

MORE THAN MELCHISEDECH

VOLUME TWO
TALES OF MIDNIGHT

Book One

'There be two men of all mankind
That I'm forever thinking on:
They chase me everywhere I go --
Melchisedech, Ukalegon.'
[Edwin Arlington Robinson. Two Men.]

1

Well, who was Ukalegon? Skalsky says that Ukalegon was a woman and no man at all; and that she was, in all ways, the negation of Melchisedech. But did the poet E. A. Robinson understand that?

In the year 1946, Duffey started off on a week's trip from which, as it would happen, he would never return.

Now it was the case that Casey Szymansky, who had moved the Crock out of Duffey's place to more plush quarters, said that he was going on a trip the same day. Neither told the other any more about it. They were on tolerable terms with each other by then, but not on really good terms. There had been quite a bit of property and money coming to Duffey out of his partnership with Gabriel Szymansky after Gabriel's death. Duffey hadn't taken all that he was entitled to, but he had taken more than Casey thought he should have. And Duffey now owned that particular building, the building on the poor street that had once housed Gabriel's pawn shop.

"Yes, all agreements and papers are in order, Duffey, and they show such things as belonging to you," Casey and his lawyer had said, "but we don't believe the faces of those papers." But they had settled it without excess bitterness, Duffey taking a little shorter stick than he should have had.

This day, they left Chicago on the same train and on the same coach, though they had not been seeking each others' company. It wasn't really embarrassing, but it might have been just a little stuffy. It was always a problem how an Olympian should handle a Tinan who was in open rebellion.

"I'm sorry about your nose, Duffey," Casey said as they sat together.

"Oh, that's all right," Duffey told him. It was the first time they had mentioned it since it had happened. Duffey had had his nose broken (it wasn't the last time it would happen) in an altercation with goons of the new people who were associated with Casey on the Crock. New people they were, but with old goons. The goons had been the same old slant-faced men out of Duffey's unrealities. Well, did they keep spares for them? Duffey had done in one of those slant-faces as a follow-up of the altercation, and he hadn't heard from them since.

And there was something else about this trip. Mary Catherine Carruthers was on the same train. She had come to the train with Casey, but they had gone to different coaches, apparently by agreement. Both Casey and Mary Catherine were plainly startled at seeing Duffey taking the same train, though Mary Catherine continued always in her total fondness for Duffey. Casey and Mary Catherine were engaged to be married at this time, as they had been engaged several times before. But they did not ride in the same coach.

It was a daytime journey with an early leaving. Duffey and Casey as if by silent agreement, stayed away from controversial subjects. They talked

intelligently of the mathematics of probability.

"I am bothered by an impossible aggregation of coincidences," Duffey said. "There are things that are bound to come together in a fantastic congruence, or they will make liars out of all asrt of implicit pledges. And yet the improbability of their coming together is so extreme that there was not room enough on earth to write the number of that improbability."

"Can you put the aggregation into mathematical form, Duffey?" Casey asked him. "You have the irritating habit of trying to express things in words that should be expressed only in mathematical formulae. There are some problems of contingent philosophy that cannot be phrased except in mathematical form."

"Oh, I beheve that every problem can be expressed in straightforward verbal form, Casey," Duffey said. "But this one would sound so silly in the expressing."

"Many mathematical expressions are absolutely silly," Casey said. "But I'll try not to guffaw at your straightforward verbalisms, though sometimes it's hellish hard to refrain."

"Well, I made a few people, Casey," Duffey said. "That was the beginning of it. I made them with no forethought at all. But it seems to be a requirement that these people should come together. It was working almost like a chemical affinity to coagulate. But it's very unlikely that a dozen people I made, out of all the people in the world, should come together by chance. I figure that things are being stretched unlawfully, but I don't quite know what my responsibility is in the situation."

"You -- made -- a -- few -- people? Was that what you said, Duffey?"

"That's right, Casey. Wasn't that acceptable to you?"

"Oh, I suppose so. Are these the first people that you ever made?"

"Yes. These, in my present life, are the only people that I have made, so far as I remember. There are twelve of them if I count them right. Twelve of them, and another who wasn't counted in the count, and several more of mixed statue."

