



# THE SHEEP LOOKUP

JOHN  
BRUNNER

HUGO AND BRITISH SCIENCE  
FICTION AWARD-WINNER

THE SHEEP LOOK UP

John Brunner

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PROSPECTUS

The day shall dawn when never child but may  
Go forth upon the sward secure to play.  
No cruel wolves shall trespass in their nooks,  
Their lore of lions shall come from picture-books.  
No aging tree a falling branch shall shed  
To strike an unsuspecting infant's head.  
From forests shall be tidy copses born  
And every desert shall become a lawn.  
Lispings their stories with competing zest,  
One shall declare, "I come from out the West,  
Where Grandpa toiled the fearful sea to take  
And pen it tamely to a harmless lake!"  
Another shall reply, "My home's the East,  
Where, Mama says, dwelt once a savage beast  
Whose fangs he oft would bare in horrid rage—  
Indeed, I've seen one, safely in a cage!"  
Likewise the North, where once was only snow,  
The rule of halls and cottages shall know,  
The lovely music of a baby's laugh,  
The road, the railway and the telegraph,  
And eke the South; the oceans round the Pole  
Shall be domestic. What a noble goal!  
Such dreams unfailingly the brain inspire  
And to exploring Englishmen do fire ...

—"Christmas in the New Rome," 1860

CARNAGE

Hunted?  
By wild animals?

In broad daylight on the Santa Monica freeway? Mad! Mad!

It was the archetype of nightmare: trapped, incapable of moving, with monstrous menacing beasts edging closer. Backed up for better than a mile, three lanes trying to cram into an exit meant for two, reeking and stalking and roaring. For the time being, though, he was more afraid of running than of staying where he was.

Bright fangs repeating the gray gleam of the clouds, a cougar.  
Claws innocent of any sheath, a jaguar.

Winding up to strike, a cobra.

Hovering, a falcon. Hungry, a barracuda.

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However, when his nerve finally broke and he tried running, it wasn't any of these that got him, but a stingray.

## SIGNS OF THE TIMES

THIS BEACH NOT SAFE FOR SWIMMING

NOT Drinking Water

UNFIT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION

Now Wash Your Hands  
(Penalty for noncompliance \$50)

FILTERMASK DISPENSER  
Use product once only—maximum 1 hour

OXYGEN  
25¢

## NOT IN OUR STARS

The radio said, “You deserve security, Stronghold-style!” Blocking access to the company parking lot on the left of the street was a bus, huge, German, articulated, electric, discharging passengers. Waiting impatiently for it to move on, Philip Mason pricked up his ears. A commercial for a rival corporation?

The unctuous voice went on, backed by non-music from cellos and violas. “You deserve to sleep undisturbed. To go on vacations as long as you can afford, free from worry about the home you’ve left behind. Don’t they say a man’s home is his castle—and shouldn’t that be true for you?”

No. Not insurance. Some dirty property developer. What the hell was this bus stopped here for, anyhow? It belonged to the City of Los Angeles okay—right color, name painted on the side—but in place of a destination board it just had a stock sign, ON HIRE, and he couldn’t see details of its occupants through its grimy windows. But that was hardly surprising since his own windshield was grimy, too. He had been going to hit the horn; instead, he hit the wash-and-wipe stud, and a moment later was glad of the choice he’d made. Now he could discern half a dozen dull-faced kids, three black, two yellow, one white, and the head of a crutch. Oh.

The speech from the radio continued. “What we’ve done for you is build that castle. Nightly, armed men stand guard at all our gates, the only points of access through our spike-topped walls. Stronghold Estates employ the best-trained staff. Our watchmen are drawn from the police, our sharpshooters are all ex-Marines.”

Of whom there’s no shortage since they kicked us out of Asia. Ah, the bus signaling a move. Easing forward past its tail and noting from the corner of his eye a placard in its rear window which identified the hiring organization as Earth Community Chest Inc., he flashed his lights at the car next behind, asking permission to cut in front. It was granted, he accelerated—and an instant later had to jam the

brakes on again. A cripple was crossing the entrance to the lot, an Asiatic boy in his early teens, most likely Vietnamese, one leg shrunk and doubled up under the hip, his arms widespread to help him keep his balance on a sort of open aluminum cage with numerous straps.

Harold, thank God, isn't *that* bad.

All the armed gate-guards black. A prickling of sweat at the idea he might have run the boy down under the muzzles of their guns. Yellow means honorary black. It is sweet to have companions in adversity. And, thinking of companions—Oh, *shut up!*

"There's never any need to fear for your children," mused the radio. "Daily, armored buses collect them at your door, take them to the school of your choice. Never for a second are they out of sight of responsible, affectionate adults."

The boy completed his hirpling journey to where the sidewalk resumed, and Philip was finally able to ease his car forward. A guard recognized the company sticker on his windshield and hit the lift for the red-and-white pole that closed the lot. Sweating worse than ever, because he was horribly late and even though that wasn't his fault he was perfused with abstract guilt which made him feel vaguely that *everything* today was his fault, from the Baltimore bombings to the communist takeover in Bali, he stared around. Oh, shit. Packed solid. There wasn't one gap he could squeeze into without guidance unless he wasted more precious time in sawing back and forth with inches to spare.

"They will play in air-conditioned recreation halls," the radio promised. "And whatever medical attention they may need is on hand twenty-four hours per day—at low, low contract rates!"

All right for someone earning a hundred thousand a year. For most of us even contract rates are crippling; I should know. Aren't any of those guards going to help me park? Hell, no, all going back to their posts.

Furious, he wound down his window and made violent beckoning gestures. At once the air made him cough and his eyes started to water. He simply wasn't used to these conditions.

"And now a police flash," said the radio.

Maskless, his expression revealing a trace of—what? Surprise? Contempt?—something, anyway, which was a comment on this charley who couldn't even breathe straight air without choking, the nearest guard moved toward him, sighing.

"Rumors that the sun is out at Santa Ynez are without foundation," the radio said. "I'll repeat that." And did, barely audible against the drone of an aircraft invisible over cloud. Philip piled out, clawing a five-dollar bill from his pocket.

"Take care of this thing for me, will you? I'm Mason, Denver area manager. I'm late for a conference with Mr. Chalmers."

He got that much said before he doubled over in another fit of coughing. The acrid air ate at the back of his throat; he could imagine the tissues becoming horny, dense, impermeable. If this job's likely to involve me in frequent trips to LA I'm going to have to buy a filter-mask. And the hell with looking sissy. Saw on the way here it isn't only girls who wear them any more.

The radio mumbled on about extreme congestion affecting all roads northbound.

"Yeah," the guard said, taking the bill and rolling it neatly one-handed into a cylinder, like a joint. "Go right on in. They been expecting you."

He pointed across the lot to where an illuminated sign above a revolving door wished the world a merry Christmas from Angel City Interstate Mutual.

*Been* expecting? I sure hope that doesn't mean they gave up and went ahead without me!

Feet planted on signs of Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, as the revolving door hush-hushed. It turned

stiffly; the airtight seals around it must recently have been renewed. Beyond, a cool marble-walled foyer, also ornamented with zodiacal emblems. Angel City's publicity was geared to the idea of escaping the destiny you'd been born to, and both those who took astrology seriously and those who were sceptical appreciated the semi-poetical quality of the ad copy which resulted.

Here the air was not only purified but delicately perfumed. Waiting on a bench and looking bored, very pretty light-brown girl in a tight green dress, demurely sleeved, the skirt touching the neat Cuba—correction: Miranda—heels of her black shoes.

But slit to the waist in front. Moreover she was wearing pubic panties, with a tuft of fur at the crotch to suggest hair.

