles from the Pacific. Dedicated to the oceanic, this society seemed to shrink from the oceans; huddled in the protective shadow of the mountains, those fugitives from marine flabbiness.

The States which had existed before World War III were not indicated on the map. But it would be a fair guess, he thought, that the new dehumidified America, less than four hundred miles across at its widest point, started somewhere in the vicinity of the Texas Panhandle and eastern New Mexico and ran almost due north through parts of Colorado and Kansas, Wyoming and Nebraska, up into Montana and South Dakota. The picture was complicated, though, by the skinny irregular arms which stretched out more or less laterally from each side of the Strip, rather like the pseudopods of an amoeba. On the west these bands cut separately into Arizona, Utah, and the mountainous areas of Montana, petering out in the foothills of the Rockies; on the east, into Oklahoma and Arkansas, Iowa, and Minnesota, each arm stopping short of the Mississippi in true Immob hydrophobia. On the bottommost western arm was the capital, and he saw now why it had been referred to as L.A. – it was Los Alamos, the old atomic-energy centre above the bomb-testing grounds at Alamogordo and White Sands Alamogordo was not indicated; White Sands was a national park.

Where to go? His eye wandered idly up the map, spotting here and there a name that was familiar – Santa Fe, Pueblo, Denver, Oklahoma City, Omaha, Des Moines, Helena – among others which were new – Agassiz, Burbanksville, Schweitzer Falls, Thoreauopolis, Veblentown, Groddeck, Helderfort, Theo City. Then he realized something: he had automatically headed north, northwest, when he started out from New Jamestown, he must have had some destination dimly in mind.

Salt Lake City! He had been pointing toward Salt Lake City like a homing pigeon. Without even knowing whether it was there.

He began to look for it, suddenly excited. There was Salt Lake, just beyond one of the western arms, but – no Salt Lake City. Then he stiffened: the city was there, all right, but the name had been changed. It was called Martinesburg.

He stared at the dot on the map, hypnotized. It was like being plopped down on Mars and suddenly coming across all the faces one had left down home at the corner drug store.

'O.K.,' he said to himself, starting up the motor. 'So I'm a sentimental slob. I'll go and visit the old homestead.'

Driving was comfortable, even at a clip well over one hundred and fifty. The car was marvellously smooth; besides, it was not so much a matter of driving as of being driven. Now, following the clerk's instructions, he had switched to robo-drive; the car was actually driving itself and he had nothing to do but peer out the window and try to make some split-second sense out of the jumbled black masses that hurtled past in an avalanche of landscape.

He marvelled at the electronic brain – actually, he suspected, a quite simple device – which kept the car unswervingly on its path and regulated its speed at every turn. As the clerk had explained, and as he could now see for himself, the whole system of robo-drive depended on clusters of slim, needlelike beams of light which cut across the highway at regular intervals just a few inches from the pavement, emanating from squat mounds of concrete placed alongside the road. On the right-hand side of the car there

was a photoelectric-cell mechanism which intercepted these rays and transmitted their messages to the robot brain, so that actually the robot was receiving instructions on how to guide the car every few hundred feet. It was these rays which told the automatic driver when it was deviating a few inches to the left or right; when it was stacking off a couple of miles or infinitesimally picking up speed; when there was another car in the same lane up ahead, or when there was a curve coming and what the speed should be reduced to to negotiate it safely; when it was safe to accelerate again.

It was ironic, Martine thought, that as a result of technology one of the last refuges of the frontiering ego in America – the automobile, the jalopy, streamlined Old Paint – had been all but abolished. Early in the century, once the venerable horse had disappeared, all the conveyances developed for speedier transportation seemed calculated to give men a feeling of complete helplessness and passivity, a sense that they were mere bundles of freight to be lugged from one place to another: the trolley, the bus, the train, the plane. Paralleling what had happened in other areas of life, travel too had become uterine. Only in his own automobile, at the hydromatic reins, could a man still recapture some of the old frontiersman's thrill of domineering his trusty old pinto, of being in control, of doing rather than being done to: *he* pushed the buttons. But now, with robo-drive, the motorist too had become passive baggage; the mechanism had taken over and turned its electronic back on him. You could turn it off and on – that was the limit of human intervention.

Just now, however, Martine was grateful for the car's self-sufficiency; he was dog-tired, and groggy from the rota and anti-rota, and driving at any speed would have been a considerable strain. Besides, his left arm hurt where Vishinu had jabbed it with the pin. From time to time he curled his arms around the steering wheel, let his head drop, and dozed off. He had no idea how long he slept in these cat naps, but awakening from one of them he found that it was daylight and that he had come close to a thousand miles. He was approaching the suburbs of Martinesburg.

With a grunt of relief he switched over to manual operation, as his fingers gripped the wheel he thrilled to the feel of pulsing power once more subservient to his will. He'd had too much of passive thought, good to be doing something with his hands again.

But why, a few hours ago, had his hands wanted to kill Neen? And trembled when, unaccountably, he had called her – Rosemary?

The city had not been so much overhauled as filled in and expanded: there were many buildings and even whole blocks that were substantially as he remembered them but they were interlarded with skyscrapers, Immob recruiting centres, branches of the M.E. University, all plastered with the usual Immob slogans – the archaic sandwiched with the unprecedented, as always in America. There, for example, was the University of Utah, where his father had been a professor at the world's first atomic medical school and where he himself had completed his undergraduate studies before going on to study brain surgery in New York: many new buildings had been added, the entire institution was now called RADIATION RESEARCH LABS. And there was the old Mormon tabernacle, it was now tile MUSEUM OF IMMOB CULTURE.

He parked in the shopping centre, and for the next two hours was busy with his purchases. At CHAMP BROSSARD'S ROD AND GUN CENTRE he bought several

rifles and cartons of shells, plus a full wardrobe of warm camping clothes, a camp stove, oil lamps, eating utensils; at AL ERSKINE'S ELECTRONIC APPLIANCES, a portable television set; at ANNE WINTER'S FOOD MART, several cases of canned foods; at FRANK SCHWARTZ'S SUPERIOR STATIONERY, a half-dozen notebooks in which to continue his jottings; at LINN JONES' FINE LIQUOR SHOP, a few bottles of sour mash, once his favourite whisky; at BOBBIE REITZ'S FOUR SEASONS BOOKSTORE, all the Immob pocketbooks and texts he could find, everything from Tolstoy down to Helder; at DOTTIE CLARK'S BAKE SHOP, a case of vacuum-packed chocolate layer cakes, the *pièce de résistance* of his childhood gormandizing; at JAM MAHER'S SERVICE STATION, some spare energy capsules for his car; finally, at JOHN MUNDY'S SNACK CORNER, two hamburgers which he consumed on the spot. Now he could go into hiding for months, if necessary. Five or six months, anyhow. He remembered Vishinu's deadline: the world had been given a suspended sentence for a few months, five or six.

Where to now? Where did one go to dodge the Martine ocean? The mountains, of course. But first – he thought, with sudden apprehension – it wouldn't hurt to play the nostalgic prodigal for a few minutes and take a look at the old homestead. Assuring himself that it was a silly whim, he climbed back in the car and drove out toward the University.

For a moment after he parked the car he was sure he had come to the wrong place: the houses on either side seemed as he remembered them but his own house was not there. When he looked more closely he saw what the trouble was. The original house was not gone, it had only been swallowed up by several new wings and glass-enclosed sun porches and heavy landscaping which hid it from the street. In addition, a high brick wall had been put up just back of the sidewalk, terminating in an elaborate iron grillework gateway; on the gate itself was a metal plaque.

Martine went over and read the inscription

The Martine House

Home of

DR MARTINE

(1945-1972)

'He is not gone; he has
but become the ocean; let
us humbly drink.' HELDER

Over the gate was an arch decorated with iron flutings and curlicues, many of them wound around little triskelions filled with running pros, and in the centre of it a large bronze bas-relief: a steamroller, with a man perched proudly on top of it rather like a gunner emerging from a tank, man triumphant over the machine, the rider with raised fist indomitable and the machine helplessly cauchant, brought to its knees. But the man's fist was an Immob fist, the arm was a mesh of tubing and coils, so were all his limbs – he had subdued the machine by making himself into the machine. Peculiar sort

of victory, won by incorporating the enemy into oneself. If imitation was the sincerest form of flattery, the overwhelmed machine had won the fight hands down: the master had become the mirror image of the slave.

Martine's hand jerked uneasily, went up to his beard. He had just noticed the face of the man who straddled the metal dragon: it was his own; his face of twenty-odd years ago, *sans* whiskers and irony. Well, he was safe in his disguise.

There was more lettering, done in twisted iron, under the sculpture: THIS HISTORICAL SITE HAS BEEN PRESERVED AS A NATIONAL SHRINE AND REST HOME BY THE DAUGHTERS OF IMMOB HISTORICAL SOCIETY. Leave it to the girls.

'My God,' Martine said to himself, 'I used to pick my nose in this place, now it's a shrine. You can't be too careful.'

The sky was overcast, everything grey, he saw the lights go on in one of the long sun parlours on the ground floor. The gate was open. He slipped inside, quickly hid himself among the bushes, and approached the glassed-in room. Long drapes hung from the ceiling on all sides, but at several points they had been pulled apart a bit to allow for ventilation through open window panels. Standing on the grass to one side of an aperture he could see slantwise into the room and hear the voices inside.

At first glance the room looked like a nursery: there were some eighteen or twenty baby carriages standing in a row along the long wall of the porch. In a moment he realized that the occupants of the carriages (some of them lying in pairs, their heads at opposite ends of their double baskets) were all quadros, covered with fluffy baby blankets like the Antis he had seen in Marcy's window. Two women were standing near Martine with their backs turned, bending over one of the carriages: he judged that the dumpy grey-haired one was quite old, the tall lean one considerably younger, they could be mother and daughter. Inside the house, he could see, several Pros were grouped around a ping-pong table: apparently this was a rest home for Pros and Antis alike.

As the women talked and fussed over the one boy, Martine studied the faces of the others. They seemed to be paying no attention to the conversation, most of them were awake but their eyes were blank, fixed on the ceiling. Except for the women's murmurous voices and the clicking from the ping-pong table inside, the place seemed as hushed as a doll's house. Only the blinking of the unfocused eyes in the carriages provided a touch of animation. Somebody inside turned on a radio: Bessie. Smith's voice, singing 'Empty Bed Blues'.

Old Ubu should see the scene on this porch, Martine thought; he'd go green with envy. Here was the graveyard of tonus. These young warriors had given up their spears and bolos for good. They might raise their voices, never their fists.

At this moment, though, the amp hidden by the women was raising his voice, and emphatically. 'You're wasting your time,' he said. 'I told you I'm going and I'm going.'

'Why you?' the younger woman said bitterly. 'Why must it always be you?'

At the sound of her voice, Martine's shoulders hunched, the carping tone set his teeth on edge.

'You know perfectly well why,' the amp said, with the infinite condescension of a teacher explaining sums to a backward child. 'You know I have responsibilities the others don't have. I must be the first.'

'What good does it do?' the woman went on. 'Lying around in department store windows, mercy sakes, it's undignified.'

'If people want to see you,' the old woman added, 'they can come here.'

Her voice was niggling and sad, Martine's throat tightened.

'That's not the point,' the boy said petulantly, 'and you know it. It's not a question of their wanting to see me. It's my duty to go to them.'

'But what can *you* do?' the first woman said. 'You're just a baby.'

'I may be a baby to *you*,' the amp said icily, 'but it just so happens that to the rest of the country I'm president of the Anti-Pro League. And this is a critical moment, morale has been badly shaken by Vishinu's speech. I can't just lie here and do nothing.'

'Vishinu was talking about Theo,' the younger woman insisted. 'If Theo doesn't like it, why, let *him* –'

'Let him nothing. It's people like Theo who've gotten us into this mess. Look, apparently you don't understand how serious this is. It's a crisis.'

'All right,' the younger woman said. 'All right. But if you have to make a display of yourself, why not do it in some store window right here in Martinesburg? Why go hundreds of miles to Los Alamos? Nobody in Los Alamos sent for you.'

'Naturally they haven't sent for me. They're afraid of me. You can see, even the Pros around here in the Home have been avoiding me lately. They're all scared.'

'Then why go? Why bother at all?'

'Can't you understand *anything*? L.A. is the centre of the panic. That's where all the hysteria starts. What's needed is a special demonstration, some unusually striking gesture, right at the national capital, to shock our leaders and win them back to true Immob before it's too late. We're trying to contact our brothers in the East Union to do the same thing at New Tolstoygrad, maybe we'll be able to synchronize our demonstrations, but in any case we've got to go ahead. There's going to be a special concentration of our forces at the capital and I've got to lead it – it's as simple as that.'

A few carriages away, one of the other quadros coughed delicately. He coughed again. When nothing happened he let out a long, low whistle, his vague eyes still riveted on the ceiling. Both women straightened up, the thin one walked down to the signalling lamp, reached under his blanket, and drew out a bedpan.

Dully, uncomprehendingly, Martine stared at her pinched sharp features, then at the puffy wrinkled tearful face of the old woman.

'My mind's made up,' the first amp said. 'Don't waste your breath arguing with me.'

'Stubborn,' the younger woman said bitterly. 'Just like his father.' She turned and went inside.

The boy's face was directly in Martine's line of vision now. It was like all the other Anti faces he had seen – the face of a somehow wizened baby, fixed in an authoritative scowl that was at the same time an infantile pout, the expression one of mingled hauteur and fret, insouciance and incipient tantrum. It was a sophisticated-suckling face imperiously demanding the universe for a teat and yet filled with rage over the prior knowledge, the dotard's sour knowledge, that all breasts this side of Paradise must have some frustrating fist buried in them. So, mixed with the childish headstrong was an infinite senile pique.

But, for all its stock Antiness, there was something distinctive about this one face, something which set it off from the others. Buried somewhere under the typical was a suggestion of the individual. Martine could hardly bear to look at it, it was the face on the bas-relief outside, the unwhiskered steamroller-subduing Martine face minus melancholy and mischief. His own face. He was back twenty-five years, looking into a mirror.

'Then go and save the world,' the younger woman said angrily. She was back on the porch, the bedpan gone from her hands. 'Be a hero like your father. When do you intend to leave?'

'For God's sake, Mother, don't take on so,' the amp said. '*Will* you try to understand?'

'When *are* you leaving?' the older woman echoed.

'I leave for L.A. next Tuesdays' the amp said. 'They're sending a plane up for me. Listen, Grandma, you've got to make Mother understand. That's *your* duty.'

'I'll do my best, Tom,' the old woman said helplessly. 'But I'm not sure *I* understand. Generation after generation, boys running off and doing silly things just to hurt their mothers – oh, I don't understand anything any more.' She began to cry.

'You've got to try,' the amp said. 'A fellow in my position can't just turn his back on the world. People expect things of me.'

'Go right ahead,' the younger woman said. 'Run off and get yourself killed. There's good precedent for it... Oh, honestly, sometimes I just can't understand why you don't forget this silly window business and put some arms and legs on and act normal like other boys your age.'

The amp yawned, his eyes were beginning to glaze. 'If you don't mind,' he said. 'I'd like another helping of that chocolate layer cake we had for lunch, and a large glass of milk. I'm hungry.'

'His father just loved chocolate layer cake,' old Mrs Martine said through her tears.

'Like father, like son,' Irene said.

'I hope so,' Tom Martine mumbled. 'But it's a heck of a responsibility.'

Sins of the fathers –

Like father like –

'But he volunteered! If all the wounds of babies – if they volunteer! No other virus!'

He was just thinking it to himself. But he heard the words, it was more than he could stand, they ploughed through the water to him. Somebody screaming the words at him, an electrovox, bellowing, trumpeting under the water. Himself screaming, lips moving against the pressing waters, throat bulging with the words...

Head spun like a badminton bird, churning the waters. Saw the white lacerated body of Rosemary scudding gently by in the water, trailing strands of kelp, and yelled, 'She's got nothing to do with this! Leave her alone!' Losing support, falling, falling, clutching at the window sill as he went down, afraid that if he fell into the bottomless smothering basket of the lake and the two women bent over him with their niggling and their needling he would have to kill them and –

The waters closed over his head. Kelp stuffing his nostrils. Limp, floating.

Odd sense of levitational drift: body being raised, carried up, then up again, then dumped...

CHAPTER 18

...For a long time he lay at the bottom of the lake, flat on his back, unintentioned as a mollusc. Once in a while, thinking it over, he began to resent the indignity of it and started to fight – wanted to bolt up to the surface, up to the top where the surface shimmered and rippled, through the skin of the surface and out into the open where he could breathe. But steel clamps on his arms, malicious fingers, held him back every time. He cried out in his fury.

After a time, many rages later, exhausted, he opened his eyes slowly, oysters unbuttoning, lids pushing against the water. It took a while for things to become clear through the soapy silt-sprinkled muck. He began to feel reassured as objects swam through to him: maple bureau against the wall, old browned chromo of Brigham Young just above it, white bookcase with small plastic radio on the top shelf, closet door with its chipped porcelain knob. It was good to be back in his grotto-room. In the closet, on a hook, was his catcher's mitt, well-oiled, fully broken in; maybe, if it was a nice day, he'd go over to the park after breakfast and play baseball with the kids for a while. Just outside the open window the leaves of the old mulberry tree rustled, stirring up eddies in the gelatinous fluid. It was dark, outside, forest of seaweed. How come he was awake at this hour? If the day turned out sunny, a fast game of ball, maybe just some batting practice, would be fine –

No. What day was coming up? Might be Friday. If it was Friday his father might be coming home from the University in the mood for a hunting trip. They might round up their gear and pile into the station wagon, just the two of them, and go off to the cabin in the mountains, up out of the clutching waters, for the week-end; his mother would be at the kerb, they'd wave good-bye to her, her lake-face would be kind of tight and sad and something like accusation in her tired washed-out polyp eyes, they were running out on her again...

Next to Brigham Young's portrait on the wall, dim in the marine murk, something that didn't belong there. Some kind of plaque, his eyes strained to pick out the letters: HERE DR MARTINE SPENT THE FIRST FIFTEEN YEARS OF HIS LIFE... Under water, of course. Ancient sub-mariner.

Something else in the room that didn't belong. Some person. His mother, sitting quietly to one side of the bed, shawled with algae. Something wrong with her, she was much greyer and older, years older, she'd aged forty years overnight. It terrified and saddened him and he wanted to cry when he saw her wrinkled flotsam-jetsam face, studded with barnacles, but he understood that this ageing was part of the accusation, her way of getting back at him, it bothered him so much he tried again to sit up. Eels held him like ropes.

'No, no,' she said. 'You must rest. You're very weak.'

'He was weak too, just a kid,' he said bitterly. 'Why did you let him do it? You could have stopped him, tried, anyway. Why didn't anybody try to stop him? Just because he was weak enough to go and volunteer to get them cut off, *volunteer*...'

She didn't understand the obscenity, just sat there staring at him with shocked accusing agar-agar eyes. She was looking ocean-bed accusations at him, he was screaming fathoms-deep accusations at her. It had to stop, now with the flood.

'Well, Christ, what's the sense in looking so hurt, anyhow? If they want to run away from you for a week-end, back away to save face, if they insist on running around in circles, triskelions, what's so terrible? It's their virus, not yours, don't you see? Always the backing away a little and the accents of remorse, the flaws in the flesh. Why take on so? God, you needn't age forty years about it...' All he wanted to do was to put his arms around her and kiss her now to show it was all right, the backing away didn't mean anything, but he couldn't move against the lake's pressure.

'You're feverish,' she said sympathetically – a little frightened too. 'Try to rest, I'll get the doctor.' Bubbles cascading from her mouth:

She got up and breast-stroked toward the door, he made another desperate effort to rise through the water, had to explain before it was too late. Important to put his arms around her but the pressure.

But her nervous harried jellyfish face was gone. He fell back on the bed, arms and legs like sash weights socketed into his body, anchors, he couldn't move. So easy to reach out across the vicious distance and embrace her, what arms were for, but not with all the viscous waters pressing. Always water there. In a minute she was back, behind her came a quadro-amp doctor with something in his hand and two mono-amp orderlies. Behind them, Irene, with taut beleaguered ruin of a porpoise face.

'You say he fainted?' the doctor said.

'Just outside the sun porch,' his mother said. 'We heard something – he was shouting something about babies and wounds, he kept repeating a name, Rose something. He was unconscious when we got to him.'

'We had him brought up here,' Irene said. 'It's the only vacant room.'

'When he came to he began to talk very excitedly again,' his mother said. 'Oh, he's so upset...'

'Why won't you understand?' he said weakly. Every word an effort now, the lake was smothering him, mouth stuffed with sponges. 'The joke's on him, not you! It was voluntary! If he tries to pretend now that you always snatched the cake away... It's simply not your sin, you must see that! There are sins of the sons too! Addicts of steamrollers and accents of panic. If they go hunting for their wounds, who's to blame? No matter how many Rosemarys they go after... But oh God, oh God, couldn't you have stopped him? You might have tried. Maybe you could have held him down *before* the doctor came...'

There was no way to make it clear: now he broke down and wept, it was all too late. No way to reach her and comfort her in the seaweed. His body shook with sobs, the waters swirled.

'He's delirious, all right,' the doctor said through the bubbling waters.

'Maybe he'll snap out of it if he sleeps a little,' Irene said.

'I'll give him a shot. It'll quiet him down.'

The doctor held up his hand, in it was a hypodermic needle. He signalled to the orderlies, they drifted in from either side as the doctor came close. The two women swam close too, his mother on the left, Irene on the right.

'No!' Martine screamed. 'No tapioca in my veins, absolutely not! Too much rota in the blood stream already, enough robodrive and scalpels! I almost killed Neen for less, I warn you! If you want to immobilize me you'll have to cut off my arms and legs, that's all there is to it! I won't volunteer! Don't come near me!'

As the hands descended on him from both sides he began once more to struggle, tried to, but the waters were tightening on him like a strait jacket now, his cravings basketed, whale-bellied, and far above, on the other side of the surface, there was the snowy mountain top, agonizingly out of reach.

He was lying back helplessly in the submerged basket, belly, the women were treading water just above him, faces questioning, accusing. Someone was rolling up his sleeve, the needle was drawing near, now the accents of panic and no panic controls for these accents, he was already one of them in his heart.

'So terribly wounded!' he yelled as the needle went in, sobbing now. 'Oh God, God, so voluntarily cut to bits! If only somebody could have stopped him but the sins of the fathers, the mythological cakes, over and over the needles –'

'...something,' from the bony white-gilled Irene face bending over, it sent gusts of panic through his chest. 'What is it about his voice?'

'There, there,' from his mother's blotchy plankton face as she patted his drenched forehead and he cringed at the touch. 'It'll be all right. A little sleep...'

'I want,' he wept. 'There are sins of sons too, that's the only thing that saves us, if it's voluntary...'

Then the salty waters, oceans of tears, filled up his mouth and sloshed through his brain and dissolved his spine, gurgling softly into his fingers and toes, and there was no more talk or thought. 'I'm glad I didn't kill Neen,' he glubbed, and that was all for a long time...

When he opened his eyes there was a white-coated orderly sitting at the side of the bed.

He felt a pain in his upper arm – where the needle had gone. A sudden fright: if they'd rolled his sleeve up all the way, they must have uncovered the tattoo. Irene would immediately have recognized the tattoo, she knew all about it.

He sighed in relief. The pain was in his left arm. The tattoo was on his *right* arm.

Dark outside. The mulberry leaves rustling.

'How do you feel?' the orderly said.

'Pretty good. I'm hungry. How long did I sleep?'

'Two hours, about. What would you like to eat?'

'A large glass of milk, please.'

'You bet. Anything else?'

'A piece of chocolate layer cake, if there's any.' But that wouldn't take him long. 'And – maybe a couple of boiled eggs.'

'Right. Take it easy, I'll be right back.'

The white jacket rose, went out. Martine gave him a few seconds, then jumped up, shaking his head to drive the fog away. He found his coat in the closet – automatically looking at the hook in the corner to see if his catcher's mitt was there – it was – put his

shoes on, went into the hall, and crept down the back stairs he knew so well. Nobody around.

Out into the deserted grounds, place entirely dark except for a light in the kitchen. Through the gate, a little wobbly now but all right, out in the open air again, surfaced at last. Afraid that if he didn't get away from there fast he would rush back into the house, find the two women, throw himself at their feet, and tell them everything, begging for forgiveness...

Sins of the fathers. He got back to the car all right, nobody saw him. Sins of the fathers. Neen had sketched him that way, but it had needed his own son to bring the sketch to life. Sins of the fathers. The phrase caromed through his mind as, purely by reflex, he started up the car and guided it out through to the main thoroughfare and then through the deserted centre of town. Sins of the fathers – in those four words now was more sickness than he had ever known.

He was out of town now, approaching the flat salt graveyard again. He pulled up at the side of the road and put his head down and sat for a while, shaking all over, sharp in his mind the image of death the imperishable infant with the babyface of Martine. When the attack had passed he wiped his eyes and drove on again, westward across the crusted alkalis.

But what, precisely, *were* the sins of the fathers? What sins, precisely, had he committed that had come to be visited upon his son with the surgeon's knife? Where did his responsibility begin for this violation of his own flesh – what scurvy paternity was he to claim here? What of himself lay back in Martinesburg, enshrined in that baby carriage? Like father, like son? But how, exactly?

It was close to two hours before the paved highway ended and the familiar dirt road began the final ascent into the steep mountain range. Automatically, Martine slowed down to navigate the bumps; automatically, when he came to the narrower lane that branched off toward the lake, his hands manoeuvred the swerve.

Several miles more and he was there: the lake, surrounded by a growth of pines thick as a muff, was a sheet of isinglass glinting in the moonlight, exactly as he remembered it. And there, in the little grove beyond which the mountain soared up again, was the cabin.

When he trained his flashlight on it he saw that it had not been used for a long time: most of the windows were broken, the brick chimney had collapsed, a tree had fallen over on the porch, bashing in the flimsy roof. Chances were that he would be safe here, at least for a time. Five or six months anyhow, with luck.

It was chilly now, he shivered in his light clothes, but he was well prepared for that. He was safe, from everything but his thoughts. For a time he would provide his own tinned chocolate cake and evaporated milk, handle his own bedpans, nurse his dreams of omnipotence, quake in his nightmares of impotence, the archetypical frontiersman taking to his (electronic) horse in flight from his women. But the hunter's log cabin was only a thinly disguised baby carriage. Now, to be sure, he was in flight from something a lot more substantial than mom-mythologized-into-monster; still, he had the uncomfortable feeling that, just as in the old days, he was running at top speed from a mirage – from something in himself. Some voyage of self-discovery! One mad scramble after another.

Dully, he tried to order the events of the last two days in his mind: they were swimming in improbability. He knew from the gnawing in his stomach that he had hardly eaten for the last twenty-four hours, from the ache in his bones that he had hardly slept for twice that long. He could just barely drag himself from the car, he wanted only to flop down and sleep, but he had to eat something first and there were no women about to summon with a cough and a whistle.

Sweating with the effort, he carried most of his supplies into the cabin, arranged a cot in the corner so that he could crawl into it when he was ready. Then he opened a can of beans and gulped down its contents without bothering to heat them.

It now occurred to him: he had come close to being killed last night.

How, the enormity of how it could have happened, still wasn't clear to him, but there was no blinking the simple fact: he had almost had it. Tomorrow, no doubt, when he was functioning again, he would receive the full impact of that brush with death and quiver – now it was simply one more insipid fact among others: porch staved in, son in a perambulator, mother and ex-wife alive, beans cold, wind blowing in through the broken windows, he had almost been killed by Vishinu and Dai last night. He was no longer capable of reacting, when the nerves were too heavily overloaded they finally stopped oscillating altogether, went dead. Now he wanted only the blessed release, the death-in-installment, of sleep.

He fell on the cot without removing his clothes and pulled the thick blankets up over his body and closed his eyes and slept.

From Dr Martine's Notebook

(MARK II)

27 July 1990. At the old hunting lodge

Back in New Jamestown about three weeks ago, Fourth of July, two men, a Russian and a Eurasian, were all set to save humanity by working me over, maybe killing me. Complicated event. Long history behind it, over eighteen years in the making. Been doing some background reading and the pieces are beginning to fit. The historical picture's something like this

FIRST PHASE (1972-5): *Myth-Making*

At 3.25 a.m., 19 October, 1972, Helder jumped for his anti-blast suit and found the notebook sticking out from under my pillow. He put two and two together – he'd never read Dostoyevsky, didn't suspect that twice-two sometimes equals five – and decided I'd gone out in a blaze of unauthorized heroics. Beginnings of the myth.

Teddy Gorman was ordered to be flown home, and Helder wangled it so that he went along as surgeon in charge. Teddy was brought to a secret underground hospital installation outside Oklahoma City, Helder attending him. It was touch and go for Teddy for some time, he didn't even regain consciousness for over a week; but finally he rallied. When he was on the mend Helder began to read him passages from Martine's notebook. During these sessions several ideas began to shape up in Helder's programmatic head

First, Martine had worked out a whole new philosophy for the pacifist movement, based on the principle of saying no to all EMSIACs. Second, Martine had picked Helder to unravel his thought and Teddy to put it into action. Third, to inspire Helder and Teddy and those who would flock to their banner, Martine had sacrificed his life to say the first thunderous no to EMSIAC. Elaboration of the myth. So began the deification of Dr Martine, much misunderstood deserter, who couldn't get his jokes taken seriously.