"You're sure that you really did it, Duffey? You're not just dreaming it?"

"I'm sure that I had a lot to do with their forming. Something, but not everything. Yes, I made them, literally and really."

"Oh, how have they turned out, Duffey?"

"The results aren't all in. In twelve, there should be one Judas. I don't know which. Oh, you're one of the people I made, Casey."

"Oh? That might explain a few scraps of problems. Just how did you made me, Duffey. And don't turn it into a dirty joke."

"I made you by a talisman given to your father in a chance encounter several years before your birth."

"Oh that thing! I have been going to throw it away several times, but it was such a curious piece of anti-art. I'm told that I held onto it from my birth till I was six months old and would not be separated from it at all. I found that it's made of solid gold. It's fairly valuable or that, but not as a piece of anti-art. Yes, it's real gold."

"Should I use false gold? Don't throw it away, Casey. Your soul may be in it."

"If my soul was in it once, it wasn't there now, I've recently traded souls with another person. Did you make anyone else that I know."

"Yes. One other certainly. Two others likely. And I've a feeling that there are many acquaintances among members of the group that I don't know about at all. Ah, I don't know just where you're going, Casey, but you may meet all the others this week. I have the feeling that you creatures have somehow decided to hold a conclave independently of your maker, me. But how can you know where to find each other?"

"I don't know, Duffey. I sure don't know where to find any others of your making, though I bet I'd recognize them as yours."

"Yes, you will probably all recognize each other at sight. And I believe that I will always know my own creatures when I come on them."

They drifted apart and fell into conversations with different sets of people in the coach and did not talk to each other again during the trip. They arrived in St. Louis in the early evening. Duffey and Casey and Mary Catherine Carruthers all seemed to be leaving the train there.

"Whatever are they going to be doing in St. Louis?" Duffey muttered about the other two. "And whatever am I going to be doing here myself?"

A young lady at a news stand in the train station was singing some gibberish as she opened bundles of evening papers.

"Kerowl, kerowl! the dogs do growl.
The Duffeys have come to town!"

"Did you say Duffeys, young lady?" Melchisedech Duffey asked her.

"Yah, Duffeys. There's a bunch of them in town. You should see them, you will see them. They're everywhere. They're wilder than beggars. They're showier than Gypsies. Oh, they are something."

"Just exactly where in town are these 'Duffies' to be found?"

"Exactly everywhere," the young lady said. "They're everywhere."

It puzzled Duffey who these Duffeys might be. But if they were everywhere in town, he would see them. Well, what was he doing here? Duffey could always find excuses to come to St. Louis. He had business interests there. He had two partners there, Bagby and Charley Murray. He had a sister there. He still owned part of the famous Rounders' Club there. But he hadn't come to St. Louis for any of these reasons. He had come because he had received a letter in Chicago, postmarked Morgan City, Louisiana, and it had read:

"...be in St. Louis on or about the last Saturday in May. I will see you there then and give you your assignment for the rest of your life. Henri Salvatore."

The name Henri Salvatore was not familiar to Duffey, but something there was familiar, This Henri or Henry was one of Duffey's own creations, from a talisman given, many years before, to a Cajun riverman. This Cajun, probably a maternal uncle (since his forgotten surname was definitely not Salvatore) had surely conferred that talisman for the birthing of this person who had written the letter. Yes, Duffey would recognize one of his creations anywhere, even by a letter written by one of them. But why should a creature be able to give a life assignment to his own creator? And was it in St. Louis that the talismanic children were going to have their conclave independently of their creator? Why then was their creator invited to town by one of them?

Duffey and Casey and Mary Catherine left the station area in three different taxi cabs, and they went down three different streets. So much for that. Duffey took his taxi to the home of one of his partners, Charley Murray.

But the cabs of Duffey and Casey arrived, from opposite directions, in front of the Murray residence, at the same time. Once again, it was a thing that could get a little bit stuffy.

"I go in here, Casey," Duffey said with just a little bit of irritation, "An old friend and partner of mine lives here. "

"I go in here also," Casey said, a little bit puzzled. "This was the address that I have. You had better check your address. Mine checks."