Last night in Vegas. Christ, I must have been out of my mind, knowing I had to sleep well, be in top form for today. But it didn't feel that way at the time. Just ... Oh, God, I wish I knew. Bravado? Craving for variety? Dennie, I swear I love you, I'm not going to throw my precious job away, won't even look at this girl! Chalmers's floor is three, isn't it? Where's the directory? Oh, behind those filtermask dispensers.

(Yet, intermixed, pride in working for this firm whose progressive image was carried clear through to ensuring that its secretaries wore the trendiest of clothes. That dress wasn't orlon or nylon, either; was wool.)

However, it was impossible not to look. She rose and greeted him with a broad smile.

"You're Philip Mason!" Her voice a trifle hoarse. Comforting to know that other people were affected by the air in LA. If only the huskiness didn't lend such a sexy quality ... "We met last time you were here, though probably you wouldn't remember. I'm Bill Chalmers's aide, Felice."

"Yes, I do remember you." The cough conquered, though a faint itchy sensation remained on his eyelids. The statement wasn't mere politeness, either—he did now recall her, but his last visit had been in summer and she'd been wearing a short dress and a different hairstyle.

"Is there somewhere I could wash up?" he added, displaying his palms to prove he meant *wash*. They were almost slimy with the airborne nastiness that had eluded the precipitator on his car. It wasn't designed to cope with California.

"Surely! Just along the hallway to the right. I'll wait for you."

The men's room bore the sign of Aquarius, as the women's did the sign of Virgo. Once when he first joined the company he'd raised a laugh clear around a group of his colleagues by suggesting that in the interests of true equality there should be only one door, marked Gemini. Today he wasn't in a joking mood.

Under the locked door of one of the cubicles: feet. Wary because of the incidence of men's-room muggings these days, he relieved himself with one eye fixed on that door. A faint sucking sound reached his ears, then a chinking. Christ, a syringe being filled! Not an addict with an expensive habit who's sneaked in there for privacy? Should I get out my gas gun?

That way lay paranoia. The shoes were elegantly shined, hardly those of an addict who neglected his appearance. Besides, it was over two years since he'd last been mugged. Things were improving. He moved toward the line of wash-basins, though he took care to select one whose mirror reflected the occupied cubicle.

Not wanting to leave greasy marks on the light fabric of his pants, he felt cautiously in his pocket for a coin to drop in the water-dispenser. Damnation. The dirty thing had been altered since his last visit. He had nickels and quarters, but the sign said only dimes. Wasn't there even one free one? No.

He was on the point of going back to ask Felice for change when the cubicle door swung open. A

dark-clad man emerged, shrugging back into a jacket whose right-hand side pocket hung heavy. His features struck a vague chord of memory. Philip relaxed. Neither an addict nor a stranger. Just a diabetic, maybe, or a hepatic. Looking well on it, either way, from his plump cheeks and ruddy complexion. But who ...?

“Ah! You must be here for this conference of Chalmers’s!” Striding forward, the not-stranger made to extend his hand, then canceled the gesture with a chuckle.

“Sorry, better wash up before shaking with you. Halkin out of San Diego, by the way.”

Tactful with it, too. “I’m Mason out of Denver. Ah—you don’t have a spare dime, do you?”

“Sure! Be my guest.”

“Thank you,” Philip muttered, and carefully stoppered the drain hole before letting the water run. He had no idea how much a dime bought you but if it was the same amount that had cost a nickel a year and a half ago it was barely enough to soap and rinse with. He was thirty-two, yet today he felt like a gangling teenager, insecure, confused. His skin itched as though it were dusty. The mirror told him it didn’t show, and his swept-back brown hair was still tidy, so that was all right, but Halkin was wearing practical clothes, almost black, whereas he himself had put on his newest and smartest gear—by Colorado standards, much influenced of course by the annual influx of the winter-sports jet set—and it was pale blue because Denise said it matched his eyes, and while it could never be crumpled it was already showing grime at collar and cuffs. Memo to self: next time I come to LA. ..

The water was terrible, not worth the dime. The soap—at least the company kept cakes of it on the basins, instead of demanding another dime for an impregnated tissue—barely lathered between his palms. When he rinsed his face a trickle ran into his mouth and he tasted sea-salt and chlorine.

“You got held up like me, I guess,” Halkin said, turning to dry his hands in the hot-air blower. That was free. “What was it—those filthy Trainites occupying Wilshire?”

Washing his face had been a mistake. There were no towels, paper or otherwise. Philip hadn’t thought to check beforehand. There’s this big thing about cellulose fibers in the water of the Pacific. He read about it and failed to make the connection. His sense of awkward teenageness worse than ever, he had to twist his head into the stream of warm air, meantime wondering: what do they do for toilet paper—round pebbles, Moslem-style?

Keep up the façade at all costs. “No, my delay was on the Santa Monica freeway.”

“Oh, yes. I heard traffic was very heavy today. Some rumor about the sun coming out?”

“It wasn’t that Some”—repressing the ridiculous impulse to make sure no one black was in earshot—such as Felice or the guards around the parking lot—“crazy spade jumped out of his car in the middle of a jam and tried to run across the other half of the road.”

“You don’t say. Stoned, was he?”

“I guess he must have been. Oh, thanks”—Halkin courteously holding the door. “Naturally the cars that were still moving in the fast lanes had to brake and swerve and *bang*, must have been forty of them bumped each other. Missed him by a miracle, not that it did him any good. The traffic coming away from the city was doing fifty-sixty at that point, and when he got across the divide he fell in front of a sports car.”

“Good lord.” This had brought them level with Felice, who was keeping an elevator for them, so they ushered her inside and Halkin hovered his hand over the floor-selection buttons. “Three, isn’t it?”

“No, we’re not in Bill’s office. We’re in the conference room on the seventh.”

“Was your car damaged?” Halkin went on.

“No, luckily mine wasn’t included in the shunt. But we had to sit there for more than half an hour before they got the road clear ... You said you were held up by Trainites?”

“Yes, on Wilshire.” Halkin’s professional smile gave way to a scowl. “Lousy dodgers, most of them, I bet! If I’d known I was sweating out my time for their sake ...! You did yours, of course?”

“Yes, of course, in Manila.”

“My stint was in ‘Nam and Laos.”

The car was slowing and they all glanced at the lighted numbers. But this wasn’t seven, it was five. The doors parted to reveal a woman with a spotty face who said under her breath, “Ah, shit!” And stepped into the car anyway.

“I’ll ride up with you and down again,” she added more loudly. “You could wait until doomsday in this filthy building.”

The windows of the conference room were bright yellow-gray. The proceedings had started without waiting for the last two arrivals; Philip was thankful that he wasn’t entering alone. Eight or nine men were present in comfortable chairs with foldaway flaps bearing books, notepads, personal recorders. Facing them across a table shaped like an undernourished boomerang: William Chalmers, vice-president in charge of interstate operations, a black-haired man in his late forties who had developed too much of a paunch to get away with the fashionable figure-hugging gear he was wearing. Standing interrupted by the intrusion: Thomas Grey, the company’s senior actuary, a bald lean man of fifty with such thick spectacles one could imagine their weight accounting for the habitual forward stoop of his shoulders. He looked put out; scratching absently under his left arm, he accorded no more than a curt nod by way of greeting.

Chalmers, however, welcomed the latecomers cordially enough, brushed aside their apologies, waved them to the remaining vacant places—right in the front row, of course. The wall-clock showed two minutes of eleven instead of the scheduled ten-thirty. Trying to ignore it, Philip picked up a folder of papers from his assigned chair and distributed mechanical smiles to those of his colleagues with whom he could claim casual acquaintance.

Casual ...

Don’t think about Laura. Dennie, I love you! I love Josie, I love Harold, I love my family! But if only you hadn’t insisted on my—

Oh, shut up. Talk about mountains out of molehills!