Many weeks passed. Teddy was finally fitted with some old-fashioned artificial legs, aluminium ones. Coached by Helder every inch of the way, he finagled his way into the EMSIAC area and blew the whole works sky-high. Before many hours had passed, Vishinu, a Russian flier somewhat older than Theo (he'd been a protégé of Vasili Stalin's) but pretty much his opposite number, heard about what Teddy had done and got the idea of clobbering his own EMSIAC.

America and Russia were a shambles; so were all the heavily populated areas of the world. Nothing could be done on a national or international level – no nations left. Reconstruction had to get going on a purely local basis, town by town and village by village. Slowly the survivors came out of their state of shock and began to huddle together in areas where there were vital industrial plants underground.

All this time Helder, with Teddy now his strong right arm, was busy in his makeshift headquarters in Los Alamos, planning to launch a refurbished Tri-P movement. Early in 1975 he decided the time had come and over the one partially rebuilt radio network he made the electrifying announcement: Tri-P was a going concern again. Under the leadership of Helder, the mentor, and Teddy Gorman, the protégé. Under the martyrship of Martine. Nobody thought to mention one little fact: in the years before 1970 Martine had consistently resisted Helder's efforts to get him into Tri-P. Myth now become movement...

SECOND PHASE (1975-7): *The Bid for Power*

Tri-P in its reincarnation had a brand new gimmick, one that Helder had dreamed up entirely on his own. The essential problem, of course, was that of pacifism vs. defensism – the tendency of pacifists, except for a fringe of ineffectual cranks and crackpots, to break down and turn patriotic in situations where their own countries seemed to be threatened with attack. The shift from turn-the-other-cheek to eye-for-an-eye: the Judeo-Christian ambivalence. In his notebook Martine had indicated that this was the core of the pacifist dilemma. Now Helder announced that he had found the solution – the Assassination Clause.

Simple gadget, this Assassination Clause. Wherever Tri-P came into power it was to be written into law; as the twenty-third amendment to the old American constitution, the first amendment to the old Soviet constitution. The Clause read as follows:

Every person who offers himself as a candidate for public office automatically takes oath never to encourage or countenance or condone the manufacture of arms or their distribution; never to make hostile utterances about other nations or peoples; never to carry out the functions of his office with any degree of secrecy, or enter into diplomatic negotiations or agreements which are not fully open; never to obtain information of any sort through the use of confidential agents; never to employ bodyguards or take any steps toward the securing of his personal safety; never to suggest, under any circumstances whatsoever, that the foregoing commitments must be suspended because of a state of 'crisis' or 'emergency'; never to adopt or even advocate a strategy of defensism, political or personal, no matter what 'external' threat appears to exist. If during his tenure of office he engages in any of the illegal acts enumerated above, or even suggests that such acts are called for by a 'new' situation, this shall be construed by the citizenry as an invitation to assassinate said official in the public interest; and if the official takes any measures whatsoever to protect himself against such assassination, that act in itself shall be construed as an invitation to all genuine pacifists to assassinate him; and if he does no more than argue against this Assassination Clause, and press for its revocation, that act too shall be construed as an act of treason and an invitation to assassination.

The new pacifist programme was a thing of lean, monotoned beauty: any pacifist who doesn't act like a pacifist in office begs other pacifists to bump him off without further ado. In other words, the old Oxford Pledge foolproofed, with no outs.

Of course, Helder went on, a certain logical objection could be made. Peace, according to the cliché, was indivisible; workers for peace and a better world had always understood the necessity for spreading their programmes across the frontiers of nations. So, in the crisis of war, each internationalist shrugged his shoulders, acknowledged despairingly that no one could disarm unless all disarmed, and reached for a gun.

The premise was logical enough, Helder confessed. If one country was disarmed it could easily be attacked by others that retained their arms. Nothing more obvious. But logic was not enough – pacifists had been rigidly logical whenever they had risen to power, and the result had been one ruinous war after another. There was something beyond logic, some outrage to logic, some magical thing, that had been lacking in the pacifist brew all along. Martine had supplied the missing ingredient. It was, simply, the faith that surpasses all logic and understanding, utterly blind faith, a fanatical dogged devotion that could only be called theological. From this moment on, Helder announced, Teddy Gorman was to be known as Theo, as a living reminder of Martine's bequest to humanity.

But coupled with this blind faith in the rightness of the programme must be an equally blind faith, in something else: the potential of good will in all people. One must believe that when a genuine pacifist gesture such as the adoption of the Assassination Clause is made in one country, its moral audacity will exert such a magical pull on the pacifist impulses of other peoples that a mighty wave of good will will sweep over all countries and, in one mystic surge, achieve the oceanic internationalism that all the 'practical' and 'responsible' leaders of the past had talked about but never gotten anywhere near. Did history refute this belief? Well, when in history had such a gesture ever been made? Who had ever *really* turned the other cheek?

That was the burden of Helder's opening-shot speech. It was a stunner. People were sick to the marrow of war; they were fed up to the point of nausea with leaders who had promised peace and then sold them out. They wanted peace at any cost – anything, literally anything, would be better than war.

There was great excitement in the new cities that were being founded up and down the far western strip of America. Soon an election was arranged, Tri-P swept into office with practically no opposition, Helder became president and Theo his right-hand man, emissary, and all-round trouble-shooter. So the Inland Strip was born. And the magic ground swell which Helder had predicted came to pass. Very soon the theological excitement of the Assassination Clause filtered into the East to take the burgeoning pacifist movement there by storm; it led to a new order headed by Vishinu and some of his associates. So, by ignoring the logic of internationalism, Helder's 'blind faith' had finally brought about a genuinely international order.

Martyr: myth; movement; macrocosm. But in his haste to proclaim the martyr and get going, Helder forgot, first, to locate the martyr's corpse...

THIRD PHASE (1977-8): *Crisis of the Outmoded Cortices*

And immediately there was trouble. For one thing, a whole slew of materials like cobalt, petroleum, uranium, thorium, columbium, important deposits of which were to be found only in the great no man's lands left throughout the backward colonial patches of the globe after the Third World War, was vitally needed by each of the powers. Wouldn't either power, simply in order to protect its geopolitical situation, have to manoeuvre for control of such areas even when it did not yet need the specific materials available in it?

Such 'protective' ideas, of course, could not develop in a world in which people were nothing but pacifists. But the trouble was that nowhere in the Tri-P world could you find a man who was nothing but a pacifist. To be that, a man would need to have a very long and very rich and overwhelmingly persuasive tradition of pacifism behind him – and there was no such tradition in the world, even that strand of the Judeo-Christian heritage which had to do with turning the other cheek was cunningly intertwined with another strand which suggested an eye was suitable payment for an eye and a tooth the minimum recompense for a tooth. But the peoples of the Tri-P world did have another sort of tradition which was still very much with them. A long, rich, remarkably persuasive history now folded deep into the cortex, only thinly overlaid with benignity, which told every Easterner that the Western world was rapacious, and materialistic, and contemptuous of those with darker skins and more meagre technologies, and Wall Street imperialist; every Westerner that the Eastern world was wily and rapacious and totalitarian and benighted and clumsy with machines and irrational and contemptuous of democratic human values, and Soviet imperialist.

To be sure, the leaders of the Strip and the Union never gave voice to such thoughts – there was, after all, the Assassination Clause to think about. But the Clause could not be enforced against whole populations. Private citizens of both countries – newspaper editors, journalists, professors, economists, businessmen – were not bound by the Clause; they were free to make accusatory statements; and make them they did.

Then a completely unforeseen thing happened. No holder of public office could make accusations against another power, not if he valued his neck. But – and this was something the clause makers had not anticipated – he could resign his office and, using his prestige as a recent leader to gain an audience, yell out his accusations all over the place with the immunity of a private citizen. This is exactly what Vishinu did. He kept mum for almost two years after he became head of the Union. Then he quit, on the ground that he could be more useful to his country as a private citizen, and let fly.

There was hell to pay. Vishinu threw the whole moth-eaten Soviet book at Helder and his associates – charged them with everything from imperialism to bed wetting. Helder and his associates, of course, could not reply.

It was a bad time for Helder. Vishinu, it was suggested, was preparing a coup in the Union which would overthrow the nominal Tri-P government and set up a defensist one. What was Helder to do? To give up Tri-P would mean to give up everything which stamped his messianic life with meaning and direction. But he could not disprove the terrifying reports which appeared daily in the Strip press – and neither could he do anything to muzzle the press. He could not even be sure that the aroused citizens of the Strip were not doing exactly what they accused Vishinu of doing – there were such

rumours too. War, a thoroughly off-the-record war, was obviously being prepared by the citizens of two pacifist nations in a thoroughly off-the-record way, and there was no way to stop it.

Crisis. In three short years the world was on the brink again. Some essential ingredient, obviously, was still missing from the pacifist stew. And if it could not be found in a hurry, the human race was very probably doomed – that was being corny and histrionic, maybe, but there it was...

Helder was in a state of panic. He had missed up somewhere. He had to find out where, exactly – otherwise his life made no sense. And he was a man to whom it was enormously important to make sense – he always forgot his Rosemarys.

FOURTH PHASE (1978): *Revelation of the Word*

He went into retreat in the mountains. For almost a month he was gone; only Theo knew his whereabouts. He thought and thought, pacing the floor of his cabin nights. Where had he gone wrong?

In desperation he went back once more to study the bible. And suddenly, one febrile night, it struck him. None so blind as those who will not see. The answer was as simple as a twice-two-equals-four Euclidean theorem – it had been there in Martine's notebook all the time.

It was as though a veil had suddenly dropped from Helder's eyes and he saw for the first time. Martine had sensed, with his breathtaking insight, that pacifism was all child's play and dust in the eyes unless it was non-reversible – and it would never be non-reversible until it was rooted in the very anatomy of man and the aggression which vitiated it was rooted *out*. Martine had meant to suggest all that in his apparently casual and haphazard speculations about inducing good will in Theo through lobotomy. And then he had gone on to suggest the real surgical solution to the problem through a series of apparent jokes and wisecracks – the solution of Immob!

The big problem was to *prove* to the world that in becoming a pacifist you were not simply stepping from one ideological suit of clothes into another, while inside you remained the same; you had to demonstrate for everyone that you were thinking and feeling with a completely new cortex, from which all the old suspicions and wily strategies had been removed. Immob would do just that: no one would suspect a vol-amp of harbouring any anachronistic imperialism under his cranium. It was not by accident that Martine had put so much of the Immob philosophy into Theo's mouth, in that incredible imaginary dialogue which no one had understood before this moment. It was glaringly obvious that this was Martine's way of saying: because Theo was already a duo-amp quite involuntarily, because he'd been mauled by the steamroller, he must now become the initiator of Immob by voluntarily making himself a quadro-amp – and thus launch mankind's first real effort to dodge the steamroller.

In great excitement Helder summoned Theo to his hideout. He closeted himself with the young man and, stammering with the furious glory of his revelation, explained the whole thing – quoting the lines from Martine's notebook which, several years ago, he had deleted as irrelevancies. (All the lines – except those having to do with masochism.) At first Theo thought Helder was joking; then he grew silent.

Finally Helder asked him what he thought. He said that he would have to go off by himself and worry it over a little – it was a pretty big idea to swallow all at once.

Theo went out and sat on the mountain top all that night long. God only knows what ideas went through his mind as he felt his aluminium legs, then raised his hands and studied them in the moonlight. But when the sun came up and he went back to the cabin, Helder knew by the saintly glow on his face what his answer was. Theo was not one to refuse the mantle of destiny, especially when it was flung to him by a Martine.

The whole thing was arranged by Helder in absolute secrecy. A remote place was selected for the operations, surgeons were sneaked away to do the job. For almost two months Helder and Theo remained in hiding, recuperating.

By this time, of course, the whole Strip was in a panic – the leaders were gone, the bombast from the Union propagandists was getting wilder and wilder.

FIFTH PHASE (1978-9): *Tri-P to Immob*

Loud-speakers all through the Strip trumpeted the sensational news: Helder and Theo were about to return to public life – they would appear at a monster rally at New Jamestown. The rally, of course, was scheduled for 19 October 1978; that had already become the big holiday of the new order, known as Peace Day.

Came the great day. People poured into New Jamestown from all parts of the Strip. A quarter of a million spectators crowded into the giant stadium. When the curtains finally rolled back, they revealed two people on the stage: Helder, standing behind a table draped with bunting, and Theo, standing directly to his right.

A tense hush. Slowly, with great emotion, Helder began to speak. He held up one hand, in it a volume; this, he explained, was the original manuscript of Martine's notebook, the manual of humanism bequeathed to all men of good will by the great martyred hero. In it was the great lesson – the need for absolute faith.

Now he turned and pointed to Theo.

Here, as they all knew, was the prototype of the great faithful, so named by Martine himself. Martine's plenipotentiary to humanity. For some three years now the remnants of the civilized world had been living under Martine's banner, striving to reach the theological purity of Theo. Through the political instrument known as the Assassination Clause, the best device invented by man so far to make his moral commitments stick.

And yet – something had gone wrong. Wild recrimination filled the air all through the pacifist world. Charges, threats, and bitterness everywhere. The moral commitment had *not* stuck. Somehow, the Assassination Clause was inadequate. Another catastrophe impended, one which would eliminate whatever tag ends of the human race were left. What, what had happened?

He would tell them what had happened. They had not reached out joyously to accept their heritage from Martine. The one true lesson in the notebook, they had not learned. The Assassination Clause was not the way. It was a puny, halfway measure. The wholeway measure, the full triumphant leap into irrevocable faith, they had not taken – but Martine had defined it and pointed the way. It was –

Immob !

Immob !

As the magical word boomed through the stadium, great banners unfurled from the proscenium arch. On them, emblazoned in lumi-letters twenty feet high, were the sensational new phrases: NO DEMOBILIZATION WITHOUT IMMOBILIZATION, PACIFISM MEANS PASSIVITY, A LEG SHORTER AND A HEAD TALLER, ARMS OR THE MAN, DODGE THE STEAMROLLER, DODGE THE STEAMROLLER, DODGE THE STEAMROLLER...

What, Helder demanded, did Immob mean? Immobilization, of course. Immobilization through vol-amp. He explained what vol-amp was, how it was designed to outwit the steamroller.

But Immob was more than that. Much, much more. Something more positive. He and Theo had pondered its meaning in Martine's guarded remarks and they had come to see, in a burst of revelation, what else it meant. It was the name of a whole new movement, a new way of life, a new and fully human order. Its letters were the initials of the new and spiritually soaring thing that Tri-P must become if it was to capture the missing ingredient of theological devotion. Those initials stood for –

International Mass for the Manumission of the Benign!

Mass, not movement. There had been too much movement in the world. Immob was designed to cure the malady of activity. Mass – that summoned up a picture of humanity becalmed by a new quiescent faith, impervious to all steamrollers, just triumphantly standing there.

Helder and Theo had pondered long and soberly. They had come to see who had to make the first gesture. And now – it was to be made.

At a signal, attendants appeared from the wings. Two of them stepped up to Theo, reached for his jacket, and slipped it off.

A quick gasp, choked off in many throats. For when the jacket came off, the shirt underneath was exposed and it was seen that there were no sleeves on the shirt – there was no need for sleeves, Theo had nothing to fill any sleeves with, his arms were gone!

The world's first Immob!

But he was not alone. The attendants advanced to the rostrum, took hold of the wooden framework supporting the bunting and removed it.

Another great convulsive shudder ran through the audience. Helder was not standing behind the draped table, as everyone had thought. He was standing on the table! On his two stumps!

The world's second vol-amp!

'This is our answer to the charges made against us!' Helder cried, his voice thick with sobbing. 'This is our answer to men of faltering commitment everywhere! We are not imperialists! We give ourselves fully, all the way, for ever, to peace! Where is the man who will join us?'

Great lamentation through the stadium. Sobs, wails, screams, women falling in a faint. Weeping, much wringing of hands.

But then – something else. Another, more positive sound. A wild affirmatory shouting, hoorays, whoops, hysterical and surging.

It was the young men, reacting now after the first paralyzing shock. Leaping to their feet. Jumping up and down. Waving their arms frenziedly in the air in a surge of

benignity. And running, bounding, stampeding down the aisles – to the recruiting booths which were now being set up on the great stage.

It was a wild time. And it lasted for many days. Like a great tidal wave Immob swept across the Strip: very soon all but a few queer, iconoclastic elements among the youth – not much in the literature about them – were recruited. Before long the thing began to get institutionalized; there were Immob clubs set up and M.E. universities, and the academicians began to overhaul their ancient disciplines and a new philosophy and ethos began to take form. The atmosphere crackled with magic.

And the magic was infectious, on a scale beyond Helder's wildest dreams. Almost overnight Immob captured the public imagination all through the East Union. The Union youth too dished to the recruiting stations. Now, indeed, on a basis of full commitment, of theological fervour, the one world had come into being. Even Vishinu threw in his hat and both legs.

All bitter talk of imperialism ceased. Men who are rushing to have their limbs cut off in the interests of peace do not call each other imperialists.

SIXTH PHASE (1980-90): *Artificial Limbo*

There was just one fly in the saccharine ointment. Helder had reckoned without modern technology – the electronic tube, the transistor, communications science, cybernetics, atomic energy, etc., etc. He had been so engrossed in programmatic matters these past years that he did not even know about the small group of cyberneticists who had, ever since the war, been working quietly in a little neurological laboratory attached to the Denver University Medical School.

These men were, almost without exception, expert neurocyberneticists who had studied under Wiener at M.I.T. They had been inspired by Wiener's contention that, granted the technological savvy of the 1940s, an artificial limb superior in many ways to the real one could easily be created if society wanted to spend as much money on such a humanitarian project as it was willing to spend on developing an atom bomb. Their research on prosthetics had begun under the aegis of the Advisory Committee on Prosthetics Appliances which had been set up in 1948 by the American Congress to aid the amputee veterans of the Second; it had been given a great impetus by the Third, in which scores of thousands of people, both military personnel and civilians, lost one or more limbs. (It was their laboratory, as a matter of fact, which had built the aluminium pros for Theo when he was flown back from Africa in '72.) And when the Inland Strip got organized in '75, their project was granted a subsidy by the new government, purely in the spirit of encouraging humanitarian research.

Less than a year after Immob was founded, these cyberneticists made a startling announcement: they had perfected an artificial limb superior in many ways to the real thing, integrated into the nerves and muscles of the stump, powered by a built-in atomic energy plant, equipped with sensory as well as motor functions, etc. It was a neutral, value-eschewing announcement. They did not know whether this invention was good or bad, whether it should be fostered or suppressed, any more than physicists a quarter century earlier had known whether their discovery of atomic fission and robot brains was good or bad – they merely had the thing, it was up to the politicians to figure out what to do with it. Science discloses, politics disposes.

Great agitation on the heels of this announcement. Heated pros and cons. Shouldn't this doodad be unceremoniously suppressed – after all, if Immob was the idea, what was the point to devices which would provide still greater mobility? Yes; but weren't the vol-amps our great heroes, hadn't they made the supreme sacrifice in the spirit of Martine? Was anything too good for our heroes?

The battle went on. Sides were taken. It became the basic political issue, the split in opinion started to take on institutionalized shape in the form of parties, Pro-Pro and Anti-Pro came into being. And Pro-Pro soon became the government party. Helder and Theo, after looking the problem over from all angles, decided to go along with Pro-Pro – they could not see how any kind of mechanical gadget could vitiate the inner moral revolution brought about by vol-amp. After all, pros were removable; and besides, many of the vol-amps were getting restless, the first intense glow of passivity had begun to wear off and they were complaining that, now that they had given themselves irrevocably to peace, they wanted to get up and around and do something a bit active for the cause instead of lying flat on their backs. And their women complained that they fretted and pouted quite a bit, lying there in their baskets (although many women joined the Anti-Pro Ladies' Auxiliaries). These psychological problems had to be considered.

Prosthetics plants were set up. Neuro-LoCo Centres were organized. More active M.E.s were devised. The dexterities and discernments became basic sports. A new philosophy came into being, based on expectations as to how cybernetic limbs would affect the cytoarchitectonic structure of the cortex and produce a new superior type of man. And as all this happened on the double in the Strip, similar developments took place in the Union: technological, political, philosophical, the whole works.

In 1982 the Olympic Games were revived, this time as an annual cybernetic competition. Vishinu had never gone back into the Union government, but he did accept a post as chairman of the Union delegation to the Olympic Arrangements Committee. In the first Olympic Games, Theo and Vishinu were the outstanding competitors of their respective teams – at first duo-amps like Vishinu were allowed to compete in some events – Theo trounced Vishinu every time, the Unioneers never won a single event.

Those were eventful times; real ferment, a progression of red-letter days. Much excitement, and a great international friendliness – everybody alive and benign. But there was an entirely unforeseen development

As soon as the mass production of prosthetics got under way, it became clear that they couldn't possibly be manufactured in quantity without big supplies of columbium. And the known deposits of columbium in the world were very meagre indeed – not enough to answer the needs of even one Immob nation, let alone two of them. The pinch had begun to be felt by the U.S. Air Force as far back as the forties. No substitutes for the rare metal were possible, this was the one problem that continued to stump all the metallurgists.

What to do? Both the Strip and the Union began to send out parties to look for columbium in the unexplored wildernesses – the Andes, the Himalayas. There was talk of looking into the situations in Madagascar and Greenland, perhaps even at the North and South Poles. It was quickly realized that this sort of exploration might develop a competitive spirit, not quite as innocent as the spirit of the Olympic Games, and to guard against that eventuality the more promising areas were carefully staked out between the two powers. But then, as the years went by and the shortage grew more

and more acute – to the point of being an insuperable bottleneck in many cybernetic projects – a certain tension developed. Each party began to think that perhaps the other one had the better of the bargain – and each began to wonder if the other wasn't, in the imperialist manner, organizing *sub rosa* expeditions in the hope of getting the jump on its partner. Vishinu was still not hampered by public office: he made the first guarded references to this lurking suspicion. Soon the references became less guarded. After three or four years, the situation got pretty serious. The whole thing culminated in the hammer-blow speech made by Vishinu three weeks ago in New Jamestown...

It looks like Jerry was right: the earth has played a very cute little joke on the pacifists. Everything else it yields up in teeming abundance, fruits to delight the palate, all the *rotas* and *ganjas* the human organism can stand – but with this one thing, this silly metal which can hold up under the blasting fires of hell, it turns miserly. After whetting men's appetites for this heat resister beyond all slaking, Mother Nature coyly withdraws the mineral breast.

There it is: the world is now irrevocably committed, with theological devotion, to only one thing, columbium, and there is not enough of the stuff to go around. So long as men want cybernetic super-limbs to super-move and super-grasp with, they will not find anywhere under this good green earth enough columbium to build them with...

And so, almost eighteen years after I made the last entry in my notebook, two men, one a Russian and the other a Eurasian, came after me with a rubber truncheon and a stubby automatic. Yes, the event has a long and complex history. What is its meaning, exactly?

It makes no difference what Vishinu and Dai had *consciously* in their minds. The event has an objective significance, quite aside from the conscious intent of its participants. By an oversight, the new world's martyr hadn't been quite reduced to a corpse; now it meant to rectify the error. This kind of society wants its martyrs to stay quite dead – the martyr who turns into a Lazarus only makes trouble. Just like an Unknown Soldier coming back to life, it would be embarrassing as hell – what in Christ's name would you say to him, what heretical things might he not say to you?

They haven't got me yet. Not quite. I'm a bit of a slippery customer, thank God, for the martyr-makers.

So far I've given the slip to all the martyrizers of Martine – except myself.

But they got me indirectly. They got my son.

And just about the whole youthful population of the entire civilized world.

For which I can't entirely dodge the responsibility. After all, I did make the jokes

Point there somewhere, wish I could see if I weren't so tired but



7 August 1900. Hunting lodge.

Swimming in the lake a lot. Like old times, keep diving to see how long I can stay under. This afternoon almost caught a trout with my bare hands but it wriggled free.

13 August 1990. Lodge

Keep thinking of Tom in the perambulator. Dreamt about him last night – I was trying to pull the covering away from him, it was very important to me to see if he was castrated but the blanket was like a sheet of steel riveted in place, wouldn't budge. I was soaked with sweat. He looked up at me with a malicious grin. 'Nothing doing,' he said. 'I know what you're up to but you can't change places with me, from each according to his need.'

Woke up with bad rheumatic stiffness in my arms and legs, it lasted several hours, disappeared the moment I went swimming. Toward evening I opened a vacuum-packed chocolate cake, delicious, took one bite, and immediately threw up.

22 August 1990. Lodge

News report on the video. Vishinu and Theo meeting in Los Alamos with the Olympic Arrangements Committee. Making plans for the Games, due to start 5 October and run through 19 October, Peace Day.

13 September 1990. Lodge

Peace Day one month off. Twentieth anniversary of my much martyrologized desertion. Of my birthday; except I still don't know what the hell I started to get born as.

'Ambulatory basket case.' Why does the phrase keep bothering me? 'You are already one of us in your heart' – that bothers me too.

Can't think. Can't think.

Hunting today. Took a pot shot at a rabbit, winged it in the foreleg. Clipped. Set the bone, rigged up some splints, put it back in the forest.

Rummaging in the closet. Found an old mildewed collection of stories with my father's name inscribed on the flyleaf. Hemingway's *Men Without Women*.

22 September 1990. Lodge

So, then: Immob started as a joke. A joke that miscarried.

But every one of the big salvationist movements in history – from the Ten Commandments all the way down to the Mormons' Latter Day Sainthood and Christian Science and Jehovah's Witnesses and Fletcherism and Bolshevik-Leninism and Dianetics and Orgonotics and Santa Monica Vedanta and Mandunga – every one of them might have started out as a great Swiftean joke. That some humourless man got hold of and took literally.

The jokes get wilder and wilder, people laugh less and less.

Suppose some Helder had come across Swift's tract on a method to abolish the famine problem in Ireland by eating the children of the poor Jesus.



PART SIX

GAMES

CHAPTER 19

Eight, nine, ten days it went on. A sequence of kinaesthetic marvels – whirlings, lunges, soarings, flipflops, heaves, spins – cybercyto feats such as no Immo eyes had ever seen. All of them performed nonchalantly, with debonaire ease, by the Unioneers – who, like the Strippers, all wore large blue 'Ms' on their jerseys. With each passing day the sportscaster's voice lost a few more decibels of its professional bounce, grew more and more puzzled; after a while he began to stutter badly, it looked to Martine as though he was a bit frightened.

'What d'you know!' he said the first day. 'The Union team has just won the decathlon! They ran up twenty-eight points over the world's record, heck –'

And soon after, sputtering now: 'Seventy-three feet! Imagine that, ladies and gentlemen, seventy-three feet! Nobody's ever broad jumped anywhere near that far before! That's, why, see now, that's thirty-two feet more than the world's record established by Theo in '83! Say, what's *happened* to these Union boys?'

Nobody knew what had happened to the Union boys. Five hundred thousand people sat in the great oval stadium in stunned silence, pondering the answer while event after event fell to the visiting team without a struggle. It was not that the Inland Strip athletes were doing badly, not at all: in fact, quite a few of them succeeded in breaking the records chalked up in previous competitions. But no matter how the Strippers outdid themselves and their predecessors, faces contorted with the effort, each time the Unioneers stepped up casually right after and did better without even trying.

There was unbelief in the announcer's voice on the tenth day when he muttered, 'There's no longer any question about it, the score card doesn't lie. Yes, the Unioneers have already piled up enough points to win the Olympics! The first time it's ever happened! But how, how, *how* did it happen? What's the thing mean, *cybernetically* speaking? That's the question on everybody's tongue out here this afternoon...'

For two weeks Martine sat slouched in a chair, hardly moving, eyes glued to the television screen.

There were interludes when no matches were going on; then he would wander down to the lake and stretch out on the rotting boards of the little dock to doze in the sun, mind battered into blankness. Only at night did he crawl out of his drugged state for a while – then, for three or four hours at a stretch, to the hooting of owls and the yelping of coyotes in the forest, he would sit at the table under the sputtering oil lamp and read, or write in his notebook. Try to write, anyhow. Often the words refused to come and his scribbles would trail off into an undecipherable scrawl in the middle of a sentence. He lost a lot of weight during this period: his cheeks were sunken and his eyes looked tired and glazed.

Toward the end of the second week his cheeks were really cavernous, his pants were bunched at the waist where he had had to pull in his belt several notches to take up the slack. He had even lost interest in writing, in trying to write; his notebooks and reading matter lay in a heap on the table, quite forgotten; he sat before the television dully,

unable to think, unable to feel. This was his state of mind and body on the fourteenth day, Peace Day, when the Games came to an end.

In the morning the Unioneers soundly trounced the Strippers in several track events, the hundred-yard dash, the quarter-mile, the pole vault, javelin throwing, the shot-put, the pentathlon. Then came a break: the officials were preparing for the high jump, traditionally the closing event of the Games.

During the lull the announcer interviewed various Strip dignitaries about their reactions to the amazing upset; the dignitaries were taciturn, falsely calm, falsely reassuring. Finally Theo appeared: his pleasant youthful face seemed to have aged ten years, he looked worried and there was a distracted air about him.