Oh, it was explained all right, after a little while, inasmuch as such almost-embarrassing things are ever explained. Charley Murray greeted Duffey as his oldest and best friend, as he was. And Charley knew who Casey was and had been expecting him.

"I meant to phone you, Duffey, and tell you that this young Casey was coming down from Chicago to St. Louis at about the same time you were, Charley Murray said. "I thought it would be nice if there were some way you

could recognize each other in case you traveled on the same train. I was wondering how I could describe you to each other so you could make yourselves known, but this was a little bit difficult considering that I had never seen Casey."

"You described us both marvelously, even though at a distance, even though you were not conscious that you were doing it," Duffey said. "The mind of man was a wonderful thing. Though you had never seen Casey, I recognized him instantly from your description."

"You are, as always, a crooked-tongued fraud, Melchisedech," Charley said. "You two met on the train, did you? Casey has come to town for the wedding of an army friend of his, a nephew of mine. We weren't sure how much room there would be for out-of-town guests over at the Stranahans, so Casey was here on a possible overflow basis. And he was welcome here, and there, and everywhere."

Well, that was all right, that was fine, that was as good an explanation as any. Duffey's breath ran a little short when he heard part of it, of course, but we all have shortages of breath sometimes. Duffey knew a man named Stranahan here in St. Louis, a Patrick Stranahan who used to come into the Rounders' Club, a man who was very close to this Charley Murray, and a fairly close friend of Duffey himself. And Duffey, once on an evening of mellow exuberance, had given a gift to this Patrick Stranahan.

It would be fine here, but a little bit nervous and testy. Duffey rather wished that he had gone to stay with his sister and her husband Bagby. He was astonished now that he hadn't even thought of that, since he almost always stayed with them when he was in St. Louis.

"But would the mysterious Henri Salvatore be able to find me at the Bagbys?" Duffey asked himself now. "Well, will he be able to find me at the Murrays? Why did I think that he would have a better shot at me here? He didn't say where to be in St. Louis, and this was a fair-sized city."

About twenty minutes later, there was a car and a voice outside, both of them calling out for Casey. But Duffey got another one of his shocks from that. He knew that voice, and yet he knew that he had not ever heard it before. He knew it because he had made it. It was the voice of one of his creatures. But the voice and the car went away with Casey, and Duffey forbore to look out.

Duffey phoned his sister. Then he went over to the Bagbys. Murray said that they would all meet over at the Rounders' Club later. Duffey spent several hours with the Bagbys. His sister had always been very close to him, even when he didn't see her for years at a time. But how had Bagby become so close? This was the one friend on earth who would do anything for him. Duffey and Bagby seemed to have an infinite number of points of contact.

Later, Duffey and the Bagbys picked up Beth Keegan, Duffey's old St. Louis girl, and her husband to go to the Rounders'. Beth was named Erlenbaum now.

"Kerowl, kerowl! the dogs do growl.

The Duffeys have come to town!" Beth chanted when she saw him.

"Where has this doggerel come from, Beth?" Duffey asked her. "What Duffeys? I have heard this chant before since I have been in town."

"Oh, the Duffeys, the Duffeys, the bright and shining Duffeys! They are all over town, as lively as a dog blanket full of fleas. You aren't in with these new Duffeys, Melchisedech. You just haven't their class or color. You'll see them, you'll see them. There was no way of avoiding them."

"Whence have they their name?" Duffey asked, a little bit bewildered.

"Oh, from you ultimately, I suppose," Beth said. "They're creatures of yours, and you are their architect. But I'm afraid they got a little bit out of hand. You used too much color when you made them, Melchisedech. You used too much noise. You were working in an unaccustomed medium, I suppose, but they're badly overdone. Everybody in town loves them. They'd better."

Duffey's sister Mary Louise looked wonderful, but even she was a

little bit overdone. But Bascom Bagby, the baroque, the flawed pearl, the husband of Mary Louise, the brother-in-law of Duffey, though he also was a little bit overdone, did not look wonderful. He looked too old for his chronological age. He looked sick. But he looked more than ever like Duffey. He had lost some of his bluffery and he seemed very glad to see Duffey, "probably for the last time", as he said. But he was still a powerful and humorously rough-looking man, with beetling brows and a beetling belly.