But his situation was precarious, after all. Notoriously, he was by nearly seven years the youngest of Angel City’s area managers: LA, Bay, SoCal, Oregon, Utah, Arizona, NM, Texas, Colorado. Texas due for subdivision next year, the grapevine said, but as yet it hadn’t happened. That meant that his footsteps were being hounded by hordes of skilled, degree-equipped unemployed. He had six salesmen with Ph.D.’s. Running to stay in the same place ...

“If we can continue?” Grey said. Philip composed himself. The first time he had met the actuary he had assumed him to be a dry extension of his computers, lost in a world where only numbers possessed reality. Since then, however, he had learned that it had been Grey who hit on the notion of adopting astrological symbolism for the firm’s promotional material, and thereby endowed Angel City with its unique status as the only major insurance company whose business among clients under thirty was expanding as fast as the proportion of the population they represented. Anyone with that much insight was worth listening to.

“Thank you. I was just explaining why you’ve come.”

Eyes rolling back to the limits of their sockets, mouth ajar, breath hissing in her throat! Useless denying it to myself. No woman ever made me feel more like a man!

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Philip touched the inside of his cheek with the tip of his tongue. She had slapped him back-handed and marched out of the motel cabin with blazing eyes because he had offered her money. There was a cut. It had bled for five minutes. It was next to his right upper canine, all his life the sharpest of his teeth.

“It’s because,” Grey continued, “of the hike in life insurance premiums we’re going to impose from January first. Of course we’ve always predicated our quotations on the assumption that life expectancy in the United States would continue to rise. But during the past three years it has in fact started to go down.”

## A ROOST FOR CHICKENS

Sharp on nine the Trainites had scattered caltraps in the roadway and created a monumental snarl-up twelve blocks by seven. The fuzz, as usual, was elsewhere—there were always plenty of sympathizers willing to cause a diversion. It was impossible to guess how many allies the movement had; at a rough guess, though, one could say that in New York City, Chicago, Detroit, LA or San Francisco people were apt to cheer, while in the surrounding suburbs or the Midwest people were apt to go fetch guns. In other words, they had least support in the areas which had voted for Prexy.

Next, the stalled cars had their windows opaqued with a cheap commercial compound used for etching glass, and slogans were painted on their doors. Some were long: THIS VEHICLE IS A DANGER TO LIFE AND LIMB. Many were short: IT STINKS! But the commonest of all was the universally known catchphrase: STOP, YOU’RE KILLING ME!

And in every case the inscription was concluded with a rough egg-shape above a saltire—the simplified ideogrammatic version of the invariable Trainite symbol, a skull and crossbones reduced to [??].

Then, consulting printed data-sheets, many of which were flapping along the gutter hours later in the wind of passing cars, they turned to the nearby store-windows and obscured the goods on offer with similarly appropriate slogans. Unprejudiced, they found something apt for every single store. It wasn’t too hard.

Delighted, kids on the afternoon school shift joined in the job of keeping at bay angry drivers, store clerks and other meddlers. Some of them weren’t smart enough to get lost when the fuzz arrived—by helicopter after frantic radio messages—and made their first trip to Juvenile Hall. But what the hell? They were of an age to realize a conviction was a keen thing to have. Might stop you being drafted. Might save your life.

Most of the drivers, however, had the sense to stay put, fuming behind their blank windshields as they calculated the cost of repairs and repainting. Practically all of them were armed, but not one was stupid enough to pull a gun. It had been tried during a Trainite demonstration in San Francisco last month. A girl had been shot dead. Others, anonymous in whole-head masks and drab mock-homespun clothing, had dragged the killer from his car and used the same violent acid they applied to glass to write MURDERER on his flesh.

In any case, there was little future in rolling down a window to curse the demonstrators. Throats didn’t last long in the raw air.

## ENTRAINED

“It’s easy enough to make people understand that cars and guns are inherently dangerous. —

Statistically, almost everyone in the country now has experience of a relative being shot dead either at home or abroad, while the association between cars and traffic fatalities opens the public mind to the concept of other, subtler threats.”

### MASTER MOTOR MART

New & Used Cars

*Lead: causes subnormality in children and other disorders. Exceeds 12 mg. per m<sup>3</sup>. in surface water off California. Probable contributory factor in decline of Roman Empire whose upper class ate food cooked in lead pans and drank wine fermented in lead-lined vats. Common sources are paint, antiknock gas where still in use, and wildfowl from marshes etc. contaminated over generations by lead shot in the water.*

“On the other hand it’s far harder to make it clear to people that such a superficially innocuous firm as a beauty parlor is dangerous. And I don’t mean because some women are allergic to regular cosmetics.”

Nanette’s Beauty Center  
Cosmetics, Perfumery & Wigs

*Polychlorinated biphenyls: waste products of the plastics, lubrication and cosmetics industries. Universal distribution at levels similar to DDT, less toxic but having more marked effect on steroid hormones. Found in museum specimens collected as early as 1944. Known to kill birds.*

“Similarly it’s a short mental step from the notion of killing plants or insects to the notion of killing animals and people. It didn’t take the Vietnam disaster to spell that out—it was foreshadowed in everybody’s mind.”

FARM & GARDEN INC.  
Landscaping & Pest Control Experts

*Pelican, brown: failed to breed in California where formerly common, 1969 onward, owing to estrogenic effect of DDT on shell secretion. Eggs collapsed when hen birds tried to brood them.*

“By contrast, now that we scarcely make use of the substances which used to constitute the bulk of the pharmacopoeia and which were clearly recognizable as poisonous because of their names—arsenic, strychnine, mercury and so on—people seem to assume that any medical drug is good, period. I wasted more of my life than I care to recall going around farms trying to discourage pig and chicken breeders from buying feeds that contained antibiotics, and they simply wouldn’t listen. They held that the more of the stuff you scattered around the better. So developing new drugs to replace those wastes in cake for cattle, pap for pigs and pellets for pullets has become like the race between guns and armor!”

Train, Austin P. (Proudfoot): b. Los Angeles 1938; e. UCLA (B.Sc. 1957), Univ. Coll. London (Ph.D. 1961); m. 1960 Clara Alice née Shoolman, div. 1963, n.c.; a. c/o publishers. Pub: thesis, "Metabolic Degradation of Complex Organophosphates" (Univ. of London Press 1962); "The Great Epidemics" (Potter & Vasarely 1965, rep. as "Death In the Wind," Common Sense Books 1972); "Studies in Refractive Ecology" (P&V 1968, rep. as "The Resistance Movement in Nature," CSB 1972); "Preservatives and Additives in the American Diet" (P&V 1971, rep. as "You Are What You Have To Eat," CSB 1972); "Guide to the Survival of Mankind" (International Information Inc., boards 1972, paper 1973); "A Handbook for 3000 A.D." (III, boards 1973, paper 1975); crt. J. Biol. Sci., J. Ecol., J. Biosph., Intl. Ecol. Rev., Nature, Sci. Am., Proc. Acad. Life Sci., Sat. Rev., New Ykr., New Sci. (London), Envrmt. (London), Paris Match, Der Spiegel (Bonn), Blitz (India), Manchete (Rio) etc

### IT'S A GAS

Leaving behind half his lonely brunch (not that the coffee shop where he'd eaten regularly now for almost a year wasn't crowded with lunchers, but sitting next to the fuzz is prickly), Pete Goddard waited for change to be made for him. Across the street, on the big billboards enclosing the site of Harrigan's Harness and Feed Store—it had kept the name although for years before it was demolished it had sold snowmobiles, motorcycle parts and dude Western gear—which now was scheduled to become forty-two desirable apartments and the Towerhill home of American Express and Colorado Chemical Bank, someone had painted about a dozen black skulls and crossbones.