'Brother Theo,' the announcer said eagerly, 'we're sure anxious to get your slant on what's been going on. We've seen some mighty strange things out here these past two weeks, a lot of records, including some established by you, have been knocked for a loop. It's –'

'I know,' Theo said soberly. 'I don't mind much about the traditional events. What hurts is taking such a shellacking in the d-and-d's.'

'But these guys were always such bums at everything, especially the d-and-d's. How do you figure their suddenly becoming champs?'

'It'll all come out in the wash. Just one point I'd like to make – we must all remember that these competitions are entirely friendly in spirit and are always followed by a full exchange of engineering information between the contestants. Anybody who's been shaken by what he's seen here ought to remind himself that we don't go in for old-style competitive sports any more than we do for war – these are games in the true, innocent, playful sense of the word, carried on without any spirit of rancour.'

'Well, people are saying, Brother Theo, that there's a very definite old-style competitive spirit in the Olympics this year. They say Brother Vishinu was being pretty darned competitive in his speech about columbium, and now his athletes have become just as competitive in the Games. Some folks think maybe there's a connexion between the two.'

'Nonsense,' Theo said firmly, a little too firmly. 'That's just sour grapes. It's a sure way to bring back the old panicky way of thinking. We've got to mobilize our panic controls and keep our heads, all of us.'

'You feel, then, that people are wrong to tie up what they've seen here with all the talk about columbium?'

'Definitely. Anybody who thinks that way ought to go home and do some deep breathing.'

'Thank *you*, Brother Theo.' Theo got up and left the telecasting booth. The announcer continued. 'And now... What's this? Ladies and gentlemen, there just been a new development here, stand by, please... Yes, yes. Oh, that's just fine! Great! Ladies and gentlemen, our Number Two booth down on the field has just flashed us on the intercom – it looks like they've finally rounded up Brother Vishinu for an interview! Stand by, folks, take it away, Number Two...'

Another announcer appeared on the screen, sitting at a table with Vishinu. The Union representative was dressed in a blue-and-white blazer, rather like a yachting jacket, and a long-visored white cap; his heavily jowled, dark face was composed and impassive.

'Brother Vishinu,' the announcer said deferentially, 'you have just heard Brother Theo's reassuring words to the Inland Strip. Have you anything to add to them?'

'Nothing. Except, of course, one little thing. He is totally wrong.'

'Wrong? You mean – about columbium?'

'I mean precisely about columbium.'

'I'm afraid I don't follow you, sir. Could you try –'

'I will put it this way,' Vishinu said. 'For many, many years now the Inland Strippers, and before them their forefathers when there was yet no Immob, have had a very smug attitude about themselves and their country. Very satisfied with themselves. They decided they alone have all the know-how to make machines and apparatus of various sorts, that in all the world there are no engineers and masters of technics like them, so naturally everybody should kiss their, mm, boots and they should be allowed to rule the whole world.'

'But...' the announcer faltered. 'I thought, Brother Theo was just saying –'

'Semantically it made no sense,' Vishinu said impatiently. 'I am explaining to you now the *truth*. The Union engineers have been working very, very hard on prosthetics. Now it is proved that we can make the best pros in the world, better even than the master minds of the Strip. By the logic of the Strip imperialists it follows that if we have such fine know-how also we should have all the columbium in the world.'

'Brother Vishinu,' the announcer said. 'You are, why, you are contradicting everything Brother Theo said.'

'Of course. Precisely my purpose.'

'Do you mean, then, that Brother Theo was wrong about what we can expect after the Games? You won't share your discoveries with other Immobs?'

Vishinu smiled for the first time. 'With other Immobs, definitely yes,' he said. 'With those who betray the Immob world and stray off from the true path of Martine, definitely no.'

'What about the time element here, sir? How long have you had these new pros?'

'Please, no philosophical discussions. Not so easy to define time – the East and the West have most different approaches to this commodity.'

'When – will you announce your plans soon?'

'Very soon. In a matter of minutes everything will become most clear.'

'Minutes? Is something going to –?'

'Young man,' Vishinu said as he got up to go, 'remember, please, the words of your great Brother Theo: Be patient. Rome was not burned in a day. I must go, the high jump is happening very soon now.'

As the two teams lined up on the field for the final event the announcer, badly shaken by Vishinu but trying hard to recapture his usual bland glibness, explained the procedure. Since the Games winner was already known, there was no point to prolonging things unduly. Therefore, by consent of all parties, the crossbar would, right

from the start, be hoisted to the highest mark ever set, at the world's record level established nine years ago by none other than Brother Theo himself.

The field was cleared and the Union captain withdrew several yards to allow himself the usual running start; the stadium was still as the morgue. The jumper poised himself on his toes, then took several long, loping steps until he came to the take-off point. He was not exerting himself, he seemed only to hunch for a fraction of a second, bending slightly at the knees to give himself an upward push. Then he took off, effortlessly but with rocket-like force.

Up, up he shot, not even bothering to scissor his legs as jumpers usually did to facilitate clearing the bar. There was no danger of his grazing the bar, he went up stiff as an arrow, body upright and arms held rigidly at his sides – zoomed past the bar, past the tops of the uprights supporting the bar, and kept going. He had easily jumped two hundred feet. When he plummeted down he bent his knees parachuter style to break the fall, landed gracefully on his oleo-strut shock absorbers and bobbed up and down a few times and marched away.

The stadium was still, a petrified forest. Even the announcer was quiet, evidently he had nothing to say, the visual evidence spoke for itself. Months later, an eternity later, a long low ripple, a sound like wind lapping at dead leaves, passed through the crowd.

Stepping out smartly, like a drum major, the Union captain proceeded to the officials' box and went into conference with them; in a few moments the Strip captain was called over. After some more whispered talk one of the white-capped officials went over to a microphone and addressed the crowd over the loud-speaker system.

'The Committee has an announcement to make,' he said. 'In view of what has just happened the Strip team concedes the final event without a contest. The Games are over.'

Another flabby ooze of sound, the stadium was one enormous mouth softly gasping.

Now began the final ceremony. The whole Union team, some two hundred strong, proceeded to one end of the field and assembled in military formation. They began their triumphant procession, arms and legs sparkling as they rose and fell in unison. At the head of the column marched Vishinu.

The new champions reached the centre of the field, wheeled at a right angle, headed like an electrified centipede for the judges' stand. Here were assembled all the top officials of the Strip government in their capacity as hosts, all of them, headed by Helder and Theo. When the Unioneers arrived at the stand Vishinu raised his arm and they came to a halt. At a second signal from their leader they went into precise side-stepping manoeuvres until the several rows had fused and they were all spread out in a single line running parallel to the stand. They stood rigidly at attention, Vishinu at the centre of the formation and a few paces in front of it.

Helder rose to speak, holding a large golden object which gleamed in the sun. Theo stood too, at the President's right. The camera panned in on Helder for a close-up, the object in his arms bulked large on the screen – a statue, miniature reproduction of the gigantic sculpture at the hub of New Jamestown, showing a man being run over by a steamroller. But something had been added: the triumphant figure of a quadro equipped with pros was straddling the machine, exactly like the figure of Martine in the bas-relief outside the Martine Home. He rode the steamroller with the extravagant chest-bursting pride of Prometheus unbound, in his hand a javelin instead of a bolt of lightning.

The camera moved upward to Helder's face. Martine stirred, slid from his chair, and sank to his knees in front of the television. The face was as he remembered it but grown meatier and more pensive – brown hair thinned considerably at the forehead, long nose thickened and inset more deeply, dimples lengthened into crevice-like folds, the thin pressed lips become a harsh undeviating incongruous gash that seemed laid out alongside the otherwise irregular features with a T-square, the eyes still intense grey pinpoints but ringed with thick shadows that were new. There was trouble written on this face, a tension not entirely under control. When the camera backed away Helder's legs came into view: plastic. Somewhere in the stadium a band played a few bars of some brassy flourish, then Helder began to speak.

'Brother Vishinu,' he began. 'Esteemed visitors from the far corners of the Immob world. It is in order on this day, Peace Day, that we remind ourselves of other times, less enlightened times, when the Olympics were not the noble, fraternal occasion they are now but cultural echoes of the terrible imperialist struggles which racked the whole world – contest of egocentric persons and ethnocentric nations. You are no enemies who stand triumphant before us now, claiming your rightful prize – you are only our other, and at the moment obviously better, sides! You are ourselves! Can the left hand resent what the right hand accomplishes? Especially since we know, we know full well, that the marvels which you have unveiled before our eyes here will not be selfishly hoarded treasures. Every Immob Advance is another drop in the ocean of humanity from which we all drink, the ocean of Martine.

'Yes, drained of their vicious content of man against man and people against people, the Olympics have become the great Moral Equivalent of war – Immob life on all levels has become one vast Moral Equivalent of war! Under Immob all of life has become one continuing Olympic, one unending sunny smiling Game. The Game has been snatched from the battlefield and brought into the world of community endeavour and mutuality! In the true innocent spirit of the Immob Game, therefore, I salute you, the gallant knights of joyous mutuality ! You have made history here, the world will be the better for the cyber-cyto splendours of your accomplishments! And therefore, with rejoicing in my heart on this greatest of all days, Peace Day, I present this statue to your leader, Brother Vishinu. We pass it into your hands with no sense of loss. For we give to you that we may receive...'

Vishinu stepped forward until he was standing directly under Helder. Helder reached down and handed the statue to him; he took it stiffly, without acknowledgement, and backed away until he had regained his original position. There was a microphone there, he spoke into it.

'You will receive, all right,' he said. 'Definitely. All of you. You will be paid back double and triple for your rotten lies.'

A hushed 'oh' from the massed flesh, vast and oval as the stadium itself; then a terrible silence, as of an electrovox suddenly going dead.

'Let us have a clear picture of these happenings,' Vishinu continued, speaking very slowly and precisely. 'There has been no Immob, no true spirit of Martine, until this day. Until this day there has been no sharing and no equity and glad exchanges. The muck-a-mucks of the decadent West have been playing their usual game until now, the game of the lords and masters and know-it-alls, of the global haves strutting around in front of the global have-nots. This has to stop before Immob becomes a dirty word. This week we, the East Unioneers, have put a stop to it. We represent the fresh new

spirit of the East which is blowing up now a real cyber-cyto hurricane to sweep the world clean of the foul imperialist odours of the old Western masters. No, you will share nothing in our victory, Helder and Theo. What was victorious on this field was the true spirit of Immob, precisely in spite of you and your foul plots against Immob mankind.'

Behind Vishinu a frozen blur: half a million people rooted to their seats, not moving, hardly breathing. Martine's fingers clawed at the floor, knuckles white with the strain; his face was flushed and moisture was beginning to trickle down his cheeks.

'Your imperialist crimes can no longer go unpunished. You are traitors, saboteurs, terrorists, schemers, and you will be dealt with as such. We peoples of the East, we vermin of colour and backwardness, we coolies of the world, the white man's burden – we show you now that we can do as much, even more, with your fancy vacuum tubes and transistors and nuclear energy and solenoids than you great masters of the world can. We have knocked you off your smug thrones cybernetically. Now, for the sake of everything the call Immob, we must knock you off your imperialist thrones too. On this Peace Day, in the name of Martine, for the sake of the Immob masses born and unborn, we now call you to account for your imperialist crimes.'

The Strip officials were standing rigidly in their box, stupefaction on their faces. Vishinu raised his hand once, emphatically: behind him the two hundred athletes lifted their arms too, pointing them at the officials in a gleaming mass salute, like divers ready to take the plunge.

There was a moment when nothing moved, not a sound was heard. Then Vishinu brought his hand down again, smartly, maestro pacing the flutes.

A series of sharp, explosive sounds. Simultaneously the outstretched arms of the Union athletes, all four hundred of the arms, lit up with a blinding glare. The effect was quite different from the dancing glints which usually emanated from pros: for a fleeting moment every arm seemed to be positively incandescent along its whole length.

The officials in the box reacted like drunken puppets. It was a scene out of comic opera, the gestures absurdly exaggerated and the facial contortions so unlikely that they were only clownish. Some flapped their arms wildly, like fledglings essaying to fly; others clutched their throats and thumped their chests in buffoonish frenzy, still others began to tear their hair, wring their hands, stroke their cheeks in fits of absent-mindedness: their hands came away from their bodies red. And there were some who, with no histrionics, no expressions on their faces but utter incomprehension, slumped immediately to the floor and out of sight behind the balustrade.

One by one the gesticulators, the claspers of bosoms, the hand wringers, followed suit, crumpling like marionettes from which the mover's hand has suddenly been withdrawn. Cries of anguish came from one, then from another – sharp yelps, long meandering whines, hysterical screeches that sounded like laughter. Soon they were all on the ground, their bodies hidden from sight.

Martine had not moved from his position on the floor. He was on his knees, Mohammedan crouching before a television Mecca. He searched the scene for some sign of Helder and Theo – he had not followed what had happened to them in the confusion, they were gone from sight now.

'The swine, the swine, the swine,' he said. He thought he was just talking but it was more like screaming. 'He lied. Five or six months, he said. I remember distinctly. He said five or six months.'

A humming noise now began to come over the television speaker, slowly it grew louder.

'Swine,' Martine said, shrilled, pounding the floor with his fists. 'Swine. Swine. Swine.'

One of the cameramen at the stadium seemed not to have lost his wits entirely – he swivelled his camera away from the boxes and tilted it up at the sky. On to the television screen flashed an image of dozens of planes with helicopter rotors whirring, humming, a whole fleet flying in over the western rim of the stadium at an altitude of less than two hundred feet.

Slowly the planes made their way to the centre of the field, then stopped there and idled in the air. From the underside of each plane dangled a series of contraptions which looked like trapeze bars.

At last something began to move on the ground. With Vishinu still at their head, their ranks unbroken, the Union athletes proceeded with military order to the centre of the field, to a point directly below the motionless planes. Vishinu crouched, then bolted upward with bulletlike speed, body turning until he was moving feet foremost, straight for one of the planes. Whether by magnetic force or whatever, his plastic feet seemed to be pulled unerringly toward one of the trapeze bars. The moment they came into contact with the bar they stuck to it, in a second he was hauled into the plane through an opening in the belly.

Now a second Unioneer – this one a quadro, moving hands first – soared upward and disappeared into a plane; then a third, then a fourth. Very quickly the sky was peppered with dozens of bodies catapulting at once. And now figures began to break loose from the solid mass of flesh huddled in a ring around the stadium; they too came to the centre of the field and began the ascent into the planes. Some of them carried drawing boards, some were women, they seemed to be the visiting artists from the Union, while others of all shades and complexions, men and women alike, were unmistakably from the East too. Apparently all the Union guests at the Olympics were taking part in this vast vertical exodus, being sucked up into the sky. Martine tried to make out the individual figures as they darted on to the field and then vaulted into the blue. The women, not having cybernetic limbs and therefore unable to jump by themselves, climbed on to the shoulders of male Immobs and were carried piggyback by them; Martine squinted in an effort to see one such tiny figure as she hurtled upward on the back of a brawny Union athlete, he thought she was wearing a pink-and-blue dirndl skirt but it was hard to make out, he couldn't be sure. Uneasy rider, he thought.

More sound effects now, the spectators were beginning to come out of the paralyzing shock. A woman howled, making a quavering sound something like a yodel; a throaty male yawping began, as of an animal in terrible pain – all the sounds of terror and lamentation somehow absurd because of the time lapse between stimulus and response. Gradually, under all the haphazard sounds of individual collapse which happened to be picked up by nearby mikes, there swelled a less shrill and more substantial sound, a steadily increasing hum from many thousands of throats as they unlocked and began to vibrate – a mass whimpering.

The camera panned down into the bleachers. At random points in the ring of flesh individual figures began to move: a man stood up and staggered a few feet, drunkenly, like a sleepwalker, hands alternately rubbing temples and playing an aimless game of patty cake; a woman began to make disjointed movements with her arms, like a windmill furiously reversing itself over and over, then dropping in a faint. Everywhere around them other people were just sitting and looking into space, as though daydreaming on a park bench.

A figure wandered into range of the camera and stood there looking jerkily from side to side, very much like a spectator at a tennis match. It was one of the announcers, apparently unaware that he was being televised. His lips were moving, they were the lips of a priest saying his beads, of a child blowing bubbles – 'My God, my God, my God,' he was saying over and over in a kind of throttled sob, the words came over the audio.

The announcer's hands were wandering idly up and down his body on a mission of demented exploration. One of them stopped at his collar and fumbled there: it had come into contact with the wire leading away from the lapel mike.

'Si!' a voice yelled from nowhere. 'Si, for Christ's sake, you're on the air! Stop mumbling man!'

The feel of the wire seemed to bring the man back to reality: he shuddered, then threw his shoulders back, cleared his throat, and began to speak a parody of his professional style. The clichés of the trained verbalizer tumbled out now in monstrous schizoid lack of contact with the enormity of what had happened; but there was hysteria under the glib robot heartiness.

'Ladies and gentlemen,' he began mechanically; for a moment he forgot himself and experimented with a ghastly smile, then gave it up. 'Ladies and gentlemen. You have just witnessed the most remarkable – today we have been privileged to see...'

He made an obvious effort to pull himself together, he swallowed hard and tried again.

'Something inconceivable has happened here. We don't – we don't understand it any better than you do. It looked as though the Union athletes had pro arms that were weapons of some sort, pistols or rifles or something, at a signal from Vishinu Brother Vishinu they all pointed their arms and fired. Their arms were guns or something. Then they fired. There were sixty or seventy of our top officials sitting in the boxes, then suddenly the arms went off and...'

His lips began to quiver, he broke down again.

'Si!' somebody shouted again. 'Get hold of yourself, Si!'

'Oh, God,' the announcer said. 'Horrible, horrible, horrible. Oh God, God, oh my God.'

Another voice, forceful and authoritative, boomed out over the scene. The camera switched back to the formation of planes overhead.

'This is Vishinu,' the new voice said. 'I am speaking to you from my plane. I am now leaving the stadium with my countrymen.'

'Swine,' Martine said. 'Pig. Scum. Swine.'

'Before I go,' Vishinu thundered, 'I have a message for all the oppressed masses of the Inland Strip. Brothers, no need to despair! The warmongering demagogues who are

left among you will tell you with their oily words that what we have just done is an act of war. Do not believe this lying propaganda, brothers, it will be just a semantic trick to confuse the suffering masses. There is no warlike element in our actions today. For many years now your false leaders have been provoking us with their imperialist tricks under a demagogic cloak of Immob. They were preparing war against us and plotting to steal all the world's columbium – plotting to get the columbium to make the war and also to make the war to get columbium, like true double-dealers. Naturally we reached the end of our Immob patience and we had to defend ourselves. For a long time we waited for you to take care of this matter yourself but none of you dared to invoke the Assassination Clause of your Constitution – or, this I think is the more likely, your fine leaders guarded themselves too well to let you invoke it. Well, today, on Peace Day, we have invoked the Assassination Clause for you, because we saw you needed our help.'

'Can you hear me, Si?' the unseen announcer bellowed. 'Get a grip on yourself, man! We've got a job to do – drag your ass over to the officials' box and see if you can find out anything. Si!'

'We do not want war,' Vishinu said. 'We make no wars with the abused and oppressed masses of the West. Listen to me, little people of the Strip. This very minute, while I speak, many many Unioneers are landing from ships on both the coasts of your country, they are already beginning to march toward the Strip. Do not fear them, they are not armies, they are liberators coming to throw off from your backs your imperialist masters and free you to return to Immob. That is why they do not drop down from the skies on you suddenly, with hydrogen bombs and such things; they come slowly to give their brothers here the chance to do the job themselves. Oppressed Negro masses of the Strip! You especially, brothers, must work with the Union liberating forces because you are doubly oppressed. Among the liberators you will find many Negroes from your own country who ran away from the segregation and discrimination of the West to take refuge in our democratic lands, where a skin that is not lily-white does not mean the man inside is all garbage. You will have a people's Immob democracy at last. You will be free at last. Be of good courage, comrades, soon the masses everywhere will live in peace in the true spirit of Martine!'

'Pig,' Martine said. 'Oh, the pig.'

The planes began to shift now, soon they were aligned in four long rows which came together to form an enormous 'M'.

'Long live peace!' Vishinu shouted. 'Long live Martine!'

The formation of planes started to move, it passed over the rim of the stadium and disappeared. The camera swung away from the sky, registered the field again.

'Si!' the voice blasted. 'You got anything, Si?'

Loud wailing from the bleachers, terrible cacophony of distress, individual screams tearing through the wall of sound. The spectators were no longer huddled in their seats, many of them were scampering through the aisles, leaping up and dashing down on the field to run to and fro in a sudden access of motoric panic.

The announcer called Si flashed on the screen again. He seemed slightly more in control of himself.

'Si! Anything happening down there?'

'Looks bad,' the announcer said. 'We have no report so far on how many have been killed and wounded, but it looks bad. I see, though, that some of the Olympics doctors

have finally reached the boxes, we should have something for you soon. One of our men is up there now, he's trying to find out something... Oh, here he comes now, maybe...'

Another quadro with a large press button on his lapel came up to the announcer and whispered in his ear, wildly excited. The announcer stood in stupefaction, mouth open, eyes bulging.

'Oh!' he cried. 'Ladies and gentlemen, we've just found out something incredible, oh, simply incredible! It's not quite as bad as we thought – almost everybody up there was hit but listen to this! *Brother Helder and Brother Theo are not there! Their bodies haven't been found! They – are – safe! They got away!* According to a newspaperman who was sitting just behind the boxes and saw the whole thing, Brother Helder somehow saw what was coming and at the last split second he threw himself on Brother Theo and got him on the floor so the bullets missed both of them! In the confusion which followed they both managed to crawl to the exit and got away! *Brother Helder and Brother Theo got away!* Most likely they're on their way back to the capital now, if all goes well, oh God, if all goes well we should be hearing from them at any moment! Folks, let's all try to mobilize our panic controls and wait, and hope –'

Martine stood up and switched the television off. He rubbed his sunken cheeks distractedly. 'So,' he said. 'Assassination didn't take. Has to be done over again. Naturally.' He walked to the window and looked down at the lake, came back to the centre of the room.

'No getting away from it,' he said. 'Otherwise I'll never get straight with myself, I've got to sleep again. R.I.P., Rosemary.'

A half-hour later he was in his car, hurriedly packed valise in the luggage compartment, careening over the back roads in the general direction of Los Alamos. He was keyed up again, lively as Lazarus, he hadn't felt this wide awake since 3.39 a.m., 19 October 1972.

CHAPTER 20

Some twenty miles north of Los Alamos he turned in at a small motor court: SVIRIDOFF'S CABINS, the lumi-letters said. He signed the register with the name 'H. C. Earwicker' and asked the clerk if there was anyone around who could run an errand for him – letter to deliver, he'd make it worth the messenger's while. The clerk said he reckoned his son could take time out from his chores to make the trip into town. Martine promised to get the message written immediately and went off to his cabin.

The trip southward, much of it over rundown back roads, had taken all night; it was daylight now, he was aching with exhaustion. But as soon as he was settled in his cabin he refreshed himself by running ice-cold water from the tap over his head and neck. Then he sat down at the desk and composed the following letter:

Dear H,

You should recognize this handwriting; you've read plenty of samples of it in your time. But in case you need another hint, here goes:

In the middle sixties two medical students, surgeons in training, were rooming together in an apartment in Greenwich Village. Let's call them X and Y. One night X came home very late. He was in an agitated frame of mind, paced the floor gulping down one drink after another (sour mash, Y always kept a bottle of it around). Under Y's prodding he finally spilled the story.

X was pretty complicated in his dealings with women: couldn't bear them, couldn't bear to be without them; needed them, kicked them around when he had them. Not an unusual attitude, God knows, but X's toughness with women wasn't checked as easily as it is in less tempestuous guys. X never cared to stop and take a good look at motives: he was compulsive rather than reflective, given to acting energetically and precipitately instead of sitting down and trying to figure out what prompts a given action.

Y was just the opposite. Too reflective, if anything. He was always making trouble for himself, maybe complicated things unnecessarily, by trying to work out all the ambivalent motives behind any act he felt impelled to enter on; so he did a lot more uneasy thinking than acting. He was up to his ears in his own analysis (X resisted the whole idea of analysis, took it on sufferance only because the medical school required it) and wished there were time to pursue it more deeply than his studies permitted. Sometimes Y even wondered if surgery was the field for him: he thought the analytic profession was a lot closer to his

real interests and speculated about whether he might not make a switch later on.

So X talked. Seemed he'd had a date with a girl named Rosemary, a nurse at the hospital adjoining the medical school. As a matter of fact, he'd taken Rosemary to a political rally at Madison Square garden – a rally of the Peace Pledge Programme, the pacifist movement in which X was becoming extremely active. (As I said, he was quite an activist.) After the meeting, at which X himself had made a fiery speech, he'd insisted on going up to Rosemary's apartment for a drink.

He'd had several drinks; he'd tried, very energetically, precipitately, actively, to make love to the girl; she'd resisted him just as energetically, at the end even hysterically. Finally, in a kind of blind rage, he had, to put the matter bluntly, raped her. Whatever the complicated act is which is named rape – obviously, more often than not, it involves certain ambivalences on the girl's part too – that's what X had come to at the end of the evening. Needing the girl and at the same time furious with her, intent on an act of love which was also a gesture of considerable hate. In any event, it was an act. X was first and foremost an activist...

While the roommates were talking the phone rang. It was one of Rosemary's girlfriends: she was calling to let X know, in between sobs, that Rosemary had just committed suicide by slashing her wrists. The police were already on the scene; the girlfriend had been called in and under questioning had revealed that X had been out with Rosemary during the evening; X would probably be hearing from the police, maybe they were on the way to his place right now. It might be pretty messy, Rosemary had been raped and in the process pretty badly mauled, inside and out. The girlfriend was calling for a very simple reason: she herself was an ardent worker in Tri-P and an admirer of X, she was dead sure that a man as dedicated to the pacifist cause as X just couldn't have done such a horrible thing to anybody, so she wanted to warn him about what was coming.

Close to hysteria himself X told his roommate what he had heard over the phone. Y's reaction was typical. Peculiar, he suggested, that an act of love could do so much damage. Peculiar, too, that in an act of passion a medical student, who knows the anatomical facts of life pretty thoroughly, could be just as inept and brutal as a moronic butcher's boy.

But the conversation didn't get very far – the bell rang, it was the police. Under questioning X admitted readily that he'd been with Rosemary that evening. However, he explained, he'd left Rosemary at her door; whoever had attacked her must have done it long after he'd returned home – his roommate could confirm

that he'd come in less than forty minutes after the meeting at the Garden was over.

The police turned to Y. After some hesitation he corroborated X's story. Then the police took X's fingerprints and studied them. How, they wanted to know, could X explain the fact that the same fingerprints had been found on a glass in Rosemary's apartment? X answered that he had come to pick Rosemary up *before* the meeting and at that time she'd given him a couple of drinks to bolster him because he was nervous about the speech he had to make.

The story sounded a little fishy, but there was no evidence to contradict it. And Y had given X an airtight alibi. After a few days the case was officially closed – suicide after rape, the rapist being unknown – and X heard no more about it.

A lot of unpleasantness developed between the roommates. Some weeks later Y moved into an apartment of his own; the two men had no more contact until the war broke out. X became more and more active in Tri-P, making speeches all over the place and getting his picture in the papers. He was quite an activist.

On that complicated night, though, there was more talk between the two men; it lasted till sunup. Talk having to do, naturally, with motives – there Y was in his element. He was furious with X for having forced him into the position of lying to the police; even more furious with himself for having been so weak as to have allowed himself to become morally involved – steamrolled into the role of accessory after the dirty fact. So he talked, angrily, accusingly about X's motives, and for once X listened.

The point is that only one person could possibly know the details I've recorded here. If you're not convinced by the handwriting, be convinced by what I've written.

Never mind where I've been or how I got here. I am here, and I've got to see you. The most important thing in all your life is to see me now. You're in a pretty bad jam at the moment and I know how to get you out of it. I've bailed you out of more than one jam before this, sometimes without meaning to.

I'll be waiting at this auto court, Cottage No. 7, the address is on the stationery. Let me hear from you at once.

Hans Castorp Earwicker

P.S. I know you like to sleep on things, but don't do it this time. Aside from the fact that I must move fast, I don't like the thought of your sleeping on anything – you snore too goddamned much. It may be due to a chronic catarrhal congestion of the upper respiratory tract but it still sounds terrible.

He wrote Helder's name on an envelope, down in the left-hand corner he printed in large letters the word PERSONAL and under it added VERY URGENT. He sealed the letter in the envelope, placed it in turn inside a blank envelope, then pushed the service buzzer.

In a couple of minutes the clerk's son appeared, a solemn-looking boy of fourteen with a confetti of freckles on his face and ears like landing flaps. Martine impressed him with the importance of the mission, instructed him to enter the capitol building and leave the envelope with some responsible official; he gave the boy a twenty-dollar bill for himself, the youngster gulped and wiggled his ears in ecstasy.