"He was my dark object," Duffey said as he had said before. "He was my uncleansed stables, he was another part of myself, and I sincerely love the low freak of a man. He was closer to me than kindred."

"Yes, there are odd things happening in town," sister Mary Louise said. "The 'Duffeys' have come to town. The beggars aren't in it with the 'Duffeys'. I love you with your nose in a sling."

"What Duffeys have come to town?" Melchisedech asked her as he had asked Beth. "Who are they?"

"If you don't know them, then nobody does," Mary Louise said. "There has never been so fired-up a band of Gypsies as these Duffeys."

Abd Beth chimed in again. "Oh, there's no question about who they are," she said. "They're you. They're you if you were multiplied ten or eleven times, if you were better looking and smarter than you really are, if you were more colorful, if you were wittier, if you were more magnetic. They are you exactly, with ten thousand superior things added to each of them."

Beth's little girls had long since become big girls. Beth was a grandmother now, but she was still a piece of cool, ivory statuary that laughed. "I know, Melky, every time that I see one of them (and I've been seeing them yesterday and today everywhere) that you thought him up, or her. If I wanted to make people, how would I start, Duffey? I bet mine wouldn't be as sprawling or overdone as yours are. We will see some of your creatures tonight. Wherever we go, some of them will be there. What are they doing in St. Louis? I also love you with your nose in that sling."

"I believe that the creatures are holding some sort of conclave in this town this week," Duffey said, "but I didn't authorize it."

"You had better authorize it, Duffey," Erlenbaum, Beth's husband, said with a mountainous grin. Erlenbaum sometimes kneaded huge fists and grinned loweringly at Duffey, and Duffey pushed him a ways by taking friendly liberties upon the lap and bosom of Beth while grinning back at him. "If you can't whip them, Duffey, and you can't, then you'd better join them. If they were yours once, they're not now. Any of them would take you around on a leash like a little dog."

Duffey and the Bagbys and the Erlenbaums arrived at Rounders' Club. Most times, when Duffey would come into Rounders', whether he had been gone for an hour or for three years, a band or orchestra or combo would strike up 'The Mng Shall Ride'. For Duffey was still King at the Rounders' Club. But now he was not noticed when he came in. There were other attractions there.

There was the picture of the 'Severed Giant Hands' up over the doorway that led to the Elegant Riverboat Deck. These 'Severed Giant Hands' were an old dream of Duffey's. Now it was the case that Duffey felt his own hands to be severed and deprived of further creative functions when he came into the presence of several of his own creations.

How had he ever done them? And how had they gone so far beyond everything that he had any knowledge of? There were several of the Duffeys-come-to-town present. They were brilliant, bedazzled, larger than life, overwhelming, loud, grotesquely suer-intelligent, roughing, shouting, pleasant, pleasant, pleasant. They had very light ways for their very great masses. It was as if they had just come from other gravities and other worlds. Duffey might as well be invisinle, for all that anybody would give him a look when the more flamboyant 'Duffeys' were there.

Then the vane swung around and Duffey became visible once more.

"Oh, it was Duffey himself!" a female of the incredible species

cried out. She was the most gentle of the 'Duffeys' and she came to Melchisedech Duffey in a geat sweep. The colors of these creatures! In what store could you find pigments for such colors?

"Oh, you came to us like a ghost, and we hardly knew you," this gentle one said, but the chandehers quivered a bit from the sound of her gentle voice. "It's as though you were hidden in a cloud or in a burning tree," she said. "And then you must remember that most of us have never seen you before, and we have never heard your voice."

"Oh, bring bread and wine, people! This was the Duffey himself, the Melchisedech. Ah, but we do love you with your nose in a sling. That shall be one of your attributes when you are sung in epics! We wouldn't have you any other way. We were wondering what you could do special for your apparition."

Duffey had to rub his eyes with his fists. It was as it had been when he was the Boy King back in his first childhood and he had made some sun-squirrels. He had not been able to look at them. He had to look away and rub his eyes. "But you made them," one of the seneschals had chided him, "why can you not look at them?" "I didn't know they would be so bright when the light went on inside them" young King Melchisedech had said. And these his present animations, Duffey sure hadn't realized that they would be this bright when the light was turned on inside them.