Well, he was feeling a little that way himself. Last night had been a party: first wedding anniversary. His mouth tasted foul and his head ached and moreover Jeannie had had to get up at the ordinary time because she worked too, at the Bamberley hydroponics plant, and he'd broken his promise to clear away the mess so she wouldn't be faced with it this evening. Besides, that patch on her leg, even if it didn't hurt ... But they had good doctors at the plant. Had to have.

New, not disposed to like him, the girl cashier dropped his due coins in his palm and turned back to conversation with a friend.

The wall-clock agreed with his watch that he had eight minutes to make the four-minute drive to the station house. Moreover, it was bitterly cold outside, down to around twenty with a strong wind. Fine for the tourists on the slopes of Mount Hawes, not good for the police who measured temperature on graph of smashed cars, frostbite cases and petty thefts committed by men thrown out of seasonal work.

And women, come to that.

So maybe before going ... By the door, a large red object with a mirror on the upper part of its front. Installed last fall. Japanese. On a plate at the side: *Mitsuyama Corp., Osaka*. Shaped like a weighing machine. Stand here and insert 25¢. Do not smoke while using. Place mouth and nose to soft black flexible mask. Like an obscene animal's kiss.

Usually he laughed at it because up here in the mountains the air was never so bad you needed to tank up on oxygen to make the next block. On the other hand some people did say it was a hell of a good cure for a hangover...

More detail penetrated his mind. Noticing detail was something he prided himself on; when his probationary period was through, he was going to shoot for detective. Having a good wife could spawn ambition in any man's mind.

The mirror cut in a curve to fit around the mouthpiece: cracked. Slot for quarters. Below it a line defining the coin-hopper. Around that line, scratches. As though someone had tried to pry the box out with a knife.

Pete thought of bus-drivers murdered for the contents of a change machine.

Turning back to the counter he said, "Miss!"

"What?"

"That oxygen machine of yours—"

"Ah, shit!" the girl said, hitting "No Sale" on the register. "Don't tell me the stinking thing is on the fritz *again!* Here's your quarter back. Go try the drugstore on Tremont—they have three."

## THE OPPOSITE OF OVENS

White tile, white enamel, stainless steel ... One spoke here in hushed tones, as though in a church. But that was because of the echoes from the hard walls, hard floor, hard ceiling, not out of respect for what was hidden behind the oblong doors, one above another from ankle-level to the height of a tall man's head, one next to another almost as far as the eye could see. Like an endless series of ovens, except that they weren't to cool, but to chill.

The man walking ahead of her was white, too—coat, pants, surgical mask at present dangling below his chin, tight ugly cap around his hair. Even plastic overshoes also white. Apart from what she had brought in with her, dull brown, there was effectively only one other color in here.

Blood-red.

A man going the other way wheeling a trolley laden with waxed-paper containers (white) labeled (red) for delivery to the labs attached to this morgue. While he and her companion exchanged hellos, Peg Mankiewicz read some of the directions: 108562 SPLEEN SUSP TYPH CULT, 108563 LIVER VERIFY DEGEN CHGES, 108565 MARSH TEST.

"What's a Marsh test?" she said.

"Presence of arsenic," Dr. Stanway answered, sidling past the trolley and continuing down the long line of corpse closets. He was a pale man, as though his environment had bleached every strong tint out of him; his cheeks had the shade and texture of the organ containers, his visible hair was ash-blond, and his eyes were the dilute blue of shallow water. Peg found him more tolerable than the rest of the morgue staff. He was devoid of emotion—either that, or absolutely homosexual—and never plagued her with the jocular passes most of his colleagues indulged in.

Shit. Maybe I should take a wash in vitriol!

She was beautiful: slim, five-six, with satin skin, huge dark eyes, a mouth juicier than peaches. Especially modern peaches. But she hated it because it meant she was forever being hounded by men collecting pubic scalps. Coming on butch was no help; it was that much more of a challenge to men and started the ki-ki types after her as well. Without make-up, perfume or jewelry, in a deliberately unflattering brown coat and drab shoes, she still felt like a pot of honey surrounded by noisy flies.

Poised to unzip if she so much as smiled.

To distract herself she said, "A murder case?"

"No, that suit someone filed in Orange County. Accused a fruit grower of using an illegal spray." Eyes roaming the numbered doors. "Ah, here we are."

But he didn't open the compartment at once.

"He isn't pretty, you know," he said after a pause. "The car splattered his brains all over

everywhere.”

Peg buried her hands in the pockets of her coat so that he couldn't see how pale her knuckles were. It might, just conceivably might be a thief who'd stolen his ID. ...

“Go ahead,” she said.

And it wasn't a thief.

The whole right-hand side of the dark head was—well, *soft*. Also the lower eyelid had been torn away and only roughly laid back where it belonged, so the underside of the eyeball was exposed. A graze clotted with blood rasped from the level of the mouth down and out of sight beneath the chin. And the crown was so badly smashed, they'd put a kind of Saran sack around it, to hold it together.

But it was pointless to pretend this wasn't Decimus.

“Well?” Stanway said at length.

“Yes, put him away.”

He complied. Turning to lead her to the entrance again, he said, “How did you hear about this? And what makes the guy so important?”

“Oh ... People call the paper, you know. Like ambulance-drivers. We give them a few bucks for tipping us off.”

As though floating ahead of her like a horrible sick-joke balloon on a string: the softened face. She swallowed hard against nausea.

“And he's—I mean he was—one of Austin Train's top men.”

Stanway turned his head sharply. “No wonder you're interested, then! Local guy, was he? I heard Trainites were out in force again today.”

“No, from Colorado. Runs—ran—a wat near Denver.”

They had come to the end of the corridor between the anti-ovens. With the formal politeness due to her sex, which she ordinarily detested but could accept from this man on a host-and-guest basis, Stanway held the door for her to pass through ahead of him and noticed her properly for the first time since her arrival.

“Say! Would you like to—uh ...?” A poor communicator, this Stanway, at least where women were concerned. “Would you like to sit down? You're kind of green.”

“No thanks!” Over-forcefully. Peg hated to display any sign of weakness for fear it might be interpreted as “feminine.” She relented fractionally a second later. Of all the men she knew she suspected this one least of hoping to exploit chinks in her guard.

“You see,” she admitted, “I knew him.”

“Ah.” Satisfied “A close friend?”

There was another corridor here, floored with soft green resilient composition and wallpapered with drifts of monotonous Muzak. A girl came out of a gilt-lettered door bearing a tray of coffee-cups. Peg scented fragrant steam.

“Yes ... Have the police sent anyone to check on him?”

“Not yet. I hear they're kind of overloaded. The demonstration, I guess.”

“Did they take his belongings from the car?”

“I guess they must have. We didn't even get his ID— just one of those forms they fill out at the scene of the accident.” Dealing with Christ knew how many such per day, Stanway displayed no particular interest. “Way I read it, though, they'd be concerned. Must have been stoned to do what he did. And if he was one of Train's top men they're bound to show up soon, aren't they?”

They hadn't yet reached the door to the outside, but Peg hastily put on her filtermask.

It covered so much of her traitorous face.

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It was a long walk to where she had left her car: a Hailey, of course, on principle. Her vision was so blurred by the time she reached it—not merely because the air stung her eyes—that she twice tried to put the key in the lock upside-down. When she finally realized, she was so annoyed she broke a nail dragging open the door.

And thrust the finger into her mouth and instead of nibbling away the broken bit, tore it. Her finger bled.