As soon as he was alone Martine threw himself on the bed and closed his eyes. The question now came to him: Why for a quarter of a century had he been so reluctant to think about the Rosemary episode? Some curdling guilt had no doubt driven the thing away from consciousness – but it was not so easy to define the guilt. Was it simply because, in giving Helder his alibi despite all misgivings, he had allowed himself to become an accessory after the fact – as he had later allowed himself to become an accessory after the fact to Mandunga? No: in some terrible way he had been an accessory *before* the fact.

One knot, anyhow, was beginning to get cut, at least frayed...

He slept... Not too long after, three hours at the most, he was awakened by the sound of a car crunching on the drive outside. Squeal of brakes; bang of a car door; footsteps on the loose pebbles; doorbell ringing.

Martine slid his hand under the pillow, found Neen's automatic where he had left it. He got up, dropped the gun into his jacket pocket, and pushed the safety catch down with his thumb. He crossed the room, took a deep breath, opened the door.

'Well, well,' he said. 'Everloving Babyface. Come in.'

Theo stepped uncertainly into the room.

'Brother Helder – he –' he said, then stopped. Hard to say whether the expression crippling his features was terror or adoration, or just three decades' worth of doubt compressed into a fat second.

'Helder sent you,' Martine said. He hoped he was keeping his voice even. 'All right. Do you know why? You saw my letter?'

'Letter? Yes. *No*. Brother Helder got it – he said something about a letter, it was hard to follow him, he was very upset. I know he got it. He had it in his hand when he called me in.' He stopped and stared at Martine, eyes begging for the alms of reassurance. 'Oh, dear God, it is possible. I wouldn't say for sure, still. Of course there would be *some* changes, eighteen years, but there's something, even with the beard...' His lips continued to move but no more sounds came.

'Did Helder tell you to get *more* proof?' Martine was incredulous.

'He said there was one other thing that would clinch it. He said – he told me to ask you about another day. A day at Coney Island? Something that happened in Coney Island?'

Please, the friendly, boyish hazel eyes said. For the love of Allah.

'Coney Island?'

'Yes. About the afternoon you and he went to Coney Island? During vacation, you had a couple of girls with you, their names were Rosemary and Irene? You'd all been drinking gin-and-tonics at Rosemary's apartment, then you went out to Coney Island and somewhere, somewhere on the boardwalk, you passed this place?'

'Wait a minute,' Martine said. 'All of a sudden – sure! I'll be goddamned!' He began to laugh. 'Sure! That's it, exactly! I'm an idiot not to have thought of it myself – that's the real proof, of course.' His left hand went up, clapped his right shoulder resoundingly several times.

'You remember?' There was no pleading in Theo's voice now, just terror.

'Every last pin prick! Sure! This is how it was – we were pretty drunk, parading down the boardwalk we passed this tattoo artist's place. Sure! We stopped there, just for the hell of it I dared Helder to get something written on him and he dared me to. After a minute or two the thing got out of hand, it was serious, we were too drunk to control it, see – there was no backing down on either side. So we blustered it through. I said a tattoo was a damned good thing to have – suppose you dropped dead of heart failure on the street or got killed in an auto accident, all they'd find on you would be your name and your name doesn't tell a thing about you – what a man needs is something emblematic inscribed on his hide, one pithy thing that sums up his whole life, everything he's been up to. A slogan, maybe, something. That was it exactly, Helder said, but there was a problem: a man doesn't know himself, it's only others who see him as he really is, therefore the emblematic slogan that sums him up ought to be picked by another person. That was fine by me, I said, I'd be happy to let him pick my slogan if he would let me pick his. He agreed and we stepped into the place, the girls thought we were crazy and tried to stop us but the thing had gone too far. So the tattoo man wrote Helder's slogan for me on my arm, and my slogan for him on *his*... Did he show you his arm?'

'Yes. Yes, he did. You –'

'Sure, I'll tell you exactly what it says on his arm. It says, in fine sweeping Spencerian script – "Onward and Upward!" Right?'

'Small letters. Blue, with a double underlining in red...'

Releasing the gun in his pocket, Martine slipped out of his jacket, rolled up the shirt sleeve on his right arm. High up, just over the vaccination mark, the lettering came into sight, faded but still legible: '2 x 2 = 5'. Blue, double underlining in red.

'Of course,' Martine said, 'the references are pretty obscure. It's a pretty obscure joke, like masochism, the references to masochism.'

'Dear God.'

Theo spoke the words tonelessly. With a peculiar dipping notion bent as though he had a stomach ache, he dropped to his knees, reached out for Martine's hand, and pressed his lips to it.

Martine shuddered. This was the first time he had actually felt a pro, its texture was utterly and abominably unexpected: the outer layer was soft, soft as skin and flesh, a sheath of softness, it had a yielding rubbery quality but about a quarter inch down the resiliency stopped and it was bone hard. Salt Lake, foam rubber, gangster-baby breast. Still shuddering, he snatched his hand away.

'Get up, get up.'

For all his disgust he said it so gently that he surprised himself. There was something about this boy, this perennial boy, something naive and open in his face, that called out an unthinking kindness in him, it was the same reaction he'd always had to trusting old Ubu. Now, too, there was a feeling of pity: touching those cadaver-cold plastic hands, he felt a deep wave of sorrow for the owner.

But immediately he caught himself. Sorry – sorry for this eraser of Parises, this sly mineralogist? 'Get up off your knees, you idiot,' he said harshly, almost barking.

'It's you, it's you!' Theo babbled. 'You've come back to save us, always in the hour of need –' Somehow he got the words out – he was sobbing now, his broad football shoulders bobbing like waterwings.

'I haven't come back to save anybody!' Martine shouted. 'Any more than I went away to save anybody! Get that through your thick tantalum skull!' There it was, he had only to reach out to touch it – the long jagged scar, under it the tantalum cup he had installed with such loving care. 'Although I must say, if I'd known what you were going to be up to I'd have given you one of columbium instead.'

Theo heard nothing, his gleaming hands were pressed over his face and he kept muttering, weaving from side to side, 'You've come back, you've come back...'

Martine took hold of Theo's lapels and jerked him to his feet. He pointed to a chair. 'Now listen to me,' he said. 'Stop blubbering and act your age. I'm going to acquaint you with the facts of life. Sit – *down!*'

Bewildered, Theo dropped into the chair.

'All right. Now listen. First, we're going to get you straight about my comings and goings on behalf of humanity. These comings and goings are and always have been on behalf of only one very minute segment of humanity, namely, me. Get it? Are you letting it sink in? Eighteen years ago, when I got into that plane and took off from our encampment in the Congo –'

'It's a miracle,' Theo said, the stupefied look still on his face. 'You went up to fight all those planes. And you came through it. There must be a reason, there was some hand –'

'You fool! If you've got a brain left in that tantalum cage of yours, use it man, use it for once in your life! Listen. You know that I took off in a plane, and you have before you now the living evidence that I got away safely. I was safe, I was in a plane. I could have gone anywhere I wanted, couldn't I? How come, then, that I never came back? Huh? Doesn't that bird brain of yours begin to understand that if I didn't come back for eighteen years, that must say something about why I went away? Think for a minute! *Think!*'

'Yes, you got away,' Theo said dully, backward child counting his sums on his fingers. 'Miracle, it was a miracle. With a plane. Then – safe, with a plane – eighteen years... But it doesn't make sense! *Where were you?*'

Theo tried to smile, it was like a man gaping his mouth for the dentist.

'That's easy,' Martine said. 'Do you remember the Mandunji island?'

'Mandunji island?'

'Yes – as you put it so succinctly, the Mandunji island. You remember being there with the Olympic team last, let's see, last May, late in May?'

'Why – yes, I was. Yes, they have some remarkable Lepidoptera there. I caught some lovely specimens, an unusual *Argynnis leto*, that's the Fritillary type, you know, and a really incredible *Aglaia j-album*, that's the Tortoise Shell. I remember the place well.'

'You damned well should. That's where you went butterfly hunting with drills and pickaxes.'

'Brother Martine!' Theo cried. 'Please don't say those things! You talk just like Vishinu, surely *you* can't believe those rotten things about met'

It was the same Theo who had appeared on the television over three months ago, on the night of his return, 3 July, to make his tearful denial of Vishinu's charges – lips quivering, hazel eyes two transparent puddles of hurt, voice choked with earnestness. Then Martine had been on the verge of being taken in, had positively wanted to be taken in: how was it possible for this babyface, this congenital boy scout, this beamish sonny boy, to lie about anything? And now, to his infinite disgust, Martine found himself wavering again, it was simply impossible to ferret out anything of the scoundrelly in this wide-eyed do-gooder. One wanted to reach out and pat him gently on the head, as one would a loyal cocker spaniel, but – there were the ineluctable facts.

'I don't have to *believe* anything,' Martine said. 'I *know*. You were seen digging. Not you yourself, actually, but quite a few of your friends.'

'Seen?' There was nothing but bewilderment on Theo's face now. 'How? We trained, we collected butterflies and orchids, we visited with the natives. That's all we did. For the cove of Marti – for the love of heaven, how could we have been seen doing anything else?'

'Don't pull that big innocent act with me,' Martine said. 'You were seen. Do you remember the native boy who came to your camp the first night with a basket of cassava from Ubu? On his way to the camp he saw quite a few members of your party in the jungle with all kinds of fancy drilling and assaying equipment, examining specimens of rock. Not butterflies, rocks. I got a full report about the operation.'

'But – some of the boys weren't with me in the camp, it's true – but those boys *couldn't* have been drilling that night! They weren't even on shore! They were – the captain told me they were staying on board ship to practise their d-and-d's, I remember distinctly...' He was a bundle of outrage and hurt.

'Maybe that's what they told you. Maybe. I can't prove you're lying so O.K., I'll give you the benefit of the doubt. But if they told you that, *they* were lying. They were in the jungle, they were digging.'

'How can you *know* that?'

'The young man who reported it to me, the one who brought you the tapioca – you remember him?'

'Very well. I had several nice chats with him.'

'I've had lots of nice chats with him. He's my son.'

Theo's head snapped back, he looked as though he had been struck. 'Oh, really,' he said softly. 'I don't see how –'

He shook his head slightly, a faint sickly smile frozen on his lips. Then he gripped the chair, the tubes in his plastic arms flickered, he bolted to his feet. 'Oh,' he said, face very serious now. 'I *do* remember something. Mr Ubu – he said in his tribe it was common for people to have some kind of sickness in the head. He explained that they

had a certain kind of operation for this sickness, Mandunga it was called, a lot of people were operated on.'

'The gossipy old bastard,' Martine muttered. 'I told him, I warned him to keep his trap shut.'

'He said many people were trained to perform this operation,' Theo went on mechanically, toneless as an electrovox. 'He said for many years it had been done very scientifically, with asepsis and power-driven trepans and everything. He said that was because for many years a remarkable scientist had been living with them and teaching them how to do it scientifically. He said – this man, he'd had to leave not long before – he was a skilled scientist, he knew an awful lot about the brain...'

Theo ran his plastic fingers through his close-cropped blond hair, blinked, swallowed hard. 'Oh, no,' he said. 'Oh *no*.... But still. Ubu said. He said this man was white. *You're* white. You – you're a brain surgeon, a highly skilled brain surgeon. Oh, dear God.'

Theo was beginning to cry again, a teardrop welled up in one large innocent hazel eye and flowed down his cheek. 'Eighteen years?' he said shakily. 'It's crazy, it doesn't make sense.'

'How many times do I have to tell you?' Martine said. In exasperation he thumped the desk top with his fist. 'I was a deserter.' I was hiding. Not saving humanity, not dreaming up harebrained messianic stunts. Hiding! Hiding! Deserters hide, I was hiding!' He glared at Theo – the man was beseeching him with his eyes to ease his torment somehow.

'One thing,' Theo whispered.

'Shoot.'

'The notebook. You *did* write it. You did *leave* it.'

'All right. I'll have to take the responsibility for writing it -and for leaving it around where somebody else could read it. But, you see, *you* never took the responsibility for *reading* it.'

'Heider was wrong?'

'It's high time you found this out: the Helters are *always* wrong. They're always annotating the facts of history and personality out of existence, whenever those facts mess up their neat ideological packages. And shoving their footnotes, dressed up as facts, down the gullible throats of suckers like you.'

Theo sat down again, transparent elbows on transparent knees, and regarded his dangling transparent hands. 'Helder was *very* convincing,' he said.

'Because you wanted to be convinced – you couldn't bring yourself to look the stark facts in the eye, you begged Helder to dress them up with his footnotes. One fact in particular you could never assess coolly – the fact of Helder himself. You think you know Helder?'

Martine explained what had happened to Rosemary. 'I know the whole story, you see. That, dear Brother Theo, was the story I reminded him of in my letter this morning. You see, you really didn't have to go to the trouble of checking the tattoo on my arm. The son-of-a-bitch *knew* from my letter that it was really me...'

Theo was silent, turning his hands forward and back, examining them as though they were prize specimens of *Aglaia j-album*. Finally, he said, without looking up, 'Then you didn't mean all that about Immo either.'

'I was warning against Immob – warning myself. I meant only one thing. I meant what I said about masochism – the one subject in my notes that Helder chose to overlook. I meant only that the human race was so goddamned masochistic it might very well, given an exalted programmatic cover by some bumblehead messiah like Helder, an excuse for self-maiming dressed up as a shining ideology, come to some ultimate sacrificial monstrosity like Immob – tear itself limb from limb, literally, and call the result salvation – create for itself the last word in limbos and consider that it had been jet-propelled straight through the pearly gates... Only it was just an ironic figure of speech, you see, an elaborate pun. I didn't mean it literally. I thought I was just joking...'

Theo held his fingers before his face and bent the knuckles, absorbedly watching the gleaming tubes. 'The Theo part, that was a joke. You were *joking* about calling me Theo.'

Theo raised his fingers still higher, studying their outlines against the background of the lumi-ceiling like a bacteriologist eyeing a rack of test tubes. 'For nothing,' he said. 'The whole thing was a mistake.'

There was no hysteria in his face now, the eyes were quite dry, steady. Something that ran deeper than tears, excluded tears, had taken hold of him now – he was lost in a dead emotional space in which the unspeakable facts gleamed, sputtered, beat like ramrods against the eyeballs. It was a fact-ridden, fact-drenched becalmment in which he floated now, corpse riding on a Sargasso Sea of facts, enormities brushing against him like putrescent orange peels and stinking dead cats. He looked exactly as he had looked eighteen years ago on the operating table, eyes open and glassy and staring. But this time he saw.

But now that Theo was far beyond the paltry histrionics of grief, Martine himself felt moved to weep. It was absurd – what was there to weep for in this wretch? But there it was, Martine felt a prickling in his eyes as he watched Theo turn his gleaming plastic hands back and forth against the light, over and back; he began to blink rapidly.

'I'm no better than you,' he said. 'Worse, maybe. I didn't even believe... All this talk, what good does it do? Are you going to take me to Helder?'

'You knew about Coney Island. He said if you knew, if the tattoo was there, I was to take you to him.'

'Poor little Theo.' Martine had intended to make it sound mocking, but there was instead a real sadness in his voice. 'Poor little self-made ambulatory basket case. For centuries now you've been devotedly tailing your glorious martyrs – never suspecting that if you ever caught up with them they'd turn out to have feet of clay, and tattoos on their arms informing you that twice-two equals five... Come on, let's get going. I've got a couple of footnotes I want to add to Helder's footnotes.'

Martine rolled down his shirtsleeve and slipped into his jacket. He went to the door and opened it, waited for Theo to pass through. He followed.

'Don't feel too sorry for yourself,' he said as the car swung into the highway. 'Helder taught you the neat mathematical approach to things, the twice-two pitch, use it now. How many people did you eliminate in the war, twenty million, thirty million? How many did you disfigure or clip, hundreds and hundreds of thousands?' His voice grew harsh as he spoke, it satisfied him that his toughness was returning; sentimentality had no place in his plans at the moment. 'The mathematics is all in your favour, you see –

two legs ripped from you and two arms willingly given, twice-two equals four exactly. It's not a very stiff price to pay, you got off pretty damned easy.'

To himself he added, 'How many people did I eliminate in the cave? How stiff a price will *I* have to pay for *that*?''

Theo drove for a long time without saying anything, he left the highway and picked a devious route over bumpy back roads, concentrating on the wheel. Finally, as the buildings of Los Alamos loomed up in the distance, wavering a little in the rolling heat currents of the desert, he said very softly, 'Why did you come back?'

Martine made a face, as though he had tasted something unpleasant. 'Oh,' he said. 'To take responsibility for my notebook, I guess. To find out why I wrote it. To write an ending for it, maybe.'

His thumb played with the safety catch of the automatic in his pocket. He studied Theo's large, frank, innocent, too steady hazel eye, eagle-scout eye, peace-on-earth eye. If he killed Helder, obviously he also had to kill Theo – matter of consistency, you can't kill just *one* Siamese twin. He did not know whether he could do it.

Ahead there was a long low concrete structure, one story high with garage-like driveways between its thick columns; across the roof was a sign reading, DROP NUMBER SEVEN: LOS ALAMOS INDUSTRIAL SLOT. Theo took the cutoff leading to this building and drove through one of the entrances, stopping before a pair of wide doors and flicking his headlights on and off several times.

'We'll go the rest of the way underground,' he said without expression. 'Safer. Might run into some of Vishinu's men going through the streets.'

In response to the signal from his headlights the doors slid open. Theo drove into the elevator, flashed his lights twice more, the doors closed, and the elevator began to drop.

CHAPTER 21

For a minute, close to a minute, they streaked downward. Then a slackening of speed, the elevator braked to a smooth halt, doors ground open again, and Theo drove out into a narrow low-ceilinged corridor chipped through solid rock and whitewashed to a gleam. The car nosed into another such slot, then a third. More twistings and weavings, it was a trellis of underground speedways, a two-laned honeycomb, hospital-clean and morgue-still – then without warning they zoomed clear of imminent walls, shot from cramping confinement into the open as in some explosive chthonian birth.

Martine looked about him in dumb astonishment. They were now travelling at a hundred miles an hour along the rim of a chasm as wide across as the Grand Canyon or the Grand Coulee and seemingly without beginning or end.

The road they were speeding over was actually a sort of platform stretched in space only thirty feet or so from the roof of this enormous pit, a catwalk arrangement supported by cantilevers which jutted out from the sheer perpendicular wall on the left: a spacious highway, wide enough for six traffic lanes and edged with a raised ramp for pedestrians. And below, to the right, fizzing and yammering all through the incredible man-made gash, was a whole subterranean supercity – a composite of many Pittsburghs and Detroits buried under the desert sands. At some points the earth had been hollowed out to greater depths than at others: the topmost levels seemed to be hardly more than two or three hundred feet below the overhanging road, the bottommost levels a thousand feet down or even more. And the entire floor of the hollow, at all levels, was strewn with machines and manufacturing equipment.

Straining to fix his eye on discrete objects as the fantastic blur sped by, Martine could make out here and there squadrons of manufactured items riding out on the conveyors to the shipping departments: refrigerators, bicycles, upholstered armchairs, prefabricated cottages, electric toasters, automobiles, passenger planes, tractors, television sets, typewriters, adding machines, books, bathtubs, flags. And artificial limbs: at one point Martine was sure he spotted a line of gleaming plastic legs travelling along.

Visually the scene was like carnival fireworks, some amuck Mardi Gras, the whole pit danced with sparks and flares and gleams and licking flames, interspersed with puffs of steam and spurts of dust and spray – and the sound was an infernal hubbub of clangings and crunchings, whines and burrs, cracklings and hissings. But, curiously, there was an impersonal cast to the whole picture, the machines gave the impression of being on their own, impervious, self-contained. Here and there Martine could make out the dwarfed, irrelevant figure of a man – most of the workers seemed to be Negroes, he couldn't be sure because of the distance and the speed at which the car was travelling – dressed in overalls, they all seemed to be puttering impotently, applying oil cans, sweeping up refuse, wiping away smudges of oil, wheeling carts of waste, while the machines, smug, indifferent, aloof, growled and thumped.

Martine pointed down to another belt line loaded with artificial limbs. 'More legs,' he said. 'To genuflect before the machines that make legs.'

His eyes hurt, it was too much. He looked away. For the first time he noticed that on their left, at eye level, carved into the face of the great cavern close to the ceiling, were many deep cubicles, separated from the elevated speedway by walls of glass and filled, lined on all sides, with more equipment: panel upon panel of levers and dials and switches and calibrated indicators and fluttering needles, batteries of electronic controls. It was easy to see what these instruments were for – up above the control boards loomed racks of flickering electronic tubes and a fantastic hodgepodge of multicoloured wires running in a diabolic tangle from wall to wall, like neurone foliations seen through an electron microscope. Here was the reason why the few workmen below looked like such surplus commodities; these were the robot engineers which ran the sunken factories, caches of brains to ride herd on the brawn below.

'I don't mean to be nosy,' Martine said, 'but when a guy wants a raise around here, or would like to ask for the day off, who does he see – the third knob on the right?'

The strained joke didn't relieve his nervousness, Theo seemed not to notice it. They drove in silence for a time, then Theo slowed down and took a left turn into a narrow tunnel. More zagging through the maze; then a pause before another elevator and a greased ascent, Martine relieved now to be back in cramped quarters after the agoraphobic wildness of the last few minutes.

When they emerged from the elevator this time there were lavish sweeps of window all about them and a downpour of sunlight – they were, Martine could see as soon as his eyes adjusted themselves to the glare, somewhere in the upper reaches of a skyscraper, some thirty-five or forty stories up, and the ramp they were travelling on mounted further still, curling wormlike around on the outside of the building and then shooting indoors again with each full circle, completing one loop per floor.

On the topmost floor, which was domed with solid glass, Theo drove off the ramp into a parking space and came to a halt. He climbed out – there was an absent look about him, he seemed to be moving as though drugged – and Martine followed him.

'This is it,' Theo said. 'I'd better call before we go in.'

He walked over to a switchboard set in the wall, pressed one of the plastic knobs several times. A light flashed on the board.

'We're here,' he said tensely after a moment, speaking into the board. 'I've got him with me.'

A silence; then a clipped 'O.K.' Theo signalled to Martine to follow him.

Through corridors again, spacious ones this time, with bouncy, soft-plasticized floors and much window and walls of soothing pastel shades, azure, and magenta. They passed many doors on which there were neat little signs: BUREAU OF LABOUR STATISTICS, BUREAU OF THE CENSUS, BUREAU OF NEURO-LOCO EDUCATION, BUREAU OF PRICE CONTROL – through the glass Martine could see that the offices within were inhabited not by people but by machines, more robot brains: panels of controls and circuits of tubes and transistors everywhere. Vishinu could mow down all the bureaucrats in the Strip and business would go on much as usual for a long time – *these* were the real bureaucrats, no migraine, the human ones were by far the most expendable. Shades of Wiener.

He stopped before the door marked BUREAU OF PRICE CONTROL and peered in. Directly before him was a huge panel running from floor to ceiling, labelled 'Official Wholesale Price of Eggs per Gross'; in the slot for the date were the figures '10/20/90' and in the slot which indicated the price per gross the figures changed, as Martine watched, from '\$8.273' to '\$8.274'.

'Very neat,' he said. 'Just too, too twice-two.'

Theo stood by his side without saying anything, waiting for him.

'What price glory?' Martine said. 'You got a calculator for that? I don't know what that's got to do with the price of eggs.'

They went on into another wing, passed through a door marked OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT. An anteroom, several outer offices – then another door on which Theo knocked.

'Come in,' a voice called.

Theo stepped to one side to let Martine go first. It was a very large room, heavily carpeted with a deep-tufted rug of maroon, at the far end was a long low semicircular desk. Behind the desk, fingers on his temples, sat Helder, sniffing.

'Marty?' Helder made as if to get up, rose halfway, then sank back in his chair. His hands, on a bureaucratic parade of their own, some parodying desk manoeuvre, transferred a stack of documents from the left side of the table to the right, then shifted them back again. 'You?'

The man's face was ashen pale and yet there was a suggestion of some mottled darkness in it, like much-trampled slush, like rocquefort. He sniffed.

Martine went over to the desk, saluted with a mock flourish.

'It's me,' he said. 'Hail the prodigal steamroller.'

'It's really you.'

Helder's hands went up in mute protest, palms pushing away from him, it looked as though he was holding some round fat mucky thing and couldn't find a place to throw it. 'Oh no,' he whispered, his hands emphatically echoing the words. 'It couldn't be.'

'Brother Helder,' Martine said. 'I want to congratulate you on your twice-two-equals-foresight. It was the intuition of a natural-born bureaucrat that led you to keep your hands on. All God's bureaucrats got hands.'

'Impossible,' Helder said.

Martine pointed a pedantic finger at Theo. 'Observe, Brother Tambo,' he said. 'Get this picture – martyr returns to gang up on his annotator, text rebelling against the footnotes. First time it's ever happened – when did a Bible, a Bhagavad-Gita, a Koran, a *Wealth of Nations*, a *Das Kapital*, a *Mein Kampf* ever rear up and lunge at its Number One disciple? The word turning on the wordy! It's an occasion, history's being made before your eyes! Leave us all up-ass and cakewalk for joy and jubilee!'

'Marty, Marty,' Helder said, sniffing heavily. 'This is no time for jokes. I know you, you pretend to be cynical and wisecracking on the surface but underneath there's a concern for the things that count –'

'Not things that count like you.' Martine said. 'On your fingers, always coming out with the logical right score. You swine.'

'Marty! Marty! For once, don't pretend to be so tough and calloused! You're the only one who can help us now –'

'I'm going to help you, all right.' Martine got up and walked over to Helder's chair. 'Get up,' he said. Helder stared at him for a moment, then got to his feet. 'I am going to help you,' Martine repeated. He took hold of Helder's tie just under the knot, gripping it with such force that Helder's head was thrown back. 'I'm going to kill you.'

'Brother Martine!' Theo said suddenly, leaping to his feet. 'What have you got in your pocket?'

'You stay out of this,' Martine said. 'Keep your babyface out of men's affairs – it wasn't *your* notebook that was made the human race's epitaph, don't interfere, I'm warning you...'

He let go of Helder and signalled abruptly with his free hand to Theo, ordering him away. Theo backed off to the window. Martine took a tight grip on the gun in his pocket, slipped the safety catch down.

'I'm through giving you alibis, you swine, do you hear! I'm going to put an end to the bloody farce and to you too – it's only fitting that I should be the one who finally invokes the Assassination Clause against you. And if your little stooge there tries to stop me, I'll plug him too. Gladly. It'll help clear the air.'

Helder's shoulders sagged, he seemed to age ten years as he stood there looking at Martine and not believing what he saw. 'You can't,' he said, almost sadly. 'You can't do it, Marty.'

'You're telling *me* what I can and can't do? Pig! I'll –'

'No, no, Marty. You don't understand. Harm me, do so much as take that gun out of your pocket, and you'll never get out of here. There are men watching, Marty, twelve of them...'

'Twelve?' Martine said. 'Oh, I see – the apostles.' He stepped back to the window seat and studied the two men, hand still in his pocket.

But now Helder was not concerned with Martine: he was looking at Theo thoughtfully. 'This does complicate matters a bit,' Martine said; nobody paid any attention to him.

'Twelve men watching?' Theo said incredulously. '*Guards?*'

'Oh, for Christ's *sake*, Theo!' Helder burst out. 'I'm sorry you've got to find out about it like this, but – put yourself in *my* place, man! Matter of fact, though, you *are* in my place – how do you think you've been getting around so easily when there're people all over the place just dying to take a pot shot at you! You lead a charmed life, sure, but not *that* charmed, it takes some arranging...'

'I'm guarded too?' Theo said.

'For months. All right! Sure, it's defensism, it violates the Assassination Clause, I know that. But what's the alternative? It's a matter of simple logic – a leader's function is to lead, that's his responsibility, and he can't do much leading if he's full of bullet holes, can he? Never mind whether or not *you* think a leader's got a responsibility to stay alive – our followers *do* think so, and they're determined to guard us whether we like it or not. What would you have me do, guard myself against these guards? But, according to the letter of the law, *that's* illegal too... Call it defensism, call it anything you want, they won't let you take a step without protection. They argue that the

Assassination Clause is abrogated for the duration of the crisis, and I don't think even you could give them a good argument to the contrary. Not after yesterday.'

Yesterday. Four hundred plastic arms outstretched: Vishinu's arm dropping: flashes, explosions: the officials crumpling, but Helder and Theo –

'Ho,' Martine said. The two men turned to him in surprise. 'I begin to smell something. Tell me one thing, Helder. Some fifty or sixty men got it yesterday, they stayed there like sitting ducks when Vishinu's men took aim, but you, you knew enough to take a dive and pull Theo down with you. Tell me, please, *how did you know when to take a dive?*'

Helder studied the floor for a long moment, looked up at Theo, then dropped his eyes again. He shrugged, sniffed. 'All right,' he said. 'That's very smart of you, Marty – sure, I knew their arms were rifles. At least, I guessed they might be.' He turned away to avoid Theo's eyes. 'I mean, I knew they had these things. It occurred to me just in time, when they seemed to be taking aim so carefully, that that was what their pros might be...'

'I see,' Martine said. 'While you're at it you might as well complete Theo's postgraduate course in Realpolitik. Tell us how, exactly, you knew about their arms being firearms.'