This first of them who had seen him here, this most gentle of the ultra-people, was named Mary Virginia Schaeffer, and she was from Galveston. Duffey knew her by this identity, just as she knew him as Duffey.

Some of the others came to meet him. They were overpowering, but there was something lacking out of the middle of them. Duffey exulted in the company of these finest of all creatures for a half hour or so, and then he came back to his objection.

"My central creation was not here," Duffey said accusingly.

"Oh, Finnegan, he'll be here tomorrow," a big-brained, grinning, young man of this special people swore. "No, Finnegan wasn't here yet tonight. He was the salt of our lives, and we are saltless without him. But not quite saltless, Duffey, when you are here."

But there was some oddity in what they knew Duffey by. They knew him as the editor, now the former editor, of the Crock. It had been a cult sheet with them. They had reveled in the intelligence of it, in the humor of it, in the Duffiness of it. But they had only wispy and intuitive knowledge of Melchisedech in his royal aspect.

The special people who were there, dining and roistering at Rounders', were John Schultz (who was Hans) (who was the big-brained grinning young man), and Marie Monaghan who was his wife from Australia.

And Dorothy Yekouris from New Orleans, and Henry Salvatore from Morgan City Louisiana (Oh, oh, he will give you your rest-of-your-life scenario, Duffey), and Mary Virginia Schaeffer from Galveston. And Absalom Stein from Chicago (Duffey already knew him a little bit, but he had never realized what a magnificent person he was, and he had never been absolutely sure that he was one of his creations). Six of the high twelve were here present. And Duffey had traveled from Chicago on the train with two others of them that day, but from long acquaintanceship with them he did not always notice just how magic-imbued they really were. Casey Szymansky and Mary Catherine Carruthers also belonged to these special creatures, but Duffey had seen them almost daily from their childhoods.

But here about him now were five of his creatures that Duffey had never seen before, and a sixth one whom he had never seen with open eyes before. Since when had a sixth one become Absalom Stein? Hadn't he used to be somebody more grubby?

Oh, there were the old 'Unreality Fringes' about all of the magnificent animations. And yet they were real. That sort of smokey halo that they all had, it was called the 'unreality fringe' in the lingo of

sorcerers. But these persons were real.

The people at the Rounders' Club had discovered that Duffey was in their midst now. For a while there, this artist had been in the dark shadow of his own animated art. He had been dwarfed by it. Now it was recognized that these special people had all been made by Duffey, that they were among his easy masterpieces. A little combo there played 'The King Shall Ride'. And then it played the rousing 'Gadarene Swine Song.' Olga Sanchez of the torchy shoulders still worked there. She came and caressed him, as others did. Duffey was back in his legendary feifdom.

Duffey had a whole riot of mixed feelings about this colorful sprawl of youngish people that he had created. Each one of them was clearly an expression of his art at its best, but maybe they expressed him a little too strongly. Oh, they were all brainy and brawny and brilliant, but it may be that they were somewhat excessive in all of it. Was this flamboyance in the right line of real art? Maybe. These special people were arts and statuaries of Duffey, were they not? They even conceded that they were.

"Duffey misunderstands his own processes," Marie Monaghan Schultz said. "He does not make us. He collects us and gives us our settings and our sparkle. He found our souls hidden away and forgotten in old junk stories. He bought us all for a song. I think it was the 'Gadarene Swine Song' he bought us for. And now he puts us on display. We were all in 'Razzle Daz' and when you have been in Razzle Daz, you can't get any higher than that."

Duffey gaped almost without understanding her. He had difficulty remembering, with all this light shining in his eyes and in his ears. But Razzle Daz had been a little comic strip he drew for the Crock. He had done it with unused parts of his mind and with unbusy moments of his hands, but many persons had thought that it was absolutely the best thing in the Crock, which Duffey had never quite understood. And, yes, of course, these splendid animations had been the models for the characters in Razzle Daz. Those characters had even gone by the nicknames of some of the splendid animations, 'Finnegan' for instance, and 'Hans', and 'Show Boat'.