But at least the pain offered an anchor to reality. Calming, she wrapped around the injury a tissue from the glove-compartment and thought about calling in her story. It was a story. It would make the TV news services as well as the paper. Killed on the freeway: Decimus Jones, age thirty, busted twice for pot and once for assault, smeared with an average quantity of the grime a young black nowadays expected to acquire. But suddenly reformed (it says here) by the precepts of Austin Train at twenty-six, mastermind of Trainite operations when they spread to Colorado ... not that he would have acknowledged the name “Trainite” any more than Austin did. Austin said the proper term was “commie”, for “commensalist,” meaning that you and your dog, and the flea on the dog’s back, and the cow and the horse and the jackrabbit and the gopher and the nematode and the paramecium and the spirochete all sit down to the same table in the end. But that had been just a debating point, when he got sick of people screaming at him that he was a traitor.

Ought to make sure Decimus gets returned to the biosphere right away. Forgot to mention that. Should I go back? Hell, I guess he put it in his will. If they take any notice of a black man’s will ...

Somebody’s going to have to tell Austin. It would be terrible if he first learned the news in print or from TV.

Me?

Oh, shit Yes. I’m the first to latch on. So it has to be me.

Her mind was abruptly a chaos of muddled images, as though three people had taken simultaneous possession of her head. Stanway by chance had asked precisely that question she felt constrained to answer honestly: “A close friend?”

Close? More like only! Why? Because he was black and happily married and not interested any more in the exoticism of white girls? (Who’ll tell Zena and the kids?) Partly, maybe. But what mattered was that Decimus Jones, healthy, male and hetero, had treated luscious tempting Peg Mankiewicz ... as a friend.

It had better be Austin who tells Zena. I *couldn’t*. And a merry Christmas to you all.

After that the confusion became total. She could foresee events fanning out from this death as though she were reading a crystal ball. Everyone would automatically echo Stanway: “Jumping out of his car that way he must have been stoned—or maybe crazy!”

Yet she’d known him as a very sane man, and being stoned belonged too far back in his past So it could never have been of his own volition. So somebody must have slipped him a cap of something fierce. And there was only one motive she could think of for doing that. To discredit him at any cost.

She suddenly realized she had been staring, without seeing, at proof of a Trainite’s passage through this parking lot, a skull and crossbones on the door of a car parked slantwise to hers. Her own, naturally, would be unmarked.

Yes. It must have been done to discredit Decimus. Must have. These stereotyped interchangeable

plastic people with dollar signs in their eyes couldn't bear to share their half-ruined planet with anyone who climbed out of his ordained grooves. A black JD dropout was meant to die in a street brawl, or better yet in jail partway through a spell of ninety-nine. For him to be loved and looked up like a doctor or a priest, by white as well as black—that turned their stomachs!

Turned stomach. Oh, Christ. She fumbled in her purse for a pill she should have taken over an hour ago. And forced it down despite its size without water.

Usually, nowadays, one had to.

Finally she decided she was getting maudlin and twisted the key in the dashboard lock. There was steam stored from the trip to get here and the car moved silently and instantly away.

And cleanly. No lead alkyls, hardly any CO, nothing worse than CO<sub>2</sub> and water. Praise be, if Anyone is listening, for those who struggle to save us from the consequences of our own mad cleverness.

At the exit from the lot, if she had been going to the office she would have turned right. Instead she turned left. There were probably not more than a hundred people in the country who could rely on locating Austin Train when they wanted to. If her editor had known that among them was one of his own reporters who had never used the information for professional purposes, he would have come after her with a gun.

#### THE BLEEDING HEART IS A RUNNING SORE

*... veteran of campaigns in Indochina and the Philippines today became the latest of many distinguished ex-officers to join the Double-V adoption plan, taking into his family an orphaned girl aged eight with severe scars allegedly due to napalm burns. Commenting on his decision the general said, quote, I was not at war with children, only with those seeking the destruction of our way of life. End quote. Questioned concerning his reaction to the growth of the Double-V scheme prior to leaving the White House for his main engagement of the day, a luncheon organized by former members of his official fan club at which he is slated to deliver a major speech on foreign affairs, Prexy said, quote, guess if they can't break down the front door they have to sneak around the back. End quote. The Congressional inquiry into alleged bribe-taking by officials of the Federal Land Use Commission...*

#### THE ROOT OF THE TROUBLE

“Te-goosey-goosey-galpa—” The rain was pelting down so hard the wipers of the Land Rover could barely cope, and the road was terrible. Despite four-wheel drive they were continually sliding and skidding, and every now and then they met a pothole which made Leonard Ross wince.

“Knock 'er down and scalp 'er—”

Dr. Williams's singing was barely audible above the roar of the engine and the hammering of the rain, but it was just possible to discern that the tune belonged to a nursery rhyme: Goosey Gander.

“Up hers! H' and your ass—”

Another pothole. Leonard reflexively glanced back to see if his equipment was okay, and wished he hadn't. The rear seat was also occupied by the policeman assigned to escort him, who had a repulsive weeping skin condition, and Leonard's stomach was queasy enough anyhow.

“Nobody will *halp* 'er!” concluded Williams triumphantly, and added without drawing a fresh breath, “How long have you been with Globe Relief?”

“Oh ...” For an instant Leonard didn't realize the question was a question. “About four years now.”

“And you've never been to this part of the world before?”

“I’m afraid not.”

“Bloody typical!” With a snort. “At least I hope they gave you all the gen?”

Leonard nodded. They had submerged him with masses of data, and his head was still ringing. But this country was so full of paradoxes! To start with, when he’d seen that the name of his contact at Guanagua was Williams, he’d assumed an American. He hadn’t been prepared for a manic Briton who wore a Harris tweed jacket in this stinking sub-tropical humidity. Yet it seemed of a piece with a nation whose first capital, for 357 years, had been demoted because the citizens objected to the governor keeping a mistress; whose current capital was so relatively unimportant it had never had a railroad, and the international airlines had given up servicing it ...

“Every time someone tries to haul this country up by its bootstraps,” Williams said, “something goes wrong. Act of God! Though if that’s really how He likes to amuse Himself, no wonder the Tupamaros are making so much headway! Not around here, of course, but in the cities. Look at this road! By local standards it’s a ruddy highway. It’s so damned difficult to get goods to market, most people haven’t the currency to buy manufactured goods, even proper tools. But now and then someone whips up enthusiasm for cash crops instead of subsistence crops—cotton, coffee, that sort of thing—and it swings along for a while and then all of a sudden, crash. Their hard work goes for nothing. Like this time. Come and see for yourself.”

Unexpectedly he braked the Land Rover at a spot where rocks as high as a man’s knee flanked the track. Peering through the rain-smearing windshield, Leonard made out that they had arrived within sight of a shabby village surrounded on two sides by lines of coffee plants, on the others by maize and beans. The layout suggested competent husbandry, but every single plant was wilted.

Jumping out, Williams added, “Bring your gear!”

“Ah—”

“Look, the rain isn’t going to stop for bloody weeks, you know, so you might as well get used to it!”

Reluctantly Leonard picked up his field kit and ducked into the downpour. His glasses blurred instantly, but his sight was too bad for him to discard them. Water trickling down his collar, he followed the line Williams had marked across the sodden ground.

“Doesn’t matter where you look,” Williams said, stopping level with the nearest coffee plant. “You’ll find the buggers anywhere.”

Compliantly Leonard began to trowel in the mud. He said after a pause, “You’re English, aren’t you doctor?”

“Welsh, actually.” In a frigid tone.

“Do you mind if I ask what brought you here?”

“A girl, if you really want to know.”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to—”

“Pry? Of course not. But I’ll tell you anyway. She was the daughter of one of the embassy staff in London. Very beautiful. I was twenty-four, she was nineteen. But her people were Catholics from Comayagua, where they’re strict, and naturally they didn’t want her marrying a Methodist. So they shipped her home. I finished my studies, saving like mad to buy a passage here, thinking that if I could convince them I was serious ... Hell, I’d have converted if I’d had to!”