'Isn't it obvious?' Helder sounded peevish; he seemed suddenly tired too, he spoke with great effort. 'They have spies. They've had spies for a long time. So we've been forced to use spies too – I fought it at first but the others prevailed, they argued that we had to be practical and in the face of the evidence I didn't know any answer to that. We just spared Theo and others like him the full ugly knowledge of the situation, we knew they couldn't take it: some of us were meant for responsible office and others for the much softer job of charismatic inspiration.'

There was bitterness in his voice.

'They always had better pros than they admitted, we knew that. So, for that matter, did we. They developed super flamethrowers, super rotary saws, super everything, while they kept on playing it humble and backward and losing the Games year after year. And we developed some pretty super models too, we could have won the Games this year if we'd thought it was good strategy to trot them out. Our timing was off... Anyhow, we knew they'd developed the rifle arm. We got hold of a couple of samples, we studied them carefully. As it happened, we already had one of our own in the works. Right this minute we've got them in mass production just as the Union has, although it's all a super-secret. So it occurred to me yesterday, after Vishinu's threatening speech, that what his athletes had up their sleeves – oh, excuse me, I'm a little upset – I got the idea that it might be wiser to duck, just in case...'

There was no gratitude in Theo's eyes. 'I see,' he said. 'I am beginning to see. There are some footnotes you haven't written yet.'

Martine was grinning now. He was beginning to feel very good. 'Say, I'm enjoying this,' he said. 'The Hyphen between the Siamese twins is getting a bit frayed. Let's kick it around a little more... Are you going to pretend that you never took a so-called defensive step until you found out the Union had taken it first?'

'Stop it, Marty!' Helder cried. 'I've had about enough... As it happened, we got a head start on one thing, they did on another; either way, the other side soon found out about the new development and caught up... Oh, it's a vicious, vicious circle, the whole thing.'

It's even hard to remember exactly how it started, a half-dozen years ago, I've forgotten who started what. Something bigger than all of us was involved, pushing us, it ran away with us before we knew it...

'Excellent,' Martine said. 'You are aware, of course, that your pretty little speech could have been delivered by Vishinu, word for word? Undoubtedly has been?'

'Don't misunderstand,' Helder said. 'Oh, he'd say those things all right, but... I don't want to give you the wrong impression – he started it, the Union started it! At least I'm pretty sure... It's just that – once it got rolling everything moved so fast...'

'Our platform', Theo said, 'was commitment. Irrevocable commitment. But you didn't mean it that way. You meant, if the others don't play fair we take our irrevocable commitment back? It was irrevocable with strings, conditions?'

But he got no further. There was a blinding flash outside, the whole ozone turned incandescent: the atmosphere shimmied, space caught on fire. Then the dancing lights, shifting like anti-aircraft searchlights, like the Aurora Borealis, went off. Then danced again, the ether doing a hula. Subsided for a moment. Flared up still another time. And while the air ignited, was snuffed out, flamed again, there was an incredible booming explosion outside, some ultimate noisemaker at work, the earth heaving up a belching basso from its bowels – then another, then a third, then another. The building quaked, moving what seemed to be inches at a time: floor shuddered, walls seemed to jiggle.

It went on for fully a minute. Air sporadically blazing. Staccato rumblings beating on the eardrums. The whole structure stricken with palsy. And they all stood, all three of them, rooted to their places, arms akimbo and mouths ludicrously frozen open.

Then it stopped. For a moment longer they stood where they were, animated as scarecrows. Then Helder, first to snap out of it, rushed to the window; a second later he was joined by Theo and Martine.

It was something to see: at several points around the city dense white mushrooms seething above the highest skyscrapers, symmetrical top-heavy alps sculpted of fleece and cotton batting, sprouting on the double like buds in a speeded-up zoological film. And in their wake, licking up around their bases, were sheets of flame – fires everywhere, giving off swirling clouds of black smoke.

'Oh, no,' Helder said. 'Oh, no.' It sounded as though he were saying a prayer.

'Atom bombs,' Theo said.

'Lots of atom bombs,' Martine said.

He suppressed an impulse to giggle; something was breaking loose in him, he was on the edge of hysteria. They were, he thought, like three little boys way back at the dawn of television, sitting on the edges of their seats in the parlour and exchanging awed whispers about Hopalong Cassidy's deadeye marksmanship.

'They're using small ones,' Helder said. 'Very small. Implosive type. Subcritical amounts of plutonium, probably.' He pressed his palms against the window. 'It's really fine glass,' he said irrelevantly. 'They tell me it'll stand up against almost anything. Keeps out the gamma rays, that's one thing, besides it's damn near shatterproof, they do something to the silica. Of course, we're pretty high up too, the blast couldn't be very strong this high up, that's to be considered...' He made a sniffing noise. 'My sinus is bad today.'

'People who live in glass defences,' Martine said.

'Glass? Defensism?' It was Theo speaking, he sounded remote, sleepy, almost.

'Glass defence mechanism,' Martine said. 'Not shatterproof. You know, I was born on the day of the *first* mushroom.'

A sound came up from his throat: maybe a giggle, maybe a hiccup, he wasn't sure.

A buzzing noise from the desk. Helder ran over and snapped a switch on the intercom box. 'Yes?' he said.

A clipped metallic voice: 'Anderson calling in, sir.'

'Anderson! What's going on out there? Have you got anything on this?'

'We're getting a preliminary picture. It's a systematic fifth-column operation – not many Unioneers actively involved, as we make it out, mostly Strip agents. They planned to blow up the capitol building too, they were setting a bomb on one of the lower stories but their man was nabbed before he could get it rigged up – a Strip citizen, one of the staff janitors, Negro, he's talking now... At least twelve limited-action bombs planted in L.A. All at key spots: the Neuro-LoCo Institute, the Institute for Advanced Cyber-Cyto Studies, the Olympic Training Clubs headquarters, several prosthetics warehouses. They did quite a job downstairs too – three or four bombs were set in the power plants and whatnot, the Slot's a mess. The pattern seems to be a concerted attack on all plants and research centres concerned with pros. No delayed-action radiation, our disaster crews can be mobilized without anti-gamma-ray gear. At least for above-ground operations.'

'All right,' Helder said. 'I see. Keep me posted.'

'Yes, Sir... Just a minute, sir! Something more's coming in now... Yes. The ticker from New Jamestown says the same thing's going on there... And here's one from Martinesburg, same story – they also got the Radiation Research Labs up there... Oh, something else. It's not just bombings. Uh, uh. There've been attacks on individuals too. On amps, wherever they could be found. Let's see... Yes. Amps have been attacked on the streets, in classrooms, in rest homes, even in their own houses. Pretty damned systematic. In these individual attacks the men aren't injured, just their pros smashed. It seems to be directed against pros, no casualties except in the bombings. They've located some of our stock piles of pros too, they've been blown up too...'

'All right,' said Helder. 'They're trying to immobilize us. Of course. Prepare a list of the installations and stock piles that've been hit as soon as you can. I want to get a full picture of the extent of the damage. At once. What about the fires?'

'The boys think they'll be able to get them under control, here in L.A. anyway, haven't heard from the other cities yet. The disaster crews are out already.'

'Keep me posted.'

Helder switched off the intercom, sat down at his desk. He seemed to be lost in thought, fingers drumming on the blotter. Finally he nodded his head vehemently, three times, then reached for the intercom and pressed one of the buttons on its control board.

'Yes, sir?' the machine barked.

'Riley?' Helder said. 'Now listen carefully, Riley. We can't have any slip-ups. This is it. As of this moment we're abandoning Plan A. Plan B goes into operation immediately. You know what to do. Send out the emergency B flash to all Olympic Training Clubs. Mobilization at the convergence points. Distribution of flame-arms, rotor-arms, heli-arms, rifle-arms from the secret stock piles, as per schedule.'

Designated shock units advance to meet the Union forces. Only the designated ones, understand – this slow pincers movement from the coasts looks like a manoeuvre to draw our defence units away from home base to make things easy for the fifth column. Designated anti-fifth-column units begin their security patrols. Atom bombs supplied the demolition squads in no case to exceed the size and strength of those employed by the Union agents. The hundred thousand kiloton bombs to be kept in reserve for Plan D, check on this. All units in Union territory to be given the B flash, they're to begin operations immediately...'

'Got it, sir.'

'Get going, Riley. Report back... Oh, one more thing. Recall all personnel from the Victoria Dredging Project immediately. To be reassigned to fire-fighting and anti-fifth-column operations.'

Theo had been listening to this conversation. He left the window now and approached Helder. 'You even have plans?' he said.

'Grow up, Theo!' Helder grunted. 'Of course – they've got plans, we've got plans, it's been that way for years.'

'You even – have agents in the Union?'

'We'd be in a hell of a fix now if we didn't,' Helder said. 'A lot of Strippers, even underprivileged Negroes are surprisingly loyal to their country, Theo. To Immo, that is. Many of them living around the Union at strategic points this very minute. They'll prove their loyalty pretty damned convincingly before the afternoon's over, take my word for it...'

'You could have given them some reason for their loyalty,' Theo said. 'All the discrimination – I tried to tell you, it was making a very bad impression in the East...'

'What could I have suggested – a few more anti-discrimination and fair-employment-practice laws? I did, but I got voted down. A lot of good all that crap does anyway – remember the old South, did the law ever do anything about lynchings there?... No, no, Theo, it wasn't anything to be solved by decree. I'd hoped that with time, by patient education – it was a transitional period, people had to be changed slowly...'

'Amputation isn't slow,' Theo said, hands raised. 'It only takes an hour.' He sat down across from Helder and fell into what seemed to be his chief pastime this afternoon: he stared at his hands in a sort of reverie. 'So we take everything back,' he said. 'It's a transitional period, we can't be irrevocable overnight.' He held his hands up. 'We take everything back. But suppose I want to take my hands back?' For the first time his voice lost its soft, pleasant modulations, rose almost to a scream. *'Who will give me back my hands? Who will give back my hands?'*

'Don't get so dramatic,' Helder said with disgust. 'Remember, I gave my legs too.'

Martine came over and stood between the two. 'I didn't give anything,' he said, twirling around like a mannikin. 'Not so much as a callus or a hangnail. I ask you both to note this carefully, in case anybody's ever in a position to write any more disarming footnotes.' But then disgust came into his face, a wave of dyspepsia. He looked at his hands as though they were enemies, and said, 'But I did give my hands – to the cave. Who will give the lobotomist back his hands?'

Helder's face was grim. 'I'm not going to be in a position to do much of anything,' he said. 'I'm going to be dead.'

'Dead?' Martine echoed.

'Sure. Oh, I'm being guarded, all right, but sooner or later, tomorrow, next week, somebody will get to thinking about the Assassination Clause and decide to get me. It would probably have happened years ago, if my colleagues hadn't taken steps. They'll get Vishinu too, sooner or later, and a lot of his pals along with him. They'll keep knocking off the leaders on both sides, one after the other. The war will go on – we'll win in the end, of course, justice is on our side, but a lot of leaders will fall by the way. It only takes one man, slipping by the guards...'

'Or maybe one guard,' Martine said. 'You've got twelve guards. Twelve apostles. There's usually at least one Judas in every twelve apostles, that's about 'the ratio. The figure ought to interest a neat mathematician like you.'

But Helder seemed bored by the discussion of his own fate. He was absorbed in his own thoughts again, lips pressed tightly together and eyes far away, nose twitching as he sniffed. 'The transition is tougher than we'd anticipated,' he said dreamily. 'There's much trouble ahead still – but we're moving, we'll get there. We must believe that.' He cocked his head and looked at Martine. 'If this didn't work, even this – then good God, what will? What could? It'll work, it's got to.'

'What else'll work?' Martine felt the hysteria stirring in him again. 'I'll tell you what else'll work – I've spent nearly eighteen years studying the question! You haven't asked me where I've been all these years, Helder, you've been distracted. I'll tell you what I've been up to for over seventeen years! I've been on a little island in the Indian Ocean, that's where, cutting open heads and tracing the aggressions in them. Sitting in a little cave, the Mandunga cave, performing Mandunga lobotomies, Christ only knows how many thousands of skulls I've pried open trying to get at the secret of aggression – how many hundreds of thousands of pages I've filled with data on where aggressiveness is rooted in the human cortex and how it can be sliced and scissored out – there's more information on the aggression areas of the human cortex back in that cave, probably, than anybody ever dreamed about. Oh, I've become an expert on the subject, I can tell you a thing or two about lobotomizing little rapists down to good little pacifists, I've turned out more and better pacifists with my trepans than all your Immo surgeons ever did...'

When Martine spat the word 'Mandunga' at him, Helder stiffened, looked quickly at Theo, then back again. He was suddenly alert and concentrating.

'I'll tell you what *won't* work!' Martine babbled. 'Attacking the human organism with a scalpel won't work, that's sure! I can slice up the worst homicidal maniac's prefrontal lobe and give you a real lamb of a pacifist, sure, the best little basket case you ever saw – but he's not a human being any more, just a lump! Just like an amp! Ambulatory basket case! For good! No, no, the knife won't work, you swine! Look at yourself this moment – the pacifist's flown out of the window, the rapist's back in action with his emergency flashes and Plan B's! More Rosemarys, eh, you love it! I could have done a hell of a lot better job on you with *my* scalpel, back in the Mandunga cave. I'd have made your commitment irrevocable, all right – only you'd have become an irrevocable vegetable too! You know what's wrong with the butcher-boy approach to the problem? I'll tell you – it just says aggression wherever there's any sign of violence and goes after

it with a knife, not bothering to determine whether the thing's real or phony. It attacks the pretence as though it were the real thing – so the essential psychological problem's untouched, the phony rapist's phony premises become the premises of the psycho-surgeon's science, he's operating on the basis of a gigantic lie! There's only one thing that'll work, you pig, that has any chance of saving man before he's annihilated through his own masochism, it's to get behind his shows of violence and pound it home to him that 99 per cent of them are phony, masochistic in inception and masochistic in aim, born of death and striving for death. That'll work, only that, all the rest is suicide disguised as science and humanitarianism, you swine, you dirty swine...'

'Marty!' Helder had risen again, he was looking at Martine in utter disbelief. 'Mandunga – why, when Theo came back from Africa he told me about this island and a white man... Marty! This Mandunga thing! *You* were the white man – *you* performed all those operations – we haven't done too much with lobotomy and things like that, of course, the cyber-cyto emphasis is a little different – *you've* been at it for eighteen years, you kept records...' As he talked his eyes narrowed.

Martine shook his head, trying to get control of himself. 'You're getting that programmatic look,' he said. 'Skip it – I've talked too goddamned much already...'

'Marty,' Helder said. 'Look, it's not accidental, your returning like this. The timing's too neat, there *must* be a reason... Listen, this thing could still work, there's time. Even if you pretend not to believe in Immob, hell, you wrote it, it came from you – sometimes a man is picked to convey more than he knows, he's a vehicle for something bigger than himself...'

'I've been a vehicle', Martine said slowly, 'for some thing smaller than myself. Smaller, and deadier. That was my sin.'

'It could still work!' Helder insisted, his eyes shining. '*You* could make it work! Listen, all you've got to do is – become a vol-amp! A quadro! We could arrange it in no time. Then right after the surgery we'll announce your return, it'll be the most magical charismatic thing that ever happened – it'll shock people back to their senses, even Vishnu'll be stopped in his tracks... You can do it, Marty! You could save humanity!'

Martine glared at Helder. He clamped his palms to his temples as though he had to exert pressure to keep his skull from flying off. And he began to laugh. 'Say,' he said, 'that *would* be a pretty good punch line for the joke.' He began to laugh harder. 'No, thanks just the same. Maybe I *am* one of you in my heart – but all the same, I'll keep my amble.'

'Think, Marty!' Helder shouted. 'You could save the human race! It would be like the Second Coming!'

'I'm going to leave now. I don't think you'll do anything about it – you know I could spill some pretty unsavoury beans. No, I think you're going to let me walk out of here.'

'Don't do it, Marty,' Helder pleaded. 'The fate of the world is in your hands.'

'The fate of your hands is in your hands,' Theo said. He was regarding his own again, bending the fingers slowly.

'Speaking of ambivalence,' Martine said. 'I'd like to make one final point. You've both got quite a taste for twice-two's, this should warm the cockles of your Euclidean hearts. I've just figured out another ratio – I'm twice the man either of you is! Between the two of you you'd make a human being. You two ought to get together and have a good long talk about columbium, for instance...'

He clicked his heels and bowed deeply to Helder. 'Mistuh Interlocutuh,' he said. 'I hope your sinus is better – you'll have to do a lot of deep breathing.' He repeated the movement. 'Brudder Tambo. May the scalpel stay on the other side of the river – you haven't got many spare parts left.' He straightened up and waved his hand. 'It's been a real nice fish fry.' He opened the door and went out.

His face was drenched, his hands fluttering, but he felt an intense exhilaration. Going down the corridor, he skipped once or twice. When he came to the door marked OFFICE OF PRICE CONTROL he stopped and looked through the glass panel again. 'What price migraine.' The wholesale price of eggs per gross was now up to \$8.276. 'What price mushrooms.' To the tune of an old song he sang,

*Too-too-twosie, good-bye,
Too-too-twosie, don't cry .*

At the elevator he had to make a decision: go back to the underground cavern or get out at street level? He had to sneak away from the city – he couldn't think beyond that. Which would be the safer way? Underground he might get lost; and there had been bombs set off in the Industrial Slot, the way might be blocked; all in all, it would be wiser to take his chances in the street, out in the open – there were fires, things must be a mess out there, but he might be able to pick his way through. At least, there was no danger of radiation.

When he got into the elevator he pressed the button marked 'Main Floor'. He hummed to himself, a strain from the Mandunji work song.

Smoke everywhere, churning black balls ricocheting from the roof tops; the sun was screened off as in an eclipse. Sirens whinnying; shouts; feet slapping excited paradiddles on pavements; growl of trucks in side streets – he heard more than he could see; his eyes smarted from the smoke, he held his hand over them and went along stumbling.

Rush of scorching wind, some agitated eddying of heat currents – suddenly the soupy haze cleared away in the area to his right, he could see down the street for three or four blocks. Fire down there, huge flames were licking from a tall building and smoke poured from it as from a giant smokestack. Clutter of fire-fighting apparatus in the street. Up above, all along the face of the building, buglike figures hovering in the air – men, quadros, equipped with umbrella-like heli-arms, bodies and heads swathed in puffy sacks, asbestos probably. Each one with a long thick nozzle tucked under the right arm, and a hose trailing to the ground from it, and a spray of water or some fire-extinguishing chemical flaring from the nozzle's mouth.

People darted here and there, flitted across the street and then back again, chattering, grunting, hallooing. He paid no attention to them – the smoke was swirling down on him again, he groped his way along as best he could, coughing and dabbing at his inflamed eyes with a handkerchief.

Entering one of the target areas now, apparently: buildings pretty badly wrecked, wisps of smoke curling from windows, streets cracked and buckled. A shattered store front, jumble of wares in it – something moving in the debris, some tiny glistening

thing. He stopped and peered in. F.A.O. SCHWAB, a sagging sign said – branch of the toy shop he'd seen in New Jamestown.

Some small bright thing moving. He recognized it: a miniature quadro cut-up, strutting absurdly on its tiny transparent legs and swinging its tiny transparent arms – tripping, rolling over, springing to its feet, marching, tripping again, scattering broken dolls' heads and torsos before it as it made its slapstick stumblebum way back and forth. Nobody laughing now. Playing to an empty house. More spectacular pratfalls on view elsewhere...

Diagonally across the street, a building with half its face blasted away. Strands of smoke streaming lazily from some of the windows, here and there a flick of flame. Something sticking from one of the windows, burning a wavery orgonotic blue glow – pair of cybernetic arms, firearms, burning, blue flames sprouting from the fingers, no telling if a body was attached to them.

Choking, acrid fumes in his-mouth, he turned a corner and proceeded down the block.

He had thought that by taking this course he would skirt the damaged area to the right, but after walking a short distance he saw that he was heading into another one – more fire, smoke, wreckage in the street. Here the streets and sidewalks seemed to have erupted: they had not only buckled, here and there almost impassable holes gaped in the concrete, maybe the effect of an underground explosion. Martine picked his way carefully around these pits; as he was passing a half-toppled store, he froze, there seemed to be human sounds coming from the crumbled and littered window. 'Oh!' somebody said obliquely.

A gurgling sound, something percolating deep in the throat. Another: some incredible smothered hee-heeing, titter, or hysterical quaver or cry that went beyond fright, one of them or all three. Somebody saying, without emotion, 'Aaaiiiiiiiiiiii', vovelling some obscure and drawn-out comment on the unutterable.

Silence for a moment. Then the first voice croaking: 'Oh! Oh! Oh!'

Hard to tell where the sounds were coming from: beams had crashed down into the window, there was nothing but a welter of mangled steel. But – there *was* something else. Here and there, hidden under the tangled girders, some small yellow thing – a series of yellow objects, small, compact, yellow baskets. Yellow, dripping red.

Baskets. Blood trickling from them into the street.

This is the way a world ends, this is the way a world ends, this is the way a notebook ends: with a bang, a mushroom, and a whimper.

'Oh. Oh. Oh.' Quietly, no dramatics. Just an observation, neutral.

Between two large holes in the pavement there was a narrow stretch, more or less intact, that led to the window: delicately, testing before each step. Martine made his way across it as he had to – no chocolate layer cakes with him, no glasses of milk, too late for that. There was room for him to stand outside the window, a ledge of solid pavement, spattered with coagulating blood, was left there.

Most of the amps were dead: one had been run through the gut by a girder, another's skull was squashed flat by the broad side of a beam, a third had had his neck neatly slit from ear to ear, apparently by flying glass – blood everywhere, trickling, forming in pools, dripping down into the street like plastic, running fingers.

Three or four were still alive. A head squirmed: eyes bulged at Martine, 'Aaaiiiiiiii' bansheed the ambulatory lips. Sobbing laughter from another head three baskets away: 'Heeheeheehee.'

He went on to the end, as he had to. Past the miniaturized groaner, the stunted titterer, the shrunk gurgler, stepping over the puddles of blood – to the yellow basket in the corner, as he had to. Basket neatly trapped in a mesh of girders, caged with ribbons of steel, blood oozing from it over the window's edge and down to the sidewalk.

Stood there looking down at the blood at his feet, his blood. Raised his eyes and looked at the face in the basket, his face. Lids of the face that was his face closed and fluttering, peevish mouth erupting soft noncommittal oh's, blood-flecked foam churning at the corners of the lips – his lips.

Baby-blue blanket still draped over the body that was his body yet less than his body – gashed in the middle now, blood surging through the rip, great blot of blood at the middle. Ripped by glass, probably: glass all about.

Itching in his throat, coughed.

Twitching eyelids snapped open. Blood-caked lips clamped on an 'oh'.

Reached between two beams, caressed the clammy forehead. Found the handkerchief in his pocket, brought it out, and wiped the lips clean, mopped the forehead.

Question in the wide-open eyes that were his eyes: enormous unspeakable question, the ultimate interrogation which takes place in an echo chamber.

'Why?'

'I don't know, son. Something went wrong. We'll have to find out.'

'Something went wrong we. Something. We.'

'No, no, son, you mustn't blame yourself. It wasn't your fault – you did everything you could. Maybe people weren't ready yet.'

Talking softly, all the while reaching for the lower edge of the blanket, lifting it gently.

'You have nothing to reproach yourself for. You went all the way. Others fell behind, not you.'

'Lifting gently, the wound coming into view. The whole belly ripped open, hole big enough for two fists, lacerated guts hanging out.

Patting the head that was his head, soothing the feverish brow that was his brow, crooning yews for noes, as he had to.

Eyes caught by something else: strange emptiness between the legs, what was left of the legs, the stumps. Where the genitals should be, something missing. Phallus lying unpropped. No testicles. Of course. Castrated. Programmatically.

Shock: of recognition; dream backfiring. Icy prickling at the nape of the neck, along the spine. Blanket back in place, mouth that was his – mouth absent-mindedly going 'Oh, oh, oh.'

'You did everything you could.'

'Maybe we were wrong!' Head raised from pillow now, jerking from side to side, eyes wild and rolling. 'Everybody! They and we too and on all the sides! War – there was an explosion, outside people standing listening I was telling them the right and then explosion they disappeared sank down into the ground I was talking telling them

they weren't there... If! The slightest in the world! Understand! Then if we were wrong the arms the legs everything... Do you hear me! Stay there, don't sink! Then in that case. Oh. Oh. Oh. Oh. But they never bring the milk.'

Martine reached all the way between the beams, slid his arm under the boy's shoulder, cradling him, trying not to feel the stumps of the vanished arms that had been his arms.

'I want my arms I want my legs. You do that. And the milk. Like a piece of chocolate cake too, please. Hungry, feel empty.'

'Listen to me, son! You were right! Never doubt it for a minute. The world will thank you for all this one day – you'll see, it will work yet. Don't lose your faith! You do not make your sacrifice for nothing – you are the true son of Martine, your father would be proud of you, you are flesh of his flesh...'

Trying to keep the nausea from his voice. Rocking back and forth gently, rocking his son.

Body that was his body tense and trembling in his arm, relaxing slowly as he spoke the noes as yeses. Eyes that were his eyes, looking up at him with diminishing fright, trust growing in them.

'All right then? You say of course? No war?'

'There will be peace. Close your eyes and breathe deeply. Don't be afraid, son.'

Breathing regular now, languid. Martine put his free hand into his jacket pocket, as he had to, took out the automatic. He reached in until the mouth of the gun was an inch away from the boy's right temple, rocking softly, crooning, 'Sleep, son, sleep.' Aimed directly at young Tom's prefrontal lobes, as he had to, at the prefrontal lobes that were his prefrontal lobes, as he had to, pulled the trigger, as he had to.

Spasm: body arched, he cradled it around the shoulders, poor maimed truncated shoulders, gripped it tight. 'Son, son,' he said. Then the body shivered cruelly, fell limp. Mouth closed in a pout. But the eyes never opened.

Tonus gone.

First successful lobotomy he had ever performed. As he had to. Last he would ever perform. As he had to.

Close notebook.

Way a notebook ends: with whimper for milk and chocolate cake. And the chamber of the cave echoing unspeakably.

'Aaaaiiiiiiii,' from down the window.

'Sleep, son,' he said.

Question: Would he have pulled the trigger if Tom Martine, sin of his sin, had not been mortally wounded? Unspeakable question, answer in the echo cave.

He rose to his feet, made his way back across the pavement, stepping over the pools of blood. At the kerb, what was left of the kerb, he sat down, hands spotted with blood of his blood. Hid face in his hands, and sobbed.

For a long time he sat there. When he rose he dried his eyes on his sleeve and began to grope his way through the smoking city again, heading north, northwest.

'Ee-ee-ee-ee-ee,' behind him, blubbing, sniggering.

CHAPTER 22

It took almost an hour of manoeuvring through the streets, detouring tediously around the trouble spots, before he reached the outskirts. His sense of direction hadn't failed him: signs began to appear, indicating the route to DROP NUMBER SEVEN. Ten minutes more and he sighted the low concrete building which housed the elevator entrances – and from this orientation point it was easy to find the highway, which ran northwest.

He began to walk along the highway, stirring up puffs of chalky dust along the soft sandy shoulder. His mind was empty; the automatic in his pocket bumped against his side as he went, he did not notice it. He was numbed, couldn't think. First to the motel, to sleep.

A vehicle came up from behind him and wheezed to a halt – battered hulk of a touring car, in its open window the friendly tanned face of a man perhaps forty, rawboned, eyes green and direct. His arms, lean and muscular, extending from the rolled sleeves of a blue denim shirt, were his own; Martine could see that he was wearing long trousers, faded dungarees, instead of the shorts worn by amps.

'Where are you headed?'

'Sviridoff's – motel about twenty miles down the –'

'Hop in, if you want a lift. I'm going right past there.'

The man's voice was deep and pleasant, neither, unctuous nor gruff, just straightforward – the twang Martine recognized as Western, his father had it too.

Martine climbed in, the car started off. They drove for a minute or two in silence.

'Bad back there,' the driver said.

'Yes.' A twitch of suspicion: 'What made you pick me up?'

'Oh...' The driver kept his eyes on the road. 'I don't know – wanted company, I guess. Saw some bad things back there.'

'I didn't ask you for a ride.'

'Don't get me wrong.' The man rubbed one palm against the side of his face. 'I'm not posing as the good-Samaritan type. Good Samaritans give me the bellyache. I was just lonely, I reckon.'

That was all he chose to say: he fished a cigarette out of his, shirt pocket, offered one to Martine, lit one for himself. Then he gave Martine a quizzical sidelong glance, rubbed his tongue slowly over his lips, and added,

'Well, I'll give it to you straight. You interested me. I notice it when a man's got his own arms and legs.'

'You don't disapprove of backward elements like me? Of course, you look pretty backward yourself.'

The man didn't reply: he simply reached out and switched on the radio. A tense announcer's voice faded in: '...bulletin received at our news desk just five minutes ago.'

Omaha, Des Moines, Theo City, and Helderfort have been hit badly too, at key surface installations as well as underground, but the news is not all bad. Hundreds of fifth columnists have already been rounded up around the Strip and the number is growing by the minute. More reassuring yet, it seems that in many places the boys of the Olympic training clubs have spontaneously organized and equipped themselves with special-function arms and are now marching out to meet the invading Union forces – skirmishes have already been reported in several areas, the Union casualties are reported to be heavy. President Helder, ladies and gentlemen, is safe at the capitol, he has just issued an urgent appeal to all true Immobs in the Union, calling on them to throw off their imperialist oppressors and –'

The man snapped the radio off. 'Backward?' he drawled. 'Hard to tell just what's backward and what's forward any more.'