Down there close to the scrawny root of the coffee plant: something wriggling. “And what happened?”

“I got here and discovered she was dead.”

“What?”

“Typhus. It’s endemic. And this was 1949.”

There seemed to be nothing else anyone could possibly say. Leonard dragged up a clod of dirt and broke it in his hands. Exposed, a frantic creature two inches long, at first glance not unlike an earthworm, but of a bluish-red color, with a slight thickening at one end and a few minute bristles, and writhing with more energy than any earthworm ever had.

“Yet, you know, I’ve never regretted staying here. There has to be someone on the spot to help these people—it’s no use trying to do it all by remote control ... Ah, you got one of them, did you?” His tone reverted to normal. “Recognize it, by any chance? I can’t find a technical name for it in the literature. Of course my reference-books aren’t up to much. In Spanish it’s *sotojuela*, but around here they say *jigra*.”

One-handed, leaving fingermarks of mud, Leonard extracted a test-tube from his kit and dropped the pest into it. He tried to examine it with his folding glass, but the rain splashed down too heavily.

“If I could get a look at it under cover,” he muttered.

There may be a roof in the village that isn’t leaking. May be ... And this is what the buggers do to the plants, see?” Williams pulled a coffee bush casually out of the ground. It offered no resistance. The stem was spongy with bore-holes and the foliage limp and sickly.

“They attack corn and beans as well?” Leonard asked.

“Haven’t found anything they won’t eat yet!”

In the hole left by the uprooted plant, five or six of them squirming to hide.

“And how long have they been a nuisance?”

“They’ve always been a nuisance,” Williams said. “But until—oh, about the time they cleared this patch for coffee, you only found them in the forest, living off the underbrush. I didn’t see more than half a dozen the first ten years I spent at Guanagua. Then about two and a half years ago, boom!”

Leonard straightened, his legs grateful to be released from stooping. “Well, there’s no doubt that this is an emergency, as you claimed. So I’ll apply for authorization to use high-strength insecticides and then when we’ve—”

“How long did you say you’d been with Globe Relief?”

Leonard blinked at him. Suddenly he was unaccountably angry.

“Who do you think this ground belongs to, anyway? We’re on the private estate of some high government muckamuck who can bend the law as much as he likes! This area’s been sprayed and soaked and *saturated* with insecticides!”

From the direction of the village, walking very slowly, a straggling line of men, women and children had emerged. All were thin, all were ragged and barefoot, and several of the children had the belly-bloat characteristic of pellagra.

“The idiot’s made the *jigras* resistant to DDT, heptachlor, dieldrin, pyrethrum, the bloody lot! This I was such a fool the idea hadn’t crossed my mind to check? Those people don’t need chemicals, they need *food!*”

DEFICIT

*Petronella Page:* Hi, world!

*Studio audience:* Hi!

*Page:* Well, this time as ever we have for you all kinds of people making news. Among others we’d like to welcome Big Mama Prescott whose hit “The Man with the Forty-Five” is currently the center of a fierce debate about the proper—or improper—material for pop songs. (*Audience laughter.*) And then we’ll be talking to a whole group of the ex-officers who’ve given so many children from Southeast Asia the best of all Christmas presents, a new home and a new family. But first off let’s welcome

someone who's been making headlines in a different area. He's a scientist, and you've been hearing about him because—well, because if his calculations are right they bode not too well for the future of this nation. Here he is, Professor Lucas Quarrey of Columbia. (*Applause.*)

*Quarrey:* Good eve—I mean, hello, everyone.

*Page:* Lucas, because not as much attention is paid to scientific matters these days as perhaps ought to be, maybe you'd refresh the viewers' memories concerning the subject that put you in the news.

*Quarrey:* Gladly, and if there's someone watching who hasn't heard about this it'll come as—uh—as much of a surprise as it did to me when I first saw the print-out from the university computers. Asked to guess what's the largest single item imported by the United States, people might nominate lots of things—iron, aluminum, copper, many raw materials we no longer possess in economic quantities.

*Page:* And they'd be wrong?

*Quarrey:* Very wrong indeed. And they'd be just as wrong if they were asked to name our largest single export, too.

*Page:* So what is our largest import?

*Quarrey:* Ton for ton—oxygen. We produce less than sixty per cent of the amount we consume.

*Page:* And our biggest export?

*Quarrey:* Ton for ton again, it's noxious gases.

*Page:* Ah, now this is where the controversy has arisen, isn't it? A lot of people have been wondering how you can claim to trace—oh, smoke from New Jersey clear across the Atlantic. Particularly since you're not a meteorologist or weather scientist. What is your specialty in fact?

*Quarrey:* Particle precipitation. I'm currently heading a research project designing more compact and efficient filters.

*Page:* For what—cars?

*Quarrey:* Oh yes. And buses, and factories too. But mainly for aircraft cabins. We have a commission from a major airline to try and improve cabin air at high altitude. On the most traveled routes the air is so full of exhaust fumes from other planes, passengers get airsick even on a dead calm day—*especially* on a dead calm day, because it takes longer for the fumes to disperse.

*Page:* So you had to start by analyzing what you needed to filter out, right?

*Quarrey:* Precisely. I designed a gadget to be mounted on the wing of a plane and catch the contaminants on little sticky plates—I have one here, I don't know if your viewers can see it clearly ... Yes? Fine. Well, each unit has fifty of these plates, time-switched to collect samples at various stages of a journey. And by plotting the results on a map I've been able to pin down—like you said—factory-smoke from New Jersey over nearly two thousand miles.

*Page:* Lots of people argue that can't be done with the accuracy you claim.

*Quarrey:* I wish the people who say that would take the trouble to find out what my equipment is capable of.

*Page:* Now this is all very disturbing, isn't it? Most people have the impression that since the passage of the Environment Acts things have taken a turn for the better.

*Quarrey:* I'm afraid this seems to be—uh—an optical illusion, so to speak. For one thing, the Acts don't have enough teeth. One can apply for all kinds of postponements, exemptions, stays of execution, and of course companies which would have their profits shaved by complying with the new regulations use every possible means to evade them. And the other point is that we aren't being as watchful as we used to be. There was a brief flurry of anxiety a few years ago, and the Environment Acts were introduced, as you said, and ever since then we've been sitting back assuming the situation

was being taken care of, although in fact it isn't.

*Page:* I see. Now what do you say to people who maintain that publicizing these allegations of you is—well, not in the best interests of this country?

*Quarrey:* You don't serve your country by sweeping unpleasant facts under the carpet. We're not exactly the most popular nation in the world right now, and my view is that we ought to put a stop right away to anything that's apt to make us even less well liked.

*Page:* I guess there could be something in that. Well, thanks for coming and talking to us, Lucas. Now, right after this next break for station identification...

## IN SPITE OF HAVING CHARITY A MAN LIKE SOUNDING BRASS

"I guess the nearest analogy would be with cheese," said Mr. Bamberly. To show he was paying attention Hugh Pettingill gave a nod. He was twenty, dark-haired, brown-eyed, with a permanently bad-tempered set to his face—pouting mouth, narrowed eyes, prematurely creased forehead. That had been stamped on him during the bad years from fourteen to nineteen. Allegedly this was the first of many good years he was currently living through, and he was fair-minded enough to expose himself to the possibility of being convinced.

This had started with an argument concerning his future. During it he had said something to the effect that the rich industrial countries were ruining the planet, and he was determined never to have anything to do with commerce, or technology, or the armed forces for which Mr. Bamberley retained an archaic admiration. Whereupon: this instruction, too firmly phrased to be termed an invitation, to go on a guided tour of the hydroponics plant and find out how constructively technology might be applied.

"I don't see why we shouldn't improve on nature!" Mr. Bamberley had chuckled.

Hugh had kept his counter to himself: "So what has to happen before you realize you haven't?"

Portly, but muscular, Mr. Bamberley strode along the steel walkway that spined the roof of the factory, his arms shooting to left and right as he indicated the various stages through which the hydroponically-grown cassava they started with had to pass before it emerged as the end product, "Nutripon." There was a vaguely yeasty smell under the huge semi-transparent dome, as though a baker's shop had been taken over by oil technicians.

And in some senses that was an apt comparison. The Bamberley fortune had been made in oil, though that was two generations back and neither this Mr. Bamberley—whose Christian name was Jacob but who preferred to be called Jack—nor his younger brother Roland had ever stumped around in the slush below a derrick. The fortune had long ago grown to the point where it was not only self-supporting but capable of fission, like an amoeba. Roland's portion was his own, greedily clung to, and destined to descend to his only son Hector (whom Hugh regarded on the strength of their sole meeting as a cotton-wool-wrapped snob ... but that couldn't be his fault at fifteen, must be his father's); Jacob had vested his in the Bamberley Trust Corporation twenty years ago, since when it had multiplied cancerously.

Hugh had no idea how many people were involved in cultivating the funds of the Trust, since he had never been to the New York office where its tenders hung out, but he pictured a blurred group of several hundred pruning, manuring, watering. The horticultural images came readily to hand because his adopted father had turned the former family ranch, here in Colorado, into one of the finest botanical gardens in the country. All that had taken on reality in his mind, however, as far as the Trust was concerned, was the central fact that the sum was now so vast, Jacob Bamberley could afford to run this, the world's largest hydroponics factory, as a charitable undertaking. Employing six hundred

people, it sold its product at cost and sometimes below, and every last ounce of what was made here was shipped abroad.

Lord Bountiful. Well, it was a better way to use inherited money than the one Roland had chosen, lavishing it all on yourself and your son so that he would never have to face the harsh real world ...

“Cheese,” Mr. Bamberley said again. They were overlooking a number of perfectly round vats in which something that distantly resembled spaghetti was being churned in a clear steaming liquid. A masked man in a sterile coverall was taking samples from the vats with a long ladle.

“You give it some kind of chemical treatment here?” Hugh ventured. He hoped this wasn’t going to drag on too long; he’d had diarrhea this morning and his stomach was grumbling again.

“Minor correction,” Mr. Bamberley said, eyes twinkling. “ ‘Chemical’ is full of wrong association. Cassava is tricky to handle, though, because its rind contains some highly poisonous compounds. Still there’s nothing extraordinary about a plant some bits of which are safe to eat and other bits of which are not. Probably you can think of other examples?”

Hugh repressed a sigh. He had never said so outright, being far too conscious of the obligations he owed to Jack (orphaned at fourteen in an urban insurrection, dumped in an adolescents’ hostel, picked apparently at random to be added to this plump smiling man’s growing family of adopted sons: so far eight), but there were times when he found his habit of asking this kind of question irritating. It was the mannerism of a poor teacher who had grasped the point about making children find out for themselves but not the technique of making them want to ask suitable questions.

He said tiredly, “Potato tops.”

“Very good!” Mr. Bamberley clapped him on the shoulder and turned once more to point at the factory floor.

“Considering the complexity of the treatment which is required before cassava yields an edible product—”

Ah, shit. He’s off on another of his lousy lectures.

“—and the unlikelihood of anyone stumbling on it by accident, it’s always struck me as one of the clearest proofs of supernal intervention in the affairs of primitive mankind,” Mr. Bamberley declaimed. “Here’s no comparative triviality like oxalic acid, but the deadliest of poisons, cyanide! Yet for centuries people have relied on cassava as a staple diet, and survived, and indeed flourished! Isn’t it marvelous when you think of it like that?”

Maybe. Except I *don’t* think of it like that. I picture desperate men struggling on the verge of starvation, trying everything that occurs to them in the faint hope that the next person who samples this strange plant won’t drop dead.

“Coffee’s another case. Who, without prompting, would have thought of drying the berries, husking them, roasting them, then grinding them and *then* infusing them in water?” Mr. Bamberley’s voice was rising toward sermon pitch. All of a sudden, though, it dropped back to a normal level.

“So calling this a ‘chemical process’ is misleading. What we really do is cook the stuff! But there’s one major drawback in relying on cassava as a staple. I may have mentioned ...?”

“Shortage of protein,” Hugh said, thinking of himself as one of those question-and-answer toys they give children, with little lights which come on when the proper button is pressed.

“Right in one!” Mr. Bamberley beamed. “Which is why I compare our job to making cheese. Here”—flinging open the door to the next section of the plant, a vast twilight room where spidery metal girders supported shielded ultraviolet lamps—“we fortify the protein content of the mix. With absolutely natural substances: yeasts, and fungi with especially high nutritive value. If all goes well

we turn as much as eight per cent of the cassava into protein, but even six per cent, the average yield, is a vast improvement.”

Walking ahead as he talked toward yet another section where the finished product was draped in huge skeins on drying-racks, like knitting-wool, then chopped into finger-sized lengths.

“And you know something else extraordinary? Cassava’s a tropical plant, of course. Yet it grows better here than under so-called ‘natural’ conditions. Do you know why?”

Hugh shook his head.

“Because we draw so much of our water supply from melted snow. That contains less heavy hydrogen—deuterium. A lot of plants simply can’t cope with it.”

And now the packing room, where men and women in masks and coveralls tamped measured quantities into cardboard cartons lined with polyethylene, then loaded the cartons on to humming fork-lift trucks. Some of them waved on noticing Mr. Bamberley. He grinned almost from ear to ear he waved back.

Oh, God. Mine, that is—if any. Not Bamberley’s cosy cheery paterfamilias kind, who is certainly tall and handsome and white-skinned behind his long gray beard. I mean, this guy paid for the clothes I’m wearing, the college I attend, the car I drive—even if it is only a sluggish electric. So I’d like to like him. If you can’t like the people who are kind to you ...

And he makes it so difficult! Always this feeling, just when you think you’re there, that something isn’t right. Like he gives all the time to Earth Community Chest, and supplies this cheap food to Globe Relief, and out of eight adopted sons not one a crippled Vietnamese ...

Hollow. That’s the word. Hollow.

But not to start arguments and rows. Another question.

“Where are the cases going that they’re filling now?”

“Noshri, I think,” Mr. Bamberley said. “The postwar aid program, you know. But I’ll make sure.”

He shouted to a black woman who was stenciling destination names on empty cartons. She tilted the one she’d just finished so it could be read from the gallery.

“Not to Africa!” Mr. Bamberley sounded surprised. “Then someone must have put in a lot of overtime—I’ll find out who and make some commendations. They’ve already started on the new contract with Globe Relief.”

“Which one is that?”

“Oh, for some village in Honduras where the coffee crop failed.”

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## HOUSE TO HOUSE

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Gilt-tooled on yard-square panels of green leather—imitation, of course—the zodiacal signs looked down from the walls of the executive lunch-room. The air was full of the chatter of voices and the clink of ice-cubes. Waiting to be attacked when the president of the company joined them (he had promised to show at one sharp) was a table laden with expensive food: hard-boiled eggs, shells intact so that it could be seen they were brown, free-range, rich in carotene; lettuces whose outer leaves had been rasped by slugs; apples and pears wearing their maggot-marks like dueling scars, in this case presumably genuine ones though it had been known for fruit growers to fake them with red-hot wires in areas where insects were no longer found; whole hams, very lean, proud of their immunity from antibiotics and copper sulphate; scrawny chickens; bread as coarse as sandstone, dark as mud and nubbled with wheat grains ...