'Yes... Where *you* headed for?'

'Bar Limbo.'

'*What?*' Martine jerked, grunted, began to shake his hand violently. He'd been reaching for the cigarette between his lips when the man answered, his fingers had suddenly clamped together directly over the lighted tip. He sucked at the burned knuckles.

'Oh – that's my ranch, it's up in the foothills about three hundred miles north of here... That name, it's just a joke.'

'What the hell kind of a joke is that?' Martine's voice was rough.

'Well, you know, there are those references to Limbo in Martine's notebook. That's how we hit on the name – we just like the way it sounds.'

'Listen!' Martine sat up straight and turned toward the driver. 'What are you trying to say, man? Give it to me straight, I've got to know! Is it – do you mean you've held out, never became an amp, because you're sick of the whole thing – all this shit – you've kept your arms and legs because –'

The man held up an admonishing hand. 'Don't get the wrong idea about me,' he said. 'I'm not as well-preserved as I look.'

He reached down with his free hand and tugged at one trouser leg, then the other: his legs were exposed to the knees. Martine blinked: both legs were plastic.

'Oh... But I don't get it, you hide them...'

'Sure I hide them!' the man said violently. 'I'm no goddamned vol-amp! I didn't turn in my legs, I lost them – same way Theo lost his – in the Third, during the hell-bombing of Moscow. Is that something to be proud of, that a burst of ack-ack ploughed off your legs eighty thousand feet over Moscow? So proud that you go and do more of the same to yourself?' He pushed his trouser legs down again. 'They gave me a medal for it,' he went on more calmly. 'I don't display that either.'

'I don't understand your bitterness.' Martine found it hard to keep the excitement out of his voice.

'That's what it's come to,' the man said, his lips curled. 'A man who's bitter about being cut down to something less than a man is considered – peculiar. Twisted. Off the beam, somehow... Theo says his glorification of amputeeism, his sawing off his arms to complete the job – in a revelation he saw that this was what Martine called upon him

to do in the notebook. You know what I answer to that? Theo can't read! There's lots of things in that book I don't understand –'

'Me too,' Martine said. His throat muscles were so tight he could hardly get the words out, they came in a whisper.

'– but I understand this much. Whatever confusion there was in this guy Martine's mind – even if he finally went up and got himself killed for no earthly reason – and to the extent that it makes any goddamned difference at all *what* he thought and did – in the end he was saying that anybody who's half a man has got to feel bitter about being cut down to less than human size. Got to stand up, even on his miserable little stumps or whatever's left of his standing-up apparatus, and yell no to all steamrollers... Remember that last speech in the notebook, in the dialogue part, where Martine has Theo, Babyface he calls him, speak his piece for a couple of pages? That comes *after* all the fine talk about immobilization and passivity and all that muck, all the stuff Helder and Theo took seriously. And *after* all of that, what does Martine have Theo say? Only: you've got your legs and I haven't got mine – you talk about fine humanitarian programmes, I lie here and massage my stumps. That's the *last* thing in the notebook. What's it mean, except that immobilization and passivity are one big dirty joke, not the way out of war but the logical end-result of war, the thing behind war, the thing war disguises...'

Martine turned his head away; his lips were trembling, he did not want the man to see how moved he was. 'You – figured all that out for yourself?'

'Doesn't take much figuring. Just some plain simple feeling... They want me to believe I'm better off!' he said. 'In place of my frail, stumbling old flesh-and-blood legs I've got infinitely superior ones – superstrong, supersensitive, superdexterous, and all. No, I'm not better off. Because, no matter how cleverly these plastic legs are made, they're still plastic. They're dead. Part of me is dead. It's sinful to be dead. A man's not a man unless he's got all his parts and is alive in all of them, uses them... I miss my own legs. I know these artificial, ones will do the job better – they'll never buckle, ache, get shinned, fracture, develop charley horses or sunburn or arteriosclerosis or frostbite, never sweat in the summer and knock at the knees in the winter, never quake. And if they do go wrong I can always get replacements. But a man should be able to stand on his own two legs, his own. With all their frailties. I want legs that are less perfect but more alive. Even if they stumble a little, and quake. A man should stumble and quake a little. Only robots never stumble and quake... You know why people laugh so hard when they see an amp trip or take a dive? Because the horror in a human being is perfection, infallibility – that's inhuman, and the idea that you can get it, short of death – that's a laugh. The stumble, the fall, it reminds people of the frail humanity behind all the mechanical perfection, the *life* – it's a hell of a relief to see it pop up. If men were meant to be perfect, they'd be hatched somewhere up in those fleecy clouds, where the angels hang out, not down here on earth and earthbound, a damned sight closer to hell, to limbo anyhow, than to heaven. Not that it's not human to want to be perfect – but the deeper part of humanity is wanting it and never getting it, knowing damned well it's a mirage... I'm scared of the perfectionist who takes himself seriously. What happened just now back there in Los Alamos – that was the work of perfectionists, every war is. Looks like the only really perfect thing they'll be able to boast about is a perfect war...'

Martine rubbed his hands over his knees: his palms were soaking wet. 'There's a lot I don't know,' he finally managed to say. 'I'm a parasitologist – I've been away for a long

time, doing research... Let me ask you: are there many people who feel the way you do?"

'Quite a few,' the man answered. 'A pretty fair number. You don't see them around much.'

'I know, you're the first one I've met... Why should that be?'

Now it was the driver's turn to study Martine. He looked directly at his passenger, green eyes suddenly narrow and cautious, appraising. For a long moment Martine stared back, waiting for him to break the silence.

The man shifted his eyes back to the road. He seemed lost in thought. Then he took a deep breath, pressed his lips together and bit them – it was clear that he was trying to make some difficult decision.

Finally he spoke. 'I'm probably shooting my mouth off more than I should. But you look O.K., I'll take a chance... You really a stranger around here?'

'That's on the level. I've been in Africa studying tropical diseases. The little I've seen of Immob makes me sick to my stomach.'

'All right. Here's the picture...'

As the rancher told it, a lot of people were pretty badly banged up in the Third – lots of amputees, as well as paraplegics and other kinds of cripples. Even more civilians wounded than vets. All right. Then the pacifist movement took over the government, there was a lot of fancy talk about Martine's notebook, the international situation got bad again, there was more talk about the notebook – then, pop, there was Immob. Suddenly able-bodied kids all over the place were rushing to recruiting offices to sign up the amputism, holy gleam in their eyes. Some people, a lot of people, were horrified. In their own simple-minded way, the war wounded had been thinking that what had happened to them was a dirty rotten kind of deprivation; now here were all these fanatical kids fighting for a place in line so they could acquire the same damage *voluntarily*.

Of course, the Theos couldn't wait to cripple themselves still further. Others, though, couldn't see making a horror into something holy... Not that the rancher wanted to exaggerate. Not all the anti-Immobs had noble motives; none did, probably. Some, in fact, were moved by pretty low considerations: they'd come by their wounds the hard way, and as a result were the first heroes of the postwar period; now here were all these Johnny-Come-Latelys getting crippled painlessly and threatening to take over the whole hero business. Naturally, some of the vets had a gripe... But, no matter what moved this or that particular guy, a lot of guys objected. Pretty soon they were joined by others with less embattled motives. Young fellows who were just too attached to their limbs to part with them on any basis: the rancher's eighteen-year-old son was one of them. Mothers and fathers who had sweated to get their sons out of the baby carriage and didn't care to see them installed there again. Girls – some who were against this thing simply because they weren't allowed to join themselves; others, not for feminist reasons but just because they didn't want their men less than men. (The rancher's wife was one such, his twenty-year-old-daughter another.) Minority peoples, Negroes and such; like a lot of women, they saw that the old status system was only taking on a new and more spectacular form in Immob and that they'd be as carefully discriminated

against in the new order as in the old... All sorts of people. With all sorts of motives. But with the same urge – to scream no to this final cuddling up to the steamroller...

They screamed in lots of places. In the Union as well as the Strip. It was bad, they were squelched in more effective ways than by a policeman's club. The irate citizens mobbed them. First the parents and wives and girl friends of the new heroes: after their darling boys had sliced off their legs they didn't want anybody going through the streets yelling that it was all a dirty mistake. There were some pretty bloody skirmishes, people were killed. Then it got worse. After a while the cyberneticists invented their new pros and the young heroes were fitted out with super-arms and super-legs. They began to get around. And they attacked the anti-Immob meetings; lots more people killed. In the Union as well as the Strip. In the Union they even began to accuse the oppositionists of sabotage and terrorism, they staged spectacular mass trials, everybody confessing to everything...

The anti-Immobs went underground, in a way. That is, clammed up. They began to meet among themselves, in little informal study circles, and the circles kept in touch with each other. The Immob world stopped hearing about the opposition... Well, the opposition was still there. In both the Union and the Strip. With their own ideas about what Martine was really getting at; they'd had a lot of years in which to talk it over. They didn't have any elaborate programme to save humanity. Except one thing, maybe: never, in politics, to make anything irrevocable... It was just that they had some notion about integrity. Which, maybe, was a lot closer to what Martine had been driving at than the filthy farce of Immob...

'That's about it,' the rancher said. 'This afternoon I was at a meeting in L.A. when the attack came. All us vet-amps got away safely because we were in disguise, you see. Reckon modesty does pay... I don't know. Maybe, when the war's far enough along, there'll be a chance for us to do something. We're discussing it now. We're waiting to hear from our friends in the Union about it... Of course; we don't have any big gaudy programme to offer people, no sensations. Maybe those of us who don't buddy up to the steamroller will always be the outcasts, maybe we'll always have to go around with our eyes cast down and our lips buttoned up. If the war doesn't eliminate everybody. We'll see...'

Several minutes passed by while Martine sat without moving a muscle, concentrating on the shimmer of the desert landscape. His heart was hammering, his throat was parched, his fingers trembled. Twice he opened his mouth as though to speak, then thought better of it – once he even shook his head emphatically. The driver glanced over at him from time to time, curious.

At last Martins came to life and said, 'Thanks.' He thought for a moment, then added: 'I want to thank, yon for trusting me. I think the most important single thing that ever happened to me was meeting up with you today.'

Another silence, his lips working.

'You see, I had a son back there – one of the Anti-Pro leaders. He was killed in one of the bombings. I despised everything he represented, but until this moment I never suspected there was anything else left. It's a good thing to know somebody like you exists – whether you have any impact on events or not...'

The picture was complete at last. There had been one ingredient missing until now: the opposition. Now he saw the whole thing – the horror, and the opposition to the

horror. Of course. He'd been an idiot not to suspect that there must be an opposition. Of course there was an opposition, the seed of opposition, the potentiality of opposition.

'Thanks,' he said again. 'Now there's something I'd like to tell you. You're interested in Martine?'

'Well – sure. Not as an authority – we've had a bellyful of authorities – just as a man. I've got a feeling he and I might have had something in common...'

'You would have. That's not just a guess – I used to know him, there were periods when we were very close.'

The green eyes when they turned to Martine were bright, startled, brimming with questions. 'What was he like?'

'Confused! Let's establish that first – no angel, no messiah, no saviour, just stumbling and quaking and confused as hell! Whatever he was, he wasn't a perfectionist. He had too much of a sense of humour for that.'

'Still, the notebook, parts of it...'

'Confused too, like its author. Sure! But it didn't have any of the meanings Helder read into it – Martine wasn't confused about Header's meanings, at least... No. You see, he'd been stunned by the line he'd once come across in Rimbaud: *To every creature several other lives were due* – which suggested to him that, just as his analysis indicated, he was a hell of a lot more than what he appeared to be on the surface, he was filled with smothered personalities, everybody was. But he'd also been hit hard by that other line of Rimbaud's: *Don't be a victim*. That meant, as he saw it, that you mustn't victimize one part of you in favour of another, sacrifice one of your potential lives to another. In other words, he had your idea: integrity, intactness – living with the whole being, trying to bring it all to the surface, never truncating any dimension of personality. He was afraid that pacifism, which no doubt originated in the decent and civilized impulses of mankind, would never get anywhere at all, only become a partner to catastrophe after catastrophe, so long as it persisted in seeing man as a truncated monolithic thing, all potential goodness. That if the do-gooders saw man as truncated, they'd wind up truncating him – theories have a habit of proving themselves that way.'

'Funny you never reported that to anybody.'

'I've been away. I didn't even know –'

The driver pointed at something up ahead. 'There's the motel,' he said, his voice almost inaudible. He slowed up and turned into the drive, parked the car on the gravel stretch in front of the cottages. He took his hands from the wheel and raised them part way toward Martine, palms up, as though begging for something – it was the Mandunji gesture of greeting, parodied.

'But then,' he said. 'His taking off that way?'

'Ah!' Martine said. 'But how, exactly, *did* he go? That's the whole question! Do you really believe that, after writing what he did about masochism, he could have stepped out and taken that plane up to what was certain death – in a silly suicidal gesture that served no sensible purpose at all? You believe that?'

'But in that case –'

'Yes, he may have gotten away. There's a chance he's still alive, somewhere. If he could get back here and stay, if it were possible for him to come back, I believe he'd be

with you and your friends. One way or another. Provided you didn't get too messianic and programmatic on him.'

The man stared at him, mouth open. He was breathing hard.

'What's your name?' Martine said.

'Don Thurman.'

'I'm Dr Lazarus. Lazare, for short. Nice name for a parasitologist, don't you think? The leprous victim of the pest, student of pestilences... Look, I've got something I want to give you. Wait here a minute, will you?'

Martine got out of the car and went off to his cabin. He was in a sweat, he sat down and tried to think. Thurman was certainly beginning to suspect. Why not spill everything to him? But there was a danger – if Thurman and his friends knew for sure who he was they might, conceivably, try to keep him in the Strip. There was a choice to be made: do everything to get back to Ooda and Rambo, or tie up with the Strip opposition and very possibly end his life here. For the messiah in him the answer was clear; but not for the man. Was he man or messiah?... No, he had to get back to the island, too much unfinished business there, he must not do anything that would interfere. On the other hand, he had a certain obligation: he *had* written the notebook, he must do everything possible to undo the damage it had caused. That meant revealing the truth about himself, somehow or other. In some way that would not suck him back into messiahdom... Well, he would have to take a chance on Thurman.

He searched through his valise until he found his worn copy of *Dodge the Steamroller*; the margins were filled with annotations. He sat down at the desk and opened the book to the first blank page after Helder's postscript. He took a pen and wrote another entry there:

20 October 1990. Svirdoff's Motel, Outside Los Alamos

Back in the Strip exactly 79 days.

L.A. bombed couple hours ago. Got away all right. Found Tom in a window, guts ripped to bits by glass: he was castrated: real meaning of Immob. Picked up on the Highway by a rancher named Don Thurman. Long talk with him.

Wish I could stay in the Strip. For one reason: to get to know Thurman better, maybe work with him and his friends. Because they're the only ones who understand this notebook. But I wouldn't be true to myself if I stayed here. I am involved in another life, in another part of the world; my job is to return and encourage the opposition there – a job I should have started eighteen years ago. Meeting Thurman has made that clear to me. Every man has some no to say in some place – and some yes too. Unmessianically. My place is not here any more.

This book should be dedicated to Don Thurman, his wife, his son, his daughter, and his friends. Because if its author could, he would want to live in Bar Limbo with them. Because they are human beings. But I must go to the place that is my home and try to create my own Bar Limbo there. Not for humanity's salvation. For mine.

This notebook is now ended.

Dr 'Lazarus'

That should do it, Martine thought. To clinch the thing, there were facsimiles of several original manuscript pages in the notebook; sooner or later it would occur to Thurman to compare them with this last notation...

Martine stepped into the office and asked the clerk if he had a large envelope. The man was so distraught that he hardly heard the question: he had the radio on, the newscaster was talking: 'Late flash. Discontent is growing in the cities of the Union, there are signs that it may result in outbursts against the treacherous Union leadership at any moment...' Martine repeated his question, the envelope was produced, he stuck the book inside and sealed the flap. He returned to the car, stood outside the driver's window.

'Here's a book I want you to have,' he said. 'It's a copy of Martine's notebook – I've filled the margins with comments containing everything I could remember about Martine, to correct the lies in Helder's footnotes. You'll learn quite a bit from it – so long as you hold to your idea that essentially *all* appeals to authority are a lot of shit... Just promise me two things. Don't open the book until tomorrow. That's important. When you do get into it, make sure to read every page. Every one.'

'O.K.' A long pause, the green eyes searching. 'I'm glad to have it. Maybe –' The eyes lit up, lips curved in a smile.

'Yes?'

'Maybe – if any of us come out of this alive – maybe we'll put out another edition of the thing. With *your* footnotes correcting Helder's footnotes – they should be *very* pertinent...'

And the man began to laugh – his mouth was open wide now, he was panting, the gales of convulsive laughter making his throat quiver, they roared out in a rush of wild sounds. Going beyond gall, spleen, nausea, the trivial titters of mere sardonic disenchantment – a cosmic laughter, big and round, all-embracing: oceanic laughter, the ultimate Om.

It was infectious. Watching the man shake, Martine found himself caught up in a wave of immense merriment. He began to laugh too – snickered at first, then abandoned himself to it and bent over with the delightful hurt, holding his sides, tears pouring down his cheeks.

It went on for a long time: the motel clerk came to the door of the office, stuck his frightened drawn face out and stared at the two men. Finally Thurman regained control of himself, wiped his eyes with his arm. Martine followed suit, patting his wet face with his handkerchief.

'If I could stay here,' Martine said, 'we might be friends. We've got a lot in common. I feel that.'

'You're going away?'

'If I can manage it – I must go back to Africa. That's where my home is. I've got a wife and son there – without them I'm not alive. Although often, when I *was* with them... I've got to go back.'

'I'm sorry. We might have worked together.'

'If there were any way for me to stay,' Martine said simply, 'I would work with you. I would try.'

Thurman held his lean brown hand out and Martine took it.

'Good luck to you and your family,' Thurman said. 'I hope you get where you want to go. I've got to get back. to my family too – there's a lot to do.'

'Thanks,' Martine said. 'Thanks for the lift – it was quite a lift. Good luck to you and your family too.'

Thurman started up the car.

'You'll be interested in this,' Martine said. 'I've really got a hunch that Martine's still alive.'

The steady green eyes widened, searched.

'So have I,' Thurman said.

'When I get back home,' Martine said, 'I'm going to look for him. I've got an idea where to look for him now.'

'I think', Thurman said, 'that the most important single thing that ever happened to me was meeting you.' He waved. The car rolled off to the highway, stopped for a moment, turned, and sped away to the north.

Martine stood in the driveway for a moment, watching until the touring car disappeared. Then he went back to his cabin, stripped and sank into bed. He had never been so tired in his life, he was asleep almost before his head hit the pillow...

Much later, many hours later, he'd slept through the evening, according to the wall clock it was almost one in the morning – he was awakened by a rapping at the door. He bolted out of bed, groped for the gun in his jacket. He went to the door and opened it cautiously.

Theo stood on the step, swaying like a drunken man. He was dressed in greasy long-legged trousers and a work shirt with the sleeves rolled down, there was a stained felt hat on his head. His face was chalky white.

'Please,' he whispered.

He came blindly into the room and sank into a chair. For several minutes he sat there, frozen. Then at Martine's urging, he began to speak.

CHAPTER 23

It had been hectic after Martine left. Helder, it was clear, was getting ready to put into effect the next phase of his operational scheme, what he had referred to as 'Plan C' – a step which, it quickly dawned on Theo, meant a bold swinging over from defence to offence at the psychological moment. Helder himself made it plain: in between conversations with his agents in the field he explained impatiently, as though spelling out the bald verities for a retarded child, that it would be suicidally naive to stick to purely defensive measures out of some soupy programmatic sentimentality – the best and only really effective defence was offence... So, in the course of one brief afternoon, Helder's metamorphosis was completed – from irrevocable pacifist to reluctant defensist to a whirlwind generalissimo of the classic combative mould who reminded Theo far more of Hannibal and Napoleon than of the dedicated man who had launched Immob. Helder had become EMSIAC.

During momentary lulls, they talked. At cross purposes. Theo, his mind full of Martine's last mocking words, had been concerned with columbium – Holder, for some reason, had stuck doggedly to one subject: Mandunga. He indicated an extraordinary interest in Martine's references to Mandunga.

Martine, Helder suggested, had been a remarkably gifted lobotomist – if he had spent twenty years at that kind of research, he must have come up with some incredible discoveries. Martine himself had hinted as much: he claimed that he had hit upon an infallible surgical procedure for removing the aggressive centres from the prefrontal areas and destroying all the tonus which is mobilized in aggression. That would be exciting to know about. There were many volumes of technical information back there on the island, according to Martine. What did Theo know about this fantastic cache of scientific literature? What did he know about this whole Mandunga thing – he had had many friendly and informative talks with that old chief – what was his name? – Ubu. On and on.

Theo did not answer. Not simply because he did not care to: he had no more answers. Over and over again he parried Helder's questions with one of his own: What about columbium? At first Helder was indifferent; then annoyed; then so exasperated that he turned to Theo furiously and told him the whole story, bluntly.

Of course there was a race for the limited sources of columbium, it had been going on for years. Never mind who started it – Vishinu's men had taken the first sly steps, no time to go into the proofs now. The race had gotten under way very soon after the invention of the atom-powered pro. Actually it had been borne home to Helder and a few of his most intimate advisers – Theo didn't have to bother with these vexing details of running a government, oh, no, he was a full-time hero – that it might be a good idea, operating in an entirely confidential way, to place some expert metallurgists on the Olympic Team. Just to pick up a little helpful data on their travels : it would hurt nobody and it would allow the Strip to bargain more intelligently at international conferences. The move had been extremely wise. For soon, at the conferences, it

became clear that the Union had at its fingertips far more information than it was conceivable for anybody to have without some very elaborate under-cover exploration.

Helder's agents checked. They learned that for some time the Union had been staffing its Olympic Team almost exclusively with metallurgists and mining engineers, and sending the Team on systematic expeditions disguised as training cruises. The race was intensified. In the last couple of years it had reached the point where hardly any traveller of any description whatsoever, whether Unioneer or Stripper, was concerned with anything but columbium – *everybody* was looking for columbium... Now, what was Theo's question: Had any members of this year's Team been looking for columbium around the Indian Ocean?

The answer was very simple: practically all the members of this year's Team had been looking for columbium in the Indian Ocean. Except Theo, of course. There had been no reason to bother his inspirational, glowing mind about such mundane matters – might dim his charisma. So the captain of the cruising yacht, and a few key members of the Team, had been instructed to keep the charismatic Theo charismatically occupied while the metallurgists went about their job. Did that answer Theo's question?

It did. It told him all he wanted to know: that he had been used. But by this time Heider was so overwrought and bitter that he proceeded to give Theo the answers to a few other questions he had *not* asked, questions he didn't even know existed. The members of the Olympic Team hadn't only been looking for columbium. They had also been planting stores of weapons everywhere they went, weapons flown in quietly from the hush-hush armouries of the Strip. Because the Union Team was doing precisely the same thing, and the Strip could not ignore it.

This was the point: if another war did break out over the question of columbium, it would hardly be an all-out H-bomb and RW dust war. No, after the holocaust of the Third, nobody would dare to initiate full-scale atomic warfare again – because both sides had about equal atomic-pile and breeder-reactor facilities, and each knew that if it started any real area-wide hell-bombing and dusting, the other could promptly retaliate with at least equal effectiveness. Whatever atomic bombing might be done would be limited in character, confined to specific targets, and neither side would dare to go very far beyond the limits which the other imposed on itself. So it was entirely likely that there would be other types of combat, with less deadly and more primitive weapons. The war could be pretty well visualized: for the most part individual combatants, rigged up as human helicopters, would come flying at each other in a kind of aerial joust, hurling flame or bullets from their arms or trying to carve each other up with their rotary saws and drills... It might interest Theo to know that quite impressive quantities of arms had been deposited in a few safe places on the Mandunji island too. Against the day when Strip soldiers might be stranded in that area, cut off from home bases. This, Helder trusted, would drive home to Theo the very uncharismatic facts of political life. Helder was exceedingly sorry that he had to force a hero like Theo to grow up in such a rush – but there it *was*. Tough titty, he knew. Nothing to be done. And now, please – what about this Mandunga?

'I'm glad I had this talk with you,' Theo said. 'It's opened my eyes... Look, if this information about Mandunga is so important I think I know how to get it.'

'How?'

'From Martine himself. Whether he wants to talk or not. He's got volumes of information on the thing with him, I saw them myself when I went out to the motel to get him.'

Helder jumped up. 'Well!' he said. 'Fine! Fine! I'll send some of the boys out right now. Nothing to it if he's still there, and if he's not, a general alarm –'

'That won't do,' Theo said as Helder was reaching for the intercom. 'The books aren't there now and Martine hasn't got them with him no matter where he is. He packed a valise and brought it along when I took him into town. All the volumes are in the valise.'

'Well? Where's the valise?'

'He hid it down in the Slot. He insisted. He told me wouldn't come any farther unless I stopped and let him get out and hide the valise – without following him. I drove off to a parking strip, at a place where the Slot seemed to be completely deserted. I showed him where the elevator was and he went down. He was gone for about twenty minutes – he couldn't have gone very far from the elevator, we can cover the area in no time. When he came back he didn't have the suitcase.'

'But that's no good,' Helder said, frowning. 'Good God, man, he's been gone for hours. He's had time to pick up the suitcase and get hundreds of miles from L.A.'

'Wrong,' Theo said. 'He may be hundreds of miles from L.A., but he hasn't got the suitcase with him.'

'How the hell do you know that?'

'Well, while you've been busy on the intercom I've been reading the details of the bombings as they came in over the ticker tape. Here's one tape I saved.' He handed the crumpled ribbon to Helder. 'You see. Passage through the Slot's been blocked off in several places – he couldn't have gotten through. The alternative, of course, is that he went straight down in the capitol building, all the way down on Drop Number One, got his suitcase, then came backup the same way. Well, that's out too. There's considerable damage close by the Number One elevator entrances below – the way from the elevators to the Slot itself has collapsed. There's just one chance – the emergency footpaths may still be open – we could investigate – but you know how tough they are to find, even for people familiar with the layout. No. He may still be down there, but it's practically impossible that he's found it and gotten away...'

'What do you propose?'

'I'll go down and look for it. If you'll come with me.'

Helder looked at Theo queerly. 'Why me?'

'There's been too much already that you've had to shoulder without me – I see that now and I'm sorry. It's time we acted as a team again, especially in something as important as this.'

Helder paced up and down the room a couple of times, rubbing his forefinger down his long majestic nose, sniffing. Theo guessed what he was thinking: it would be safe, so long as the men watching him knew where he was going and could follow. Finally he sat down at his desk, looking at Theo with a friendly smile; slouched elaborately.

'All right, Theo,' he said. 'I'm glad you feel that way about it. Sure, let's go and grab a Slot elevator right now. We'll take the elevator down to the Slot.'

'Wait – the Geiger count might be pretty high down there. We'd better not go in unprotected.'

'Right.' Helder went to a closet door and opened it. 'All the gear we need's in here.' He took out two plastic anti-radiation suits and two pairs of goggles. Then he opened a can of anti-gamma skin protectant, motioned to Theo to help himself, applied the bright blue grease liberally to his hands, his face, his scalp, and neck. In three or four minutes they were ready.

They left the office, went through the outer rooms, emerged on the corridor, and headed for the elevators. Nobody in sight yet: good. Theo had a pretty good idea of what Helder had done. Sitting down at his desk that way, he must have pressed a switch with his knee or his foot that turned on the audio circuits for his bodyguards. He was going to chance a trip down in the elevator alone with Theo because he knew his bodyguards would be covering him at both ends, up here and down below too – and he knew Theo knew it. So the point was not to take the passenger elevator. Now – if only the passenger elevator wasn't there.

It wasn't. No doubt there was a lot of traffic in the building as a result of the bombings: Theo had been counting on it.

'Oh, the hell with it,' Theo said, after they'd waited for a minute. 'The passenger elevators are probably all tied up. Let's take my car, it's right here – we'll have better luck getting one of the freight elevators on a lower floor.'

He made the suggestion casually, trying to conceal his tension. Maybe, because he was so used to being chauffeured about, Helder wouldn't remember one all-important fact: that down below, the freight cars and the passenger cars opened up on opposite sides of the great elevator shaft. If Helder's guards had heard him and were down there, they would expect him to come out on the passenger side.

'Well...' Helder said. 'That makes sense... Oh, all right.'

They got into Theo's car and started down the motor ramp which snaked in and out of the building, spiralling downward a floor at a time. Some fifteen floors below, Theo drove off the ramp, stopped in front of a freight elevator, and flashed his headlights three times. In a matter of seconds the doors yawned open.

'Just as I thought,' Theo said carelessly. 'Not many people using their cars now.'

'Right,' Helder said.

In less than a minute they were down to the Slot exit. The elevator ground to a smooth halt. Now; if only none of the guards had wandered over to this side...

The doors sprang open. Theo took a deep breath. There was nobody in sight.