“Hmm! Looks as though someone bought out the local branch of Puritan!” a voice said within Chalmers’s hearing, and he was pleased. He was moving from House to House, measuring a precise three minutes at each stop. Virgo: no women were present apart from Felice with whom he was having an affair and the two girls serving at the bar. In pursuance of its progressive image Angel City had tried appointing female area managers, but of the first two such one had married and quit and the other had suffered a nervous breakdown. Occasionally he had wondered whether Felice slept with him in the hope of climbing that far up the corporation totem-pole.

The policy, however, had been reviewed.

Libra: “Now me, I’d go straight into scrap-reclamation and sewage-plant construction. They’re the growth industries of the eighties. You’ll see your investment double in next to no time.”

Scorpio: “Rats? No, we have a terrier and a tomcat and keep them hungry. But the ants! I spent two thousand on proofing the kitchen and they still got in. So we fell back on—uh—the old reliable. By the way, if you need any, I have a good discreet source of supply.”

Sagittarius: “Yes, up our way we’ve established a *modus vivendi* with the Syndicate. Their interest in Puritan, of course. Very strong around our base. Anyone tries to put in a false claim gets a dusty answer straight away.”

No one at Capricorn.

Aquarius: “No ice, thanks—hey! I said NO ICE! Don’t you understand plain English? Doctor’s orders. Mustn’t touch anything but canned mineral water. I lose more working time thanks to digestive trouble ...”

Pisces: “Why don’t we make acceptance of a life proposal conditional on installing an approved water purifier in the guy’s home, like we insist on an approved precipitator in his car? I’ve sounded out a couple of the big firms, and they show every interest in cooperating.”

No one at Aries.

Taurus: “If we’re going to expand into the cattle states we *must* have solid documentation on the natural incidence of deformed births in domestic animals. I managed to hold his claim down to a refund of the stud fee, but even that came to five thousand, and he insisted the value of this mare that died in foal was twice as much. I had to drop very heavy hints about the cost of litigation before he

accepted the settlement.”

Gemini: “I’ve had a rash of demands lately for insurance against egg-bundle fetus. Can’t help wondering whether there may not be something behind the scare. Maybe a leak from a research lab?”

No one at Cancer ... naturally.

Leo: “Yes, the reason I was delayed—this crazy spade ...”

Chalmers clucked sympathy when he had heard Philip out, and switched instantly to a less depressing subject. “By the way! Tania and I will be in Colorado over the holiday. Get in some skiing.”

“Ah-hah? Where you aiming for—Aspen?”

“Oh, Aspen’s full of people who read about it in *Playboy*. No, your own stamping ground. Towerhill!”

“Never! Well, call us up! Maybe you could stop by with us and like have lunch?”

Sweating slightly from the *Playboy* putdown.

The conclusion of Chalmers’s meticulously timed peregrination brought him within arm’s reach of Grey at five to one.

“The man from Denver,” Grey said. “Philip Mason.”

“What about him?” Anticipating what was coming, and relieved to be able to offer an impenetrably defensive answer. Chalmers had a stake in that man; the personnel board had split three to two and his own vote had been in favor.

“There’s something wrong. Or else he’s not himself today.”

“Not himself. Saw a man killed right before his eyes this morning.” And recounted the story.

Grey pondered a while. Uncomfortable, Chalmers waited. It was disturbing to watch this man think it made the world seem full of the sound of whizzing wheels.

“Someone will have to keep an eye on him,” Grey said at last.

“But he’s one of our best men!” Chalmers felt personally aggrieved. “He’s nearly doubled the business of the Denver office. He was among the first to get wind of the new developments at Towerhill and put us in on the ground floor, and now we cover three-quarters of the place. Besides, this notion of his of sending out proposal forms for short-term injury insurance with hotel booking confirmations is showing a thousand per cent profit.”

“I’m not talking about that,” Grey said. What I want to know is what he was doing driving his own car into Los Angeles this morning. It’s a long pull from Denver. I’d have expected him to fly.”

The door opened to admit the president of the company, and he moved away to greet him. Scowling at his back, Chalmers wondered—not for the first time—when if ever he would dare call Grey “Mike”: short for “My-croft,” elder brother of Sherlock Holmes. It was only an inner echelon of the top staff who used the nickname to his face.

## THE MORAL OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Last valiant sally of a great department store whose customers had quit the city center, six Santa Clauses marched down the road.

“Ho-ho-ho!” Jingle-jangle.

The sidewalks they passed were crowded. Most of the onlookers were black, and many were children whose eyes reflected unfulfillable dreams. The city’s heart was dying before its carcass, and

these were the poor, trapped in outworn clothes and rat-ridden tenements. If they wanted to escape, like as not they had to steal a car to travel in because the now compulsory clean exhaust systems were expensive. Last time Peg had come down this way it had been to cover the story of a thriving trade in fake filters, home-built out of sheet steel by an enterprising mechanic.

In spite of the few cars, the air stank. She had taken off her mask, not wanting to be conspicuous—least, no more than was due to being white. In this district people didn't wear them. They seemed inured to the reek. The chests of the children were shallow, as though to discourage overdeep breathing.

She stared at the Santa Clauses. Behind those once-white beards, now grimed from an excursion in the open, she could not make out their features. She did, though, notice that the second man in the line was only moving his lips, not booming out his “Ho-ho-ho!” His eyes were bulging with the effort of repressing a cough.

Which would be very out of character for Saint Nick.

They broke the line to distribute come-on leaflets, most of which were immediately dropped, and dispersed into a dark alley where notices warned that only “authorized personnel” might enter.

Was one of the six, as she'd been assured, Austin Train?

The idea seemed crazy on the surface. Underneath, maybe it wasn't wholly absurd. She hadn't seen Austin since just after he recovered from his breakdown, but when he vanished from the public eye it had been with the promise that he was going to live as the poor were living, even if it meant risking what they risked. That decision had caused trendy Catholic television spokesmen to mention openly the possibility that the Church might recognize a new category of “secular saints.” She'd watched on such program with Decimus and Zena, and they'd laughed aloud.

But if this was the path Austin had chosen, it was different from Decimus's. His principle, at the Colorado wat, was third-world oriented; his community grew its own food, or tried to—crops had a nasty habit of failing because of wind-borne defoliants or industrial contaminants in the rain—and likewise wove its own cloth, while its chief source of income lay in handicrafts. The underlying concept was to dramatize the predicament of the majority of mankind. Often, prior to a meal, there had been little homilies: “You're each getting about twice as much at this table as someone in a Bolivian mountain village gets in a day.” And sometimes there were strange unexciting dishes: glutinous African sauces of fine-chopped okra, tasteless cakes of anonymous grain, samples of relief shipments sympathizers had paid for and mailed to the wat.

“This is what we're giving away,” Decimus would say. “Not steak or chicken or big fat Idaho potatoes. This is made from”—and it could be algae, or yeast, or grass clippings, or on one occasion, incredibly, sawmill wastes. “See how *you* like it, and think of those who have only such shit to be grateful for!”

But that had been a long time ago.

Around the back of the store she found a half-empty parking lot. There was a door marked *Employees Only*. She found it barred from inside. Nearby, though, was a reeded-glass window. She could make out blurred images if she leaned close to the panes. Inside, red forms changing to white as the Santa Clauses stripped off their suits and padding.

She listened, hoping to discern Austin's voice.

“In a bad way, aren't you, pal? Ah, leave him be! Well, just don't cough on me, I have kids at home and all the time doctor's bills. Don't we all?”

And so on. Some of them went through a door at the back of the room and noise of running water indicated showers. A man in a dark suit appeared and shouted, “Easy with that water! There's a

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