Helder peered out on both sides as they drove off, puzzled. After a couple of minutes of winding through the maze, Theo stopped the car: there was a cave-in some fifty yards ahead.

'Good,' he said. 'That block's some distance beyond the footpath. Here's a clear entrance, let's try it.'

They got out and approached the doorway – hardly noticeable, covered with a sheet of steel that ran flush with the wall. Helder looked up and down uneasily: nobody in sight.

'Come on,' Theo said, opening the door. 'No sense wasting time – he *did* have a big head start, there's just an outside chance he may have found a way through.'

Helder followed him into the low arched tunnel. They went a long distance, descended by a flight of stairs; then more turns, two more stairways, footsteps echoing in the cramped cavern. Finally they passed through another door and were out in the Slot's great hollow, down on its floor.

'Just look at that,' Helder whispered.

They had entered the Slot at a point almost midway between two power-plant bombings; to the right was the smoking ruin of one breeder reactor, a tremendous hole blasted in the floor, machinery lying in melted and twisted heaps for hundreds of feet around – to the left, where another explosion had occurred, there was a mountainous rock pile reaching up some two or three hundred feet, composed of boulders and rubble which had been blasted loose from the walls and from the roof far above. The area in which they were standing had contained an enormous prosthetics manufacturing plant: on all sides were furnaces and cauldrons, plastic mixers, some of them still steaming; extruders with their nozzles still dripping gooey plastic; machines for stamping out and winding and assembling the solenoid coils and cores; on a belt line nearby, not moving now, a long row of hollow plastic fingers ready for final assembly.

'It's not far from here,' Theo said. 'To the right – this way.'

They set off, picking their way between the silent, steaming machines.

'Here,' Theo said. 'Right about here, I'd say.'

Directly in front of them, at their feet, was a round hole some ten feet across. Thick yellowish vapours were rising from the hole, the odour sharp and noxious.

'What?' Helder said. 'You're – that's crazy, man, this is a vat. There's nothing down there but plastic – look at that steam, it's still cooking.'

Theo looked around carefully: still no sign of another human being. 'Weren't you looking for the rest of Martine?' he said: his voice was hollow and choked. 'There's the rest of him. He is not dead, he has but become an ocean of plastic. Now you're going to drink. Humbly. This is *your* Lake Victoria.'

There was incredulity in Helder's eyes, burning bright now. 'Listen here,' he said, sniffing rapidly. 'You're mad...'

He stepped back, Theo reached out and took hold of his neck with both hands.

'Don't struggle,' Theo said. 'You know, I'm quite an athlete, I haven't spent the last fifteen years going soft at a desk. I coordinate beautifully.'

'Theo!' Helder cried. 'What are you thinking of! Let go before –'

'Besides,' Theo said, 'you've only got super-legs. I've got super-arms as well, thanks to you. You can't get away from these hands. They were made to fit around your neck – I could snap it like a toothpick right now, without even trying. Thank you for these wonderful hands. They're about to send you onward and upward.'

Helder was fighting desperately, making strangled sounds; Theo stood there quietly, holding him in the vice like a boy holding a caterpillar gingerly in a pair of tweezers.

'I'd like to tell you why,' he said. 'In the name of the Twenty-third Amendment. For the hands you took from me. For Rosemary. To make sure you stay immobilized this time. To teach you how to be irrevocable. You – . – you, – you, – you.'

He heaved, the bulbs in his arms jittered. 'Aaaaaahhhhhh,' Helder said – his legs flew up over his head. With a quick fling Theo catapulted him into the cauldron, head first...

'That's all,' Theo said. 'Nobody saw. I stood there for a while – the steam changed from pale yellow to a bright orange, there were puffs of bright orange and it smelled bad. He went down, slowly, his legs were half melted before they went under the surface, they started to droop. For a long time after he disappeared there were lots of bubbles on the surface. I watched them.' A shudder ran through him. 'Then I found these workmen's clothes. I put them on and got out on the streets and came here. By the back roads. Walked all the way.' He shuddered again.

'Don't take on so,' Martine said. 'How many people did you kill in the last war: twenty million? This only makes twenty million and one. Of course, it's not such a neat figure.'

'What am I to do now.' It was constructed as a question, sounded like a statement of irreparable fact.

'You ask me that?' Martine brandished the tutorial forefinger again, furiously. 'What the hell did you come here for, anyway? Now that you've run out of limbs to offer to the Helders, run out of Helders too, you come knocking on *my* door – what for? Maybe you want me to gouge out your prefrontal lobes, since that's about all you can spare?'

'I came... I had no place else to go.'

'You came because you want approval for what you've done, isn't that so? That's another form of lobotomy. Sorry, Brother Theo, I won't be your conscience. Look behind your eyeballs for the answer. Where it aches the most.'

'I did right. I'm sure I did right.'

'I won't tell you whether it was right or wrong!' Martine exploded.

'Tell me where to go now.' Theo was back to his old game wiggling his fingers in slow motion, watching them intently.

'I do know one place you could go,' Martine said. 'There's a ranch up north a ways... Wait a minute. There's one thing you didn't tell me: Why was Helder so interested in finding out about Mandunga?'

'He didn't say.'

'Of course, he would be interested. He was such an inveterate whittler – he'd perk up at the first sign of any new whittling technique. But he must have had something in mind...'

'I don't know. I pretended I understood just to get him down to the Slot.'

Martine crossed the room and planted himself in front of Theo. 'Look – maybe it was a good idea, your coming here. You might be able to help me. I've got to go home.'

'Home?'

'To the Mandunji island. I *must* get there, right away. Can you help me?'

Theo was stunned: he began to think: his eyes opened wide with excitement. 'Sure!' he said. 'Of course I can – at least I think so. Out at Helder's ranch, just thirty miles north of here – there's an airfield on the grounds, there're always ten or twelve fast planes there. Maybe I could get you into one...' He rose to his feet, raised his hands prayerfully toward Martine. 'Take me with you, Martine! These new planes are pretty damned complicated, I'm still one of the best pilots in the Strip. Take me with you!'

'No! Christ, you think I need leeches? I'm not the sort of devoted parasitologist who attaches parasites to his own hide!' Martine backed away, an expression of disgust creasing his face. But then he began to look puzzled. 'Of course, it's true, I probably couldn't even get one of these new jobs off the ground, I haven't flown a plane in sixteen years... I'd have to have somebody along to run it...'

'Let me do it,' Theo pleaded. 'I'll get you there.'

Martine began to see the amusing side of the idea: 'It *would* be an interesting experiment. The world's greatest mass murderer applying for Mandunji citizenship!... I warn you, though: if you want to complete your birth and become a man, you may have to come back here, back to the scene of the crime. You've got a big debt to work off, just as I have... All right, it's settled. How do we proceed?'

Theo could hardly contain his joy. 'Well, we'll have to be careful. There's no telling what the situation is over at Helder's place. I'd better go on ahead. I'll need about an hour – suppose you meet me in about an hour, in back of the hangar. I'll draw a map for you.' He went to the desk, took a pencil, and began to trace the route on a piece of stationery.

'I'm glad to see', Martine said, 'that even plastic fingers can develop a tremor.'

'I'll need a car.'

'You can take mine. I'll scare up another one.'

Two minutes later Theo was in Martine's car, the motor running.

'See you in an hour,' he said.

'One hour.'

A two-thousand-dollar deposit mightily impressed the motel clerk, even in his panicky state: he promptly turned over the keys of his car and no questions asked. Martine ordered ten sandwiches, wrapped and packaged, plus two containers of coffee.

Back in his cabin, fretting over the insufferable slowness with which his watch ticked away the minutes, he tried to order his scampering thoughts. There was a danger: Theo might now become addicted to him, faltering enemy of addicts. Bah. Grimaces. Would have to limber up his kicking leg – the Zen Buddhist monks used to give their disciples a swift one in the slats when they learned their lessons too well. And what did Helder have in mind about Mandunga?...

According to his watch he had twelve minutes to get to the airport: just about what he needed. He slipped on his jacket – the gun was still in the pocket – gathered up his valise, his notebook, the carton of sandwiches, and went out to the clerk's car. Great pall of smoke over the horizon to the south. When he got on the highway he did not even think of using the Robodrive.

The field was almost a mile from the cluster of ranch houses, it seemed quite deserted. Seven silvery jets of various sizes were lined up on the concrete apron in front of the hangar, upended, ready for vertical take-off; like a row of stubby cigars wrapped in tin foil, gleaming in the moonlight. Martine parked his car behind a small water-pump shed, walked over to the grassy strip at the rear of the hangar. Nobody there.

He strained to hear: a chilling, muffled sound. Choked, panting – the sort of moan one would expect from an animal, but undoubtedly coming from a human throat: 'Uh-uh-uh-uh-uh' – in broken rhythm, syncopated by torment.

It stopped: a sudden piercing scream, swallowed abruptly at the soaring end. Then the chesty chugging sound again.

Martine ran toward the front of the hangar, in the direction of the sound. When he rounded the corner he saw Theo, stretched out on the concrete.

Something grotesque about the way he was lying – limbs twisted and curled, bent at points where there were no joints: a thigh changing direction midway between hip and knee, a foot veering off almost at right angles to its leg. Here and there in the mauled limbs bulbs were flickering fitfully although Theo was not moving, apparently could not move. Intense yellow fumes rising from the pros; a sizzling sound, they were cooking in their own heat. Theo's sleeves and trouser legs had been burned away – the thumb and forefinger of the left hand had melted off, they lay on the concrete, smoking.

'Uh,' Theo barked through his teeth. 'Uh. Uh. Uh.' He seemed to be grinning like a movie star – teeth clamped together, lips curled back. His wild eyes darted to Martine, bulged. 'Help me!' he screamed. 'Take them off!'

Martine bent over. 'All right, just –'

'I can't stand it, I can't stand it! Please take them off!'

'All right, I'm going to – Ow!'

Martine jumped back, shaking his hand. The limbs were scorching hot, he'd burned his fingers merely by bringing them close. He saw that the surface of the arm, the one he'd started to reach for, was bubbling.

'Take them off. Take them off or shoot me. Please. Shoot me. I'm not a coward but I can't stand it – you must shoot me please...'

'Wait,' Martine said. 'Just a minute.'

He ran into the hangar, looked around wildly, spotted a tool bench over in the corner. On the bench several heavy blocks of wood. He snatched up two of these blocks and ran back to Theo. Holding the blocks in both hands, using them as pincers, he got a firm grip on the upper part of Theo's left arm and twisted as hard as he could, the wood crackling as it burned – the arm came off, he threw it on the grass. Three more wrenches and the other limbs were off too.

Gasping sound, a weird hilarity.

'Water,' Theo gasped.

Martine found a tin cup inside, filled it at a spigot, brought it back, and fed some of the water in little sips to Theo, holding his head up. With what was left he soaked his handkerchief and wiped Theo's cheeks and forehead.

The four pros lay on the grass, fizzing. Yellow vapours streaming from them.

'What happened?'

'Uh. Uh... I was attacked.'

'Vishinu's men?'

'No. Uh. Helder's.'

'Helder's? How the hell –?'

'About fifteen. Knew several, Olympic athletes, on training cruise with me. Arrived few minutes after I got here. They didn't know about Helder being dead, acted friendly. Uh. Uh.' Theo stopped talking for a few seconds, panted, sucking in air like a greedy child lapping at an ice cream cone.

'What were they doing here?'

'I asked where they were going. They were in a great hurry. Said they were on a confidential mission for Helder. Going to the Mandunji island. To the Mandunji island to get important documents.'

'But Helder's dead! How could he –'

'Think I know. While I was in his office yesterday, after you left, he kept writing memos and dropping them into the suction-tube slot. One of them must have had the orders for this mission.'

'Theo!' Martine stood up, panicky, pressed his hands together and rocked them back and forth in dismay. 'Oh, God, they're after the Mandunga files... But why? What would Helder have wanted them for?'

'They hinted at that too. From Helder's instructions they got the idea this information was about a revolutionary technique for cutting aggression out of the brain. Helder thought that if he could get the dope fast enough he might be able to use it in the war. On captured Unioneers. He has his agents planted everywhere in the Union – figured he might be able to capture some of their key men, maybe even Vishinu. Then carry out this operation on them and produce them in public, put them on the television or something, and have them talk about the terrible aggressive things they did... These men even talked about a plan for setting up flying surgery units that would roam up and down just behind the front, operating on all captured military personnel. New humane pacifist way of ending a war, no more killing the enemy, just what Immob needed...'

'So.' Martine closed his eyes and rubbed the lids with his fingers; he felt dizzy. 'He wanted to make a weapon out of lobotomy too. Let children play with knives... They mustn't get my documents! What about these men – did they leave?'

'About fifteen minutes ago. I pleaded with them not to go. Tried to stop them – that's when they attacked me. They knew exactly how to cripple a pro. I think they must have been trained...'

Martine looked down at the absurdly small figure on the concrete. He pointed toward the planes squatting on their tails on the launching ramp. 'We've got to get moving. Can we take one of these ships?'

'The end one, on the far left. It's the latest model, fastest supersonic job we have.'

'But I can't fly it! And you – without arms and legs...'

'That's easily fixed. There are always spare pros stocked in every plane's equipment, in case of emergency. Carry me to the plane, we'll find them.'

Martine stooped, slipped his arms under Theo's body, one under the buttocks, the other under the neck. Cradling Theo as he would a baby, he lifted. He swayed, almost fainted: he was back eighteen years, back in the Congo encampment, lifting this body from the operating table – light as a sack of potatoes, it sent a spurt of nausea all through him. Theo was even lighter now...

He shook his head clear, hurried to the plane. There he had to sling Theo over his shoulder in order to climb the ladder which ran from the entry hatch straight up through

the ship. Grunting, he reached the cockpit, eased Theo down in one of the swivel chairs. As soon as he caught his breath he hurried down and sprinted to the car to get his luggage, returned in a couple of minutes.

'Where are the spare pros?' he asked.

'The storeroom, just below. Go down the ladder about five steps, you'll see the door.'

Martine found the door, yanked it open, inside there were some twenty arms and legs of various sizes, neatly racked. He pulled down two of the largest arms and two of the largest legs – making a face when he touched them: the rubbery softness outside, the suggestion of steel under the give – and brought them to Theo. He had to fumble with the first arm until he had it fitted into the socket of Theo's right stump; then, using this hand, Theo expertly attached the other three limbs himself. His face was twisted in pain: beads of sweat on his forehead.

'Are you all right?'

'I ache all over, even the plate in my skull feels hot. When pro cooling units break down it really messes up the nervous system some. I'll be all right. The shock generally wears off in a few days.'

'Take this,' Martine said. 'It'll kill the pain.' He slipped one of the pencils from his pocket, drew out the eraser, handed it over; Theo swallowed the liquid.

'All set?' Theo said.

Martine nodded. Theo pressed a button on the instrument board; the ship shuddered, roared, reluctantly rose a few feet in the air – then began with incredible acceleration to bullet up. The ground fell away, suddenly the hangar was a toy block below them.

'Think we'll make it?' Martine said.

'There are some things in our favour,' Theo said. 'They've got about a thirty-minute head start. All right. But they had to take a bigger plane to accommodate their party, it's an older job. Then, too, we've got a much lighter load. Besides, I know some special tricks with the atom power plant – I've kept up with things... I can't promise anything, but we've got a chance.'

Theo gradually eased off from vertical to horizontal flight, their chairs swivelling smoothly as the angle changed. There was a weird whistling, the whole atmosphere suddenly seemed to have the jumps, a fluttering, a groaning – then they were through the sonic barrier and gliding like silk on silk.

'Is there a radio?' Martine said. 'Let's find out what's happening.'

Theo fiddled with a couple of dials. A voice boomed out: '...where he is. There has been no communiqué from Brother Helder for almost twelve hours. Brother Theo has not been heard from either. Efforts to reach them at the capitol have proved useless... But the news elsewhere is encouraging. Reports from the fronts indicate that the enemy advance has been halted in many places, the Union forces are beginning to fall back... And the long-awaited crisis in the Union has been reached! Ladies and gentlemen, according to word received just a few minutes ago, the loyal Immobs in the Union are on the march – key installations have been destroyed in New Surabaya and New Pyongyang, New Saigon is reported to be badly hit, many sections of New Tolstoygrad are in flames...'

'Plan C,' Martine said. 'And twenty-three letters to go.'

'Here's a flash!' the announcer shouted. 'Oh, this is spectacular! Ladies and gentlemen – Vishinu is dead! He was killed just forty minutes ago, in his office in New Tolstoygrad! It looks like the tide is beginning to turn – Vishinu was shot with a rifle-arm by one of the members of his own Olympic Team – the winner of the d-and-d's in the recent Olympic Games, a Negro émigré from the Strip who remained true to Immob and decided to invoke the Assassination Clause against his false leader...

'But wait! Something's happening!' The announcer's voice veered from joy to horror. 'I can't tell – there's a peculiar rumbling – from our studios here in L.A. I can see out across the city – my God, everything's shaking, I just saw a ten-story tower fall over, just like that! Oh – there goes the capitol building! Everything's shaking – why, ladies and gentlemen, the whole town's shaking – there goes another building, I don't understand it – the rumble – *oh* –'

They could hear it over the loud-speaker: an incredible groan from somewhere at the profound heart of things, a stretching of cosmic vocal cords, the earth itself yawning. Louder; louder still, mounting to a roar – and then nothing. Silence. The radio gone dead. And –

It was as though a giant hand suddenly caught up their plane from underneath and tossed it into the troposphere – they zoomed straight up for a distance of several hundred feet, bobbling crazily. Then dropped. The plane continued its forward rush but with jerks and flutters now: the silken atmosphere was suddenly hammered into a corrugated sheet, creased with invisible buttes and coulees across which they lurched drunkenly.

'It's Los Alamos!,' Theo shouted, pointing down. 'Something – look!'

Los Alamos was stretched out directly below them. It seemed to be seething, writhing, through its whole length; a convulsive boil ran through the toy city, the building blocks jiggled.

Then – the whole city disappeared.

Fell in on itself. Collapsed into the earth from which it had sprung. One minute a city – the next, nothing but a tremendous fissure, a trench cutting across the moon-bathed desert, and in that great slit a city swallowed. Only the suburbs remained, landscaped leftovers.

The plane was still bobbing. Theo worked feverishly at the controls.

'Currents!' he yelled. 'Did you see – gone! It's gone!'

Martine was pressing his hands with all his might against the ceiling of the Plexiglas bubble, trying to protect his head. 'Maybe the whole Slot collapsed by itself!' he yelled back. 'Or maybe – Vishinu's men might have moved up to *their* Plan D...'

Another moment and they were beyond the turbulence. Martine fell back in his seat, gasping.

'I just thought of something,' Theo said. 'Now nobody'll ever know what happened to Helder. Or me either. They'll just assume we were swallowed up with the city.'

'That's how martyrs are born,' Martine said. He looked closely at Theo. 'They'll never know the real story – unless you come back and tell them.'

'That's true,' Theo said quietly. 'I would never have known about you if you hadn't come back.'

Martine turned and looked down. The slit-trench was a tiny scratch in the barren sands now; great columns of dust and smoke fanning up into the skies from the little vent.

'You see,' he said. 'You needn't ever have bothered erasing cities. Cities sometimes fall of their own weight.' He shook his head. 'As Brother Lenin said to Brother Trotsky the night Moscow fell to the Bolsheviks – *Es schwindelt*.'

He pointed his finger at Theo.

'Never mind what *I* did,' he said. 'To hell with the precedents. If you decide to pull a Lazarus and want it to have some human meaning, better find the precedents in yourself. Under that tantalum plate are the only precedents that count.'

Miama, no giraffes now. He would see no more giraffes.

'Suppose we do get there first?' Martine said. 'Suppose we have enough time to find the hidden arms – what then? You're the only one who can use them.'

'Anybody can use them. They've got special controls for manual operation. That's so monos and duos can work them.'

'Good.' A little later: 'You don't have any regrets about taking off this way? Didn't you have a wife or a girl somewhere?'

'Nobody in particular.'

'You're – not castrated?'

'No, it's not that. I thought a lot about it, sometimes I thought the more extreme Anti-Pros had some pretty convincing arguments for it, but the idea made me sick too. No – I've had girls now and then, but I just never got too involved. I was always too much on the go, I guess. I'm a little uncomfortable with women.'

'The shy charismaticist... What about Helder?'

'Oh, he wasn't the shy type. He had lots of women. Never got married, though – funny, lots of amps never got married, come to think of it... He never seemed to get along with his women, he was pretty brutal with them. It used to bother me.'

'Not half as much as it bothered him, I'll bet. Strange thing about professional humanists, the ones I've known anyway – they manage to stir up mighty little brotherly love, or any other kind of love, in the bedroom.'

Martine began to whistle, then broke off, sickened, when he realized what the song was: 'I'm Putting All My Eggs in One Basket.' He studied the glassy view below. The Bahamas were floating by, puny patches of white against a background of undulant blue-black mica. Sun just beginning to heave up ahead, red as shame, granddaddy of all electronic tubes; strands of cloud twisting here and there, scribblings of an illiterate skywriter... When he turned again to Theo he was surprised to see that there were tears in his eyes: he sat stiffly in his seat, looking straight ahead, trying to blink away the tears.

'Oh, Theo,' Martine said. 'In any case, don't cry.'

Don Thurman had roared with laughter: Theo was crying, audibly now: the sounds were disconcertingly alike.

'I don't know if this'll help,' Martine said, 'but listen. I've just made a discovery: those whom the gods would destroy they first make solemn... Look, Immo aimed to raise

man from the animal to the truly human; the great humanist project. But what distinguishes man from animal? Not hands, not superego, not logic, not the ability to abstract and make instruments, not his myths and dreams and nightmares – the beginnings of all these things are there in the higher animals, it's just a matter of man having more of the same. There's only one thing man can do that's beyond all other animals on earth: he can laugh...'

Theo's whimpering was louder now, his whole body was beginning to shake.

'Listen to me, Theo. Don't you see? Laughter, nothing but laughter, is the final answer to the steamroller. Yesterday I met a man who laughed. Even yesterday... Don't cry, Theo...'

'Why,' Theo said chokingly, 'why did he laugh?'

'Oh – because there's something else that distinguishes man from animal: he's secretly in cahoots with the steamroller and secretly knows it – it's from the cave of this secret knowledge, maybe, that most anxiously anticipatory human laughter comes. Laughter is a sort of short-circuited sob – maybe that's why it brings tears to the eyes.'

'Is that – is that the way you were laughing in your notebook?'

'Yes,' Martine said. 'I guess I was.'

He felt in his pocket, took out his notebook. He opened it to the last entry and added some lines:

21 October 1990. Somewhere southeast of Bermuda.

Correction. *Two* things that distinguish man from the animal. He laughs – uses throat and vocal cords in a most unfunctional manner. Also cries – first time in the animal kingdom the tear ducts were ever put to such fantastic unfunctional use. And performs both unfunctional activities as one function, when he's fully human. *Homo Dei*, the weepy titterer : laughs till the tears come.

My sin? It was to make those jokes about the steamroller and immobilization. Because to joke about such things is a way of thrusting them aside – and you wouldn't thrust so hard if they weren't so close to you – if you weren't already 'one of them' in your heart. The laughter hides the tears.

Everybody has his own built-in steamroller. Not everybody has an *idea* of the steamroller, a blueprint of it, a genealogy of it. The man who could photograph it and dissect it would be really unique. If he simply *wanted* to photograph and dissect it, he would be unique. That way, maybe, lies a new kind of identity...

There is something I *can* accept. The picture of man – me – as the incipiently introspective Dog-God. Curious to distinguish between the 1 per cent of aggressiveness in him which is a response to reality and the 99 per cent which is phony, designed to make the God look like the Dog and the cheek-turning like tooth-for-tooth. Who begins to see, dimly, that the real target for most of his vicious blows is himself, via others. That most of his blows are all boomerang and backfire. And therefore begins to investigate the steamroller behind the eyeballs, sadly and merrily. In order that his story, which began in the third person, can turn, belatedly into the first. O pioneer!

To this hyphenated *Wunderkind* I can say yes. To his acceptance of the Hyphen, and his curiosity about it. And his hyphenated tearful-laughing reaction to it. And his awakening thirst for first-personality.

To this I say yes.

I say *yes*.

YES.

I say

YES

Funny. Wrote a big NO in my notebook eighteen years ago. Now, at last, a big YES. Another hyphen, I'm the original no-yesman. Name should have been NOYES...

Good Christ. Been staring at that last entry for five minutes, stupefied. Noyes is my name, in a way. It's my mother's maiden name, haven't thought of it in years. Oh, blessed mother of myth, fount of multiness, source of all twos!...

This notebook, too, is now ended. My messianic addiction to notebooks is now ended. I want no more to make a mark: those who set out to make their mark usually wind up leaving mutilations. From now on I want to have an impact on *myself*. If I now set out to create an opposition on the island of coma, it is not for my third-person incognito, my 'race' – it is for myself. I need this opposition in order to live as something other than a cripple. Messiah's in the cold cold ground!

Once you go into the cave, you've got to grope along to the bitter end: no exit. And no end. Each man his own spelilogist. We're in for an indefinite turbulence in human affairs: Man's not only the animal who makes words, he's the animal who's eternally obliged to eat his own words.

Now and forever it's a tough transitional period for all us anxious c-and-c systems, for all our d-and-d's.

Old myth-mother, old artificialer, stand me now and forever in not too bad stead!

Signed (without incognito)

Dr Lazarus

(his own best parasite)

Theo was biting his lower lip, tears were streaming down his face. Martine looked away. Below, the Atlantic, lapping, rippling, like molten plastic.

'What's that thing back in the belly of the plane?' Martine said. 'Some sort of bomb bay?'

'No. It's for dropping supplies to men doing their M.E.'s in inaccessible places – at the South Pole, in forests and jungles.'

'Are there controls for the inner doors?'

'Yes. Sure.'

'Well, open them, will you? I'll tell you why in a minute.'

Theo leaned forward and made some adjustments on the instrument panel.

'I'll be right back,' Martine said.

He slipped out of the cockpit and made his way back to the box-like installation set into the plane's underside. The inside doors were pulled back. He dropped his notebook into the hollow, returned to his seat.

'All right,' he said. 'You're the world's greatest bombardier – this is your last bombing run! When I give you the signal, open the outer doors... Ready! Set! Go! Om-bomb away!'

Theo squeezed another button. Martine craned his neck there was the notebook, leaves flapping, dropping end over end through the vapid blue like a lackadaisical tern – it plummeted and was gone.

'There are all sorts of ways to achieve the oceanic,' Martine said. 'Helder did it one way, very meltingly. I think I prefer my way. Om ! Enough of notebooks. My God, I hope I didn't leave any more of the damned things around.'

Theo was silent, his cheeks still wet. Martine felt the tears welling up in his own eyes...

'Lot to do,' he went on. 'Lots of caves to let a little sun into... Only way to cut down your tonus a little. Relax. A little tapioca isn't so bad, really...'

He had meant to say it jokingly, in good humour, but he was crying unashamedly now, unhyphenatedly. Thinking of the great coruscating merriment in the sunlight, the laughter that illumination brings – thinking too that tears are always the camouflage of the vol-amp, part of the masochist's blind of self-pity – and weeping furiously all the while.

'My sin', he said, 'was that I carried Tom in my head before I sired him in the flesh.' Added, 'But also Rambo – there was Rambo.'

Eyes filmed, he turned to Theo once more, saw him as through the window of a bathysphere. He remembered what somebody – Malraux – had written long ago: The nineteenth century faced the question, Is God dead? – the twentieth century was facing the question, Is man dead?

Was the answer in himself? He had carried death in himself, in a cave with no skylights. But not only death. Was the answer in Theo? He was half-dead, undoubtedly; legs dead, arms dead, plate of metal in his skull. But still, huddled behind his eyeballs were the prefrontal lobes, bulging with miracles; and in the eyeballs tear ducts – he could cry. He was crying now. Could enough light be let into that seething temple-cave – not with a scalpel: that destroyed the cave without illuminating it, leaving everybody as much in the dark as ever – to temper the tears a bit, relax the tense lips into a flickering smile, purge the smile bit by bit of its grave shadows...

'Can't we go faster?'

'We're making pretty good time.'

'We've *got* to make it.'

Sobbing hilariously, yes and no, Martine leaned forward, trying not to hear the agonized choked sniffing from the seat next to him, knowing that it came from his own

seat as well. Peering into the nauseating blue vacuum ahead, into the sun, the glare of the sun, straining with anxious anticipation to catch a glimpse of that cave-ridden ocean-lapped island which, miraculously, or maybe just because maps so rarely catch up with territories, had never been charted on any map by any cartographer.

PART SEVEN

The Mandunji, Meanwhile...

CHAPTER 24

Above, in the raffia trees, animals made a sound like laughing, but down in the clearing it was quiet, gravely quiet, quiet as the grave. To one side of the sputtering fire sat the elders on stools of cane and braided bamboo. Ubu at their head; across from them the villagers, squatting in awed expectancy.

Rambo rose from his cross-legged position and advanced toward the old men. His intelligent dark face was drawn and strained, he walked as though he wished not to but were being shoved from behind. In his hand a small volume, grease-stained.

He stopped a few steps from Ubu, coughed. He opened the book and began to read in a tight quavering voice, stumbling now and then over an unfamiliar word: ' "This village is built on a lie. The lie is that the healthy ones are without aggression. They cut off many of their human qualities, to pretend that they are not men but gods. Gods stuffed with tapioca." '

Ubu leaned forward, face knitted in a scowl. From somewhere in the rustling raffia trees behind the clustered huts a tarsier made a throaty noise, chortled, chuckled.

' "But there is a worse lie yet," ' Rambo continued. His voice was a little stronger now; he pointed an index finger at Ubu. ' "Despite all the precautions taken by the normal ones, all their aggression is not stilled. Some comes out even so, in a disguised form. The one great disguised aggression of our normal ones is known by a very polite name – Mandunga. It means, to drive the devils from the skull. But with the devils go the men." '

Ubu jerked at the word, rose to his feet. He was trembling. But Rambo would not stop, his finger rose and fell.

' "Mandunga is the aggression of self-crippled men disguised as gods against those who cannot cripple themselves the same way: of the paralysed against the berserk. It is a punishment, not a help – it calls itself therapy but it is inspired by murderous venom. The venom of the less-than-human, pretending to be more-than-human, for the all-too-human –" '

'Stop!'

Ubu's eyes widened in astonishment: it was the loudest sound he had ever uttered in his life. It took a second before he could calm himself enough to go on: 'Young man, you go too far... For months we allowed you and the young ones of the cave to add your figures and make your studies. We of the council did not interfere. Tonight when you asked for a special council meeting, and for permission to address it, we gave you your way too. But you go too far, the elders and your fellow villagers did not come here to listen to you and be insulted... Why do you say these bad things in English? These obscenities? From what bad book do you read these obscenities to us?'

'This bad book', Rambo said proudly, standing very straight, 'was written by Dr Martine, my father. It is a very old notebook, almost empty. Before he left, my father instructed us to study much, to read many books in the cave. On one of the shelves,

hidden behind some of these books, we found this volume. The dates are very old, the notes were made only during the first year after he came to the island, then they stop...'

'Martine? Martine?' the old man stuttered. There was dread in his tired troubled eyes. 'He would not say such things – he would not say them now. No, not now! Earlier, it is possible – when he first came to the island, he did not understand...'

'The night he left', Rambo said loudly, 'he said the same things to us in the cave. More. He told us that we must not do any more Mandunga, we must only study Mandunga, all the statistics from all the case histories. We have finished the studies now, we have all the statistics. They are here.'

From the leaves of the notebook he withdrew a sheet of paper, unfolded it, and began to read. Total number of Mandungabas, so-and-so many. Number of recidivists, so-and-so many. Cases in which new symptoms or debilities developed postoperatively, so-and-so many. Percentage of cases which, because no relapses occurred *and* no other symptoms developed, could be considered successful without serious qualifications – such-and-such. Rambo broke the figures down relapse by relapse, symptom by symptom, reciting them like a prosecuting attorney, vigorously, with exaggeratedly correct precision; at the end his voice rose and began to tremble.

'These are the figures!' he cried, his finger rigid with indignation. 'The picture is – negative, all negative! We are trying to do a job with magic, not logic! We have not learned yet the way of science!'

'Young man,' Ubu thundered, shocked at the sound of his own voice, 'you must not talk this way! Everything that is sacred –'

'Nothing is sacred if it does not work! Mandunga does not work !'

Ubu drew himself up to his full majestic height, pulled his chieftain's robe, studded with drawings of parakeets, tighter about his frail body. 'You young scientists of the cave,' he said ironically, 'you are very, very good with figures. Do your figures tell you some other way? You have something else to offer instead of the Mandunga of your forefathers?'

'Yes!' Rambo shouted. 'My forefather has something else to offer.' He opened the notebook and began excitedly to read again:

' "We must recognize that aggression exists in all men. But then we must go further: we must learn, and teach other people, that 99 per cent of all the aggression in this world is not genuine aggression, but pseudo-aggression. That those who attack others generally do it only to conceal something about their own innermost natures – that their most secret wish is to attack themselves, that behind the sadist is the masochist: that under the pretence of hurting others is the deepest desire to be hurt, to hurt oneself. This is equally true of the aggression of man against wife and wife against man, of soldier against soldier (especially in modern war), of friend against friend, of the troubled against the normal but also of the normal against the troubled. The study must begin by dragging the secret pseudo part of the aggressiveness out of the cave of the mind and into the full light of analytic day. Then the difference between true and false aggression can be pondered clinically. We might begin with a sort of rule-of-thumb chart..." '

Rambo signalled to the young men sitting behind him, they jumped to their feet and came forward carrying a tripod constructed of canes lashed together. They set the frame

down next to Rambo and handed him a long roll of pounded bark; he let the roll drop open and hung it from a notch on the stand.

'Here is the table my father put down in his notebook,' he said. 'It is in English – I was unable to change it into our language because for many of these things we have no words.' He turned to the words he had painstakingly printed on the bark and began to read, falteringly, line by line:

AGGRESSION: TRUE AND FALSE	
Normal Aggression	Neurotic Aggression (Pseudo-Aggression)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Used only in self defence.</i> 2. <i>Object of aggression is a 'real' enemy.</i> 3. <i>No accompanying unconscious feeling of guilt.</i> 4. <i>Dosis: Amount of aggression discharged corresponds to provocation.</i> 5. <i>Aggression always used to harm enemy.</i> 6. <i>Timing: Ability to wait until enemy is vulnerable.</i> 7. <i>Not easily provoked.</i> 8. <i>Element of infantile game absent; no combination with masochistic-sadistic tendencies; feeling that a necessary though disagreeable job has to be done.</i> 9. <i>Success expected.</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Used indiscriminately when an infantile pattern is repeated with an innocent bystander.</i> 2. <i>Object of aggression is a 'fantasied' or artificially created enemy.</i> 3. <i>Feeling of guilt always present.</i> 4. <i>Dosis: Slightest provocation – greatest aggression.</i> 5. <i>Pseudo-aggression often used to provoke 'masochistic pleasure' expected from enemy's retaliation.</i> 6. <i>Timing: Inability to wait, since pseudo-aggression used as defence mechanism against inner reproach of psychic masochism.</i> 7. <i>Easily provoked.</i> 8. <i>Element of infantile game present, combined with masochistic-sadistic excitement, usually repressed.</i> 9. <i>Defeat unconsciously expected.</i>

'This is as my father wrote it,' Rambo said, his face lit with great pride, 'word for word. After there is one more note: "Learned this table years ago, during my analysis. This is the truth which all Mandungas try to hide. (Did I become a lobotomist instead of a psychoanalyst in order to hide from it?) Sometime I must try to explain all this to my students in the cave – must think about it more myself, much more. If there only were time. We are all so busy with our scalpels, our surgical pseudo-aggressions, there is no time..." After this my father wrote no more.'

'Many words,' Ubu said, pointing to the table. 'No meaning. Long before these words without meaning, our forefathers –'

'They *have* meaning!' Rambo shouted. 'You do not understand them – I do not either, entirely, many of them I do not know, but I shall study more – they mean much! My father perhaps will not return, but in these words is his heritage to our village. Study them!'

'Perhaps you do not understand these words of your father. There is in them a kind of joke, what he used to call a joke. He says in this table that there are some types of, ah, aggressions which are good and normal and healthy – surely this he meant to be a joke...'

'You do not understand!' Rambo said with considerable heat: 'He meant that the joke is in those who pretend they are gods and not men – their aggressions are hidden and false, like Mandunga, they cripple themselves and the whole village. That is one joke. Also, to beat up your wife or your mother-in-law, that is no good either, naturally – this is a joke too, because the aggression is a lie. But some aggressions *are* good. Those which are not lies. Those truly for defence. I will show you.'

He waved again: several youths came around from the other side of the fire, bearing long narrow boxes of metal. They set their packages down on the ground at Rambo's feet, removed their lids. From the elders, from all the hushed villagers gathered around a long terrified 'oh': inside the cases were various sorts of plastic arms and legs – fire-arms, rotor-arms, flame-arms, drill-arms.

'You see?' Rambo shouted. 'You were very nice and friendly with the queer-limbs when they were here, but we, we young people of the cave, we were suspicious, as my father was. We spied on them and we saw them bury many of these terrible machines in the jungle. When they were gone we dug them up and studied them.'

He picked up a rotor-arm and opened it out until it stretched some twenty feet before him; he pressed some buttons near the shoulder and – the circular saw began to whirl. Rambo manoeuvred the cutting end until it came into contact with the trunk of a slender raffia sapling which stood near the maize grinder: a quick metallic ringing sound, zip, zing, as of some soprano wind instrument, and the top half of the tree crashed to the ground. The villagers gasped. The next moment Rambo had a fully extended flame-arm in his hands. Again he pressed the controls: a tongue of fire snaked out from its funnel-like mouth, growling like a bassoon, and what remained of the raffia tree was gone in one garish puff.

The villagers sighed, in the intense harsh light thrown off by the flame their faces stood out sweaty and knotted in fright. Rambo snapped the fire off.

'We have practised much,' Rambo said. 'We have acquired much skill with these arms that cut and burn. Now we are armed – we have better bolos and poison darts than

were ever manufactured secretly by our troubled ones. We have no wish to use these terrible weapons, but we will, if we are forced to. Only to defend ourselves.'

'Against what?' Ubu said harshly. 'On this peaceful island there is no need to defend.'

'There is! Much! It is not by an accident that the queer-limbs left these machines hidden here. It is a bad sign – if they buried such things they mean to return, and for no good. My father was right, there is some evil in these people, we must not trust them. If they come we will not hold out empty hands and say peace to all. We will say peace to all – but in our outstretched hands will be flames and saws, run by atoms. This kind of aggression is good and healthy, according to my father's table which I have studied much. This is normal! It is a new kind of health, dy, dynamic, that comes now to our village...'

'Health!' Ubu's face was twisted in disgust, there was so much tension in his muscles that it hurt. 'This is a kind of madness you bring. Health comes only through Mandunga.'

'There will be no more Mandunga,' Rambo said, his voice quiet. 'We have decided on this in the cave.'

'You have decided? *You*? It is the elders who decide.'

'No,' Rambo said. 'This the elders will not decide – they are not fit to decide, they are not trained in the ways of – of logic and science.'

There was a long tense moment in which no one said anything: the old man glowered at the boy in speechless dismay, the boy stared back with a look which was more than juvenile impudence – in it too was some newly found conviction, some granite sturdiness, whose appearance startled even its possessor into silence.

Then Ubu spoke, unsteadily: 'You – would stop us?'

Another vibrant pause.

'Yes.'

Many of the villagers, the older ones, turned their eyes to the ground – they were embarrassed to watch this scene of shame. It was a bad sight, like discovering a man secretly carving a bolo, like watching one man hit another.

'Do not misunderstand,' Rambo pleaded. 'It is not to be important and humiliate you that I speak this way. We need now a real therapy. We must learn now to be psychiatrists, and use our knowledge to help the sick to know themselves so they will no longer be so sick. Also, to decide what is health – how much sickness a healthy village can allow, what is sickness and what is only being different. This means: the knives of knowledge, not the knives of the butcher. That is why we make up our minds there will be no more Mandunga. If you agree, all will be peaceful, but if you insist on this ceremony which is a lie we shall oppose you. And if you try to do this thing against our wishes, with force, and if we cannot stop you another way, then we shall use these weapons against you too – with great weeping in our hearts. Only if we have to. Only because we cannot come to truth in our village, and learn to live with truth, unless you stop this great lie with the knives. This is not sick aggression. This is the beginning of our health.'

There was agitated whispering among the elders. Ubu raised his bony emaciated hand, let it fall to his side again; he sank back weakly into his chair, shaking his head. He pointed to the motor which was attached to the maize grinder.

'So,' he said. 'Ah, so then. It has come. The bad things from the machines. I told him many times that they thought too much about machines in the cave – it is not good to let machines do everything, it breaks the habits of work and the young have too much time to dream what should not be dreamed. Men should grind their own corn and catch their own fish, it is better so. The machines have destroyed our peaceful village.'

'No,' Rambo said, 'not the machine. My father was aware of this danger too, he wrote some lines about it.' Again he flipped the notebook open and read: ' "7 March 1973. Hopped over to Johannesburg today with Ubu, picked up some motors for the fishing boats in the village. The first step toward mechanization: it's a responsibility, thought about it a lot before I decided to do it against Ubu's wishes. But there are two ways to escape being steamrollered by the machine, granted the will to escape is there. One is to limit mechanization to the absolute minimum. The other: to make the machine laughable, as the Greeks and ancients did, to take the threat out of it. It is not so threatening when I can laugh at it, because the machine can't laugh back. A hierarchy is established: 'T' over 'It'. What's needed is a new mythology in which the machine until now a bugaboo, becomes a buffoon. Not impossible to arrange. For there is something hilariously, outrageously funny about the machine. It's a perfect man..." '

Rambo stopped. A remarkable change had come over him in the course of the council meeting: he had begun, with much stammering, his voice small and tight with immaturity; toward the end he had lost his trepidation, had shouted – too loudly, at times – his shyness yielding bit by bit to a forcefulness which lent new depth to his voice and incipient dignity to his intent adolescent features. Toward the end his finger, rigid with newly acquired pedagogic thrust, had tilted with quite impressive authority – almost charismatic and yet a little shy – at the circle of elders.

But now he seemed to hesitate once more; his voice grew soft and unsure again, the forefinger drooped in a curl of diffidence a puzzled look came over his bronzed face. He stooped and picked up the flame-arm he had demonstrated.

'I do not know what these words mean,' he said quite without bombast, humble now. 'My father saw there was danger in the machine – he also saw a way to lessen this danger. Laugh at the machine, he said. I do not understand about the laughter.'

He held the flame-arm up – absurd object, limb of transparent plastic with things that lit up inside like fireflies, shaped like a human arm from shoulder down through elbow and almost to wrist, but then continuing much farther than a human arm does, out far beyond the hand, to flare up at its end into a mouth which belched fire for fifty feet because things nobody had ever seen, rumours called atoms, were breaking up somewhere inside. He looked at this arm that was not an arm, this machine shaped like an arm and also like a mouth, this fire-arm, and there was bewilderment on his solemn face. His lips curled at the corners – he was trying to smile, experimenting with a smile, but there was a tremendous gravity holding the smile back. He stood there gravely smiling, more grave than smiling but trying very hard, and he said, his voice very solemn, 'Perhaps the machine is very funny. There must be some joke in the machine that we do not understand. I do not know. We must study more – the jokes too. Especially the jokes. History -'

His lips twitched, searching for the joke: shy rehearsal of a smile. From a branch over the thatched roof of Dr Martine's hut a tarsier chattered, it sounded like a chuckle.

Beyond the fire, on the outermost ring of the villagers, Ooda sat with her hands folded on her belly. She listened to Rambo's voice. In one hand she clutched a wrinkled piece of paper, as she listened she pressed her belly with her fingers. The sound of Rambo's voice as he talked about history, always about history, hypnotized her: it had started as a child's shaky voice, suddenly it sounded exactly like his father's only without the laughing – Martine without the laughing.

Where was Martine now? Into what ears talking his talk about history and cerebrotone and jealousy and love and orgasm? She rubbed a finger over the piece of paper. She did not have to unfold it to see the words, she knew them by heart; every day since she had found the paper on his desk, right after he left, she had studied the words, the words he had written with his own hand, trying to find some answer in them to a question she did not know how to put.

She knew the words by heart now: 'Guess I'll never be entirely without ambivalence in my feelings toward Ooda; there'll always be a bit of a cuff in each caress, the genitals are never altogether without fangs. But she loves me, at bottom it's good. She's warm, she gives – too often I forget that. With enough to build on, with that much, a man's gratitude might in the long run outweigh his savage resentment of his woman simply because she is a woman and therefore the mythic denying mother and therefore to be scorned and mistreated – to conceal the fact that secretly what he really wants is to be scorned and mistreated by her, to bolster his myth. (Haven't thought in those terms for a long time: well over twenty years.) I haven't been good enough to Ooda, been too much by myself. If I get back I must make things better for her. I must get back to her, because then...'

That was all. She knew all the words, down to the last 'because then'. She did not know what they meant. She knew only one thing: he wanted to get back to her. No matter what thing had made him go away, he wanted to get back – to her. This was enough. It meant, to use the word from his peculiar language, that he 'loved' her. From the time she had found the piece of paper and read the words and known, even without understanding all the words, that he 'loved' her, that with her he was made 'happy', used himself up, was not 'bored', wanted to come back to her – from that time she had not smoked one cigarette of *ganja*. It was his wish. She was already too – somatotone, he had said. Then she would be less somatotone, try to be. If he wanted to come back, she wanted to be the way he liked. He had to come back. She wanted to lie down again with him. She would lie down with no other man, the thought sickened her.

She listened to Rambo's voice as it gathered strength, Martine's voice. She pressed her belly, ran her fingers over the beginning bulge. When had he left? In May, the time he called May. Five months ago. When would the child be born? Four months more – what he called February. If he did not come back, some part of him was in her. Would it be a son?

In seventeen years the son would look like Rambo, with the growing Martine voice. What would the village be like in seventeen years? In forty-five years he would look like Martine. Very cerebrotone, like Martine.

What would the village be like in forty-five years? Now, with history working in it? Whose voices would ring out at the council meetings around the fire? What would they say?

She tightened her hold on the paper, fingering the scrap of the past that ended in mid-sentence, rubbed the bulge of the future in her belly.

The sun was sinking now, a bowl of blood: it looked like the cup of a Mandungaba's skull, brimming with blood. Ubu still felt cold, he pulled his bark robe tighter around him. All night long, and all the following day, he had sat in the clearing on the mountain top, at the centre of the doomed Mandunga Circle, the Circle that had become a noose, too upset by the council meeting to sleep. Here he had first met Martine, eighteen years ago: Martine had dropped from the sun directly into the cave, like a bolt of light. Now there was nothing but a vacuum stretching before him. Beyond the carpet of raffia leaves, beyond the saw-tooth cliffs, a cobalt vacuum with no hope in it; empty, and blue – as a baboon's ass.

He was tired, there was a pain in his chest. He should not have climbed the mountain, of course – without much care, prognosis unfavourable. But why take care? Everything he knew and believed in was going now, the machines were destroying the village, the cave was destroying the village, the village was toppling like Johannesburg, there was nothing left to live for. Martine had dropped into the cave like a bolt from the sun, and from the cave had come all the bad things – machines, science, logic, statistics, books, dreams, jokes; now psychiatry. And dy, dynamism. These things were good, Martine said. They meant that the Mandunji were joining history. But this joining history was not good: it made a man feel uncomfortable, people stopped eating tapioca and began to smoke *ganja*. When you joined this history each day was unlike the other days and there was no more soothing sameness – you did not know what to expect. Soon he would die, he could feel the prognosis in his chest. What would come after him? Only trouble. Dizziness. Shouting. People were beginning to shout: last night he too had shouted. He wished Martine had not gone away. Martine was good in time of trouble.

The old man scrubbed his thatch of bristly white hair, searching for an itch that eluded fingers, bent down with a sigh, and rubbed his aching feet through the cricket sneakers which had once belonged to the British naval attaché at Johannesburg. He listened to the hypertense sounds of the jungle, scowling. With envy he looked down at the untuned old ocean: good to be like the ocean, placid as tapioca. He wished he had some tapioca now.

Then he gave a start: over to the west there, where the sun was collapsing in the smear of flame-tinged blue emptiness above the horizon, over in the direction of Mauritius and Reunion and Madagascar and all the toppled African cities, coming from the lands of cummerbunds and electroencephalographs, the source of history – something moving.

He stood up, shielding his terrified-hopeful old eyes with bony tremorous hand. A dark speck there, in the sky. Moving east, southeast. Not a bird: it glinted in the sun, this bird had aluminium feathers. He was sure it was moving this way, as eighteen years ago Martine's metal bird had moved – heading unerringly from the sun like a poison dart from a blowgun, straight for the island that had never been charted on any map by any cartographer.

'May war always stay on other side of river,' the old man whispered in English, without conviction. Immediately he corrected himself: 'May *the* war always stay on *the* other side of *the* river.'

What prognoses this day?

The activity of these people interested me only as an illustration of the law of predetermination which in my opinion guides history, and of that psychological law which compels a man who commits actions under the greatest compulsion, to supply in his imagination a whole series of retrospective reflections to prove his freedom to himself.

– TOLSTOY

AUTHOR'S NOTES AND WARNINGS

A word about Mandunga. Over the centuries men have hit upon all sorts of ingenious ways to disfigure, or at least discomfort, themselves: bound their feet, stretched their lips into saucers, pierced their nostrils and cheeks and ears, filed their teeth, used swathings to taper their skulls into pyramids, circumcised themselves, castrated themselves to become choirboys or harem eunuchs, cut off fingers and toes and torn out hair in rituals of grief, branded and tattooed their hides, crushed their abdomens with corsets, gormandized themselves senile, grown gaunt and 'furry as a hedgehog' crouching on flagpoles, poisoned themselves with nicotine and alcohol and other drugs, found a sartorial use for hairshirts and even sackcloth and ashes; the Amazons, determined to get into the self-lacerating act (equal rights forever!) lopped off their right breasts to make room for the bow. An endless fitful hacking away at the body. You don't have to dig into the military record to prove that man, whatever else he may be, is certainly the self-maiming animal. In a sense, a voluntary amp.

Lobotomy is presented in this story as yet another technique for destructive self-tinkering. (Not true unless it's voluntary? But it often is voluntary. 'The Operation of Last Resort', in the *Saturday Evening Post* for 20 October 1951, gruesomely details how one man solicited such surgery. And the *New York Herald-Tribune* for 16 January 1952, tells the story of Frank di Cicco, embezzler and forger, who, while serving time in an Ohio penitentiary, arranged to have a lobotomy 'in an effort to rid himself of criminal traits'.) I had thought, however, that the primitive version of lobotomy here called 'Mandunga' was only a convenient storyteller's fiction. No such thing: in these literally hair-raising fields the imagination is reality's straggler. In April of 1951 a Peruvian surgeon named Dr Francisco Grana announced before the Italian chapter of the International College of Surgeons (*New York Times*, 30 April 1951) that 'he had examined 200 (American Indian) skulls in tombs and ruins, and found evidence of excellent brain surgery. The death rate from Indian surgery was about 30 per cent of all brain operations, the same as the present rate,' he declared. One skull which Dr Grana placed on display, from the fourth century, A.D., had two perfect surgical perforations..

This book is a grab bag of ideas that were more or less around at the mid-century mark. I would like here to list those writings from which I borrowed ideological materials with a free hand: often mauling them badly in the process: sometimes unintentionally.

My debt to Norbert Wiener throughout is obvious. The concept of 'charisma' is developed in the sociological works of Max Weber. The Mandunji tribe is patterned in part after the mild-tempered American *Zuni* Indians, as described by Ruth Benedict in her *Patterns of Culture*; and, of course, her terminology of the 'Apollonian' as against the 'Dionysian' is straight out of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* (the only book I know which says something about bebop).

The writings consulted on neuro-surgery are too numerous to itemize; I should mention, though, that the fine quotation on page 56, from R. W. Gerard, is reproduced by Dr Mary A. B. Brazier in her paper, 'Neural Nets and the Integration of Behaviour',

in *Perspectives in Neuro-psychiatry*. The novelistic possibilities of a non-Aristotelian society were suggested to me by a clever work of science fiction, A. A. van Vogt's *The World of A*.

A sickly shadow is cast over many of these pages by the first portion of Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground*, that appalling antirationalist fulmination which has been called the great pathological document of the nineteenth century. But the sickness of this outrageous work goes beyond morbidity; Thomas Mann considers it 'holy disease'. Of this section of *Notes from Underground* Mann has written (in his introduction to *The Short Novels of Dostoevsky*):

Granted... that it is hazardous talk in the strongest sense of the word, dangerously likely to confuse naïve minds, because it stresses scepticism against faith, and because it heretically attacks civilization and democracy and the humanitarians and the meliorists who believe that man strives for happiness and advancement while he is actually thirsting just as much for suffering, the only source of knowledge, that he really does not want the crystal palace and the anthill of social consummation, and that he will never renounce his predilection for destruction and chaos. All that sounds like reactionary wickedness and may worry well-meaning minds who believe that the most important thing today is the bridging of the chasm that yawns between intellectual realization and scandalously retarded social and economic reality. It is the most important thing – and yet those heresies are the truth: the dark side of truth, away from the sun, which no one dares to neglect who is interested in the truth, the whole truth, truth about man. The tortured paradoxes which Dostoyevsky's 'hero' hurls at his positivistic adversaries, anti-human as they sound, are spoken in the name of and out of love for humanity: on behalf of a new, deeper, and unrhetorical humanity that has passed through all the hells of suffering and of understanding.

That is the only justification I can think of for Martine's sickly, tortured paradoxes *à la* Dostoyevsky. But, to be sure, he is damned rhetorical about them – which may be the special pathology of the *twentieth* century.

This book could hardly have been written, obviously, without the body of psychoanalytic literature now generally available. I have leaned especially heavily on Freud; for example, on his discussion of the 'oceanic' in *Civilization and Its Discontents* and of the struggle between the forces of Eros and Thanatos in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Indeed, this novel might be taken as a result of a too literal reading of Freud's remarks, in the first-mentioned volume, about man and his machines: 'Man has become a god by means of artificial limbs, so to speak, quite magnificent when equipped with all his accessory organs; but they do not grow on him and they still give him trouble at times. However, he is entitled to console himself with the thought that this evolution will not come to an end in A.D. 1930. Future ages will produce further great advances in this realm of culture...'

The idea of the 'It' comes from Georg Groddeck's *The Book of the It* and *The Unknown Self*. On the self-damaging tendency I found some useful speculation in Theodor Reik's *Masochism in Modern Man*; but here, as in so many other connexions, far and away my greatest debt is to Dr Edmund Bergler's jolting analysis of aggression and pseudo-aggression in his *The Battle of the Conscience*, *The Basic Neurosis: Oral Regression and Psychic Masochism*, and *Neurotic Counterfeit-Sex*. Starting from Freudian premises, but with enough openness of mind to expand or revise them as new clinical data appeared, Dr Bergler has, in his many books and technical papers, made an immensely valuable contribution to psychiatry by developing the view that the 'basic neurosis' is 'psychic masochism', which he traces to the drives and thwartings of the oral phase; and his analysis sheds much new light on man as an 'injustice-collecting' animal. For purposes of this book I have assumed that, by the mid sixties, analytic thought has pretty much come around to the ideas and emphases worked out by Dr Bergler. The table entitled 'Aggression: True and False' (pages 352-3) is from *The Battle of the Conscience*, and is reproduced here with the kind permission of the author.

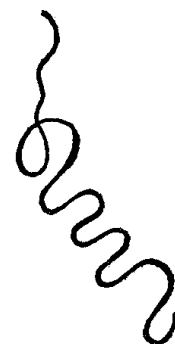
The sketch on page 252 was done by Fred Segal.

Limbo makes it sufficiently clear, I think, that many of the things it satirizes are, in the opinion of its author, to be found in even more obnoxious abundance in Soviet culture than in American; but those who specialize in the fine fabulist's art of quoting-out-of-context overlook such details. I want, therefore, to make this point:

After writing a book that deals pretty harshly with my own country I found no difficulty whatever in getting it published – exactly as I wrote it. The book is now in circulation, and so am I; nothing worse has come my way than a royalty (*not* loyalty) cheque. What would happen to a novelist anywhere behind the Iron Curtain who conceived such a book about his own world and offered it for sale, or was discovered scribbling it simply for his own amusement on the backs of menus? He would, it hardly needs saying, promptly find himself shorter by a career and a head.

Anybody who 'paints a picture' of some coming year is kidding – he's only fancying up something in the present or past, not blue-printing the future. All such writing is essentially satiric (today-centred), not utopic (tomorrow-centred). This book, then, is a rather bilious rib on 1950 – on what 1950 might have been like if it had been allowed to fulfil itself, if it had gone on being 1950, only more and more so, for four more decades. But no year ever fulfils itself: the towpath of History is littered with the corpses of years, their silly throats slit from ear to ear by the improbable.

I am writing about the overtone and undertow of *now* – in the guise of 1990 because it would take decades for a year like 1950 to be milked of its implications. What 1990 will really look like I haven't the slightest idea. Nobody can train his mind to think effectively, without vertigo, in terms of accelerations and accelerated accelerations – and nobody can foretell Clio's pratfalls. On the spurious map of the future presented herein, on the far side of the pinpoint of now, I have to inscribe, as did the medieval cartographers over all the terrifying areas outside their ken: HERE LIVE LIONS. They could, of course, be unicorns, or hippographs, or even giraffes. I don't even know if there's going to *be* a 1990. Neither does ENIAC – I keep telling myself.



Bernard Wolfe was born in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1915. He vaguely remembers having spent some years at Yale, and has the impression that he passed the rest of the 1930s at sea – occupationally (there were very few jobs), politically (there were too many parties and movements), and sometimes literally (when he could find work in the merchant marine).

During the war he was a military correspondent for science magazines, and it was not until 1946 that he turned from journalism to fiction. Apart from *Limbo '90* he has written several television plays and recently completed a full-length play based on the assassination of Trotsky. His book *In Deep* has also been published in England.