"Duffey collects works of art," Marie Monaghan went on, "and we are all of us works of art."

"You are wrong, Marie," Duffey inswasted. "I do make you. But I haven't collected you, and I don't know how you have collected yourselves in this town. I did not give you your settings and sparkle quite as you have them now. I think you're a little overdone. You may have to be changed."

"You will change us at your peril, grubby sorcerer," Dotty Yekourwas told him. "We like us just the way we are, and we like you the way you are. Oh, may your nose never heal!"

But if Duffey had made these people, and of course he had, how did their excellence become independent of his. Their wit was too fast for him to keep up with, and all their jokes were obsoleted by new jokes every minute. When had Duffey's mind ever worked so fast as did the minds of these creatures of his?

"I knew that you would be exactly like this," Mary Virginia said, "banging your hands together as you do! It's as though you still had a 'maker's malfet' in your hands!"

She kissed him with that transcendent way she would always have. Yes, he'd made them with a 'maker's mallet'. He remembered that part of it now.

But these people were all just a little bit larger than life, and maybe they were too large. Henri Salvatore, the Fat Frenchman, was tremendous. And Hans Schultz was at least enormous. And Absalom Stein, was he really that big? But Duffey hadn't seen him for quite a few years. He had never seen him since he had gone by the name of Absalom Stein.

Those three master-work girls who were here right now, Dotty Yekouris, Mary Virginia Schaeffer, Marie Monaghan, they didn't look overly large beside the men they were with. And yet each of them would have stood a quarter of an inch over six feet, barefooted and slouching and smiling

wickedly. They were ample in all ways.

That estimate of their size was Duffey's subjective estimate, of course. They may not have loomed that large to other people. But Duffey was their maker, and what size he comprehended for them should have been the size imposed on them. Duffey recalled that Mary Catherine Caruthers, also in this town somewhere, was larger than she would seem to ordinary eyes.

Hans and Marie, Henri Salvatoree, Dotty and Mary Virginia, they were overwhelming. Even Absalom Stein was overwhelming tonight.

Just when had Absalom Stein outgrown his grubby pupa form as Hugo Stone? Or hadn't he been one of the many mouthy little Stone brothers and cousins anyhow? Yeah, Absalom was Hugo. But what, by all the compounded mysteries, was this Stein doing with the others of them in St. Louis. How did he even happen to be acquaints with the other talismanic children? There was a wealthy and lurid Jewishness to him such as has not been so powerfully expressed since the times of the Elizabethans, and then only on-stage. In life, there had never been such a type before. Absalom gave the impression that he was wearing a quantity of splendid jewelry, and he wasn't wearing a single bauble.

The lavish talk that these people poured out! If only it could be recovered it could be bottled and sold. If it could be created again after it was gone, then you would have something. But even the creator Duffey could not create it again. As with all demiurges, angelics, cavern spirits, pure intellects, monsters, the extraordinary conversations of these splendid animations could never be recalled later.

Hans Schultz was a thunder-head out of mythology, a holy ox in the manner of Aquinas himself. But he was such a clash of bulky colors and bulky speed and bulky fellowship! He was too loud.

There was bad and overdone art in every one of them except Mary Virginia. They weren't such things as Melchisedech would put on the market with his reputation for taste behind them. They were such things as he would keep for his own gusty enjoyment and cry out "Gad, what genius I had when I did them!"

Henri Salvatore, the Fat Frenchman from the Swamps, was the center of gravity of any room or building he was in. He was this by sheer weight. Henri was a whopper in color and texture and movement and sound. But balanced proportion was not in him at all.

And Absalom! "Absalom, take off that purple cape with the scarlet lining! It's just too much!" Oh, but he wasn't wearing a purple cape with a scarlet lining at all. He was wearing a simple unfigured sports shirt. It was just something extravagant about him that gave Duffey the impression that he was wearing the outlandwash get-up.

The twelve talismanic creations of Melchiscdech Duffey were these:

Finnegan, who was the salt of their lives, who was properly named John Solli, who was (hold onto yourself) the son of Monster Giulio. He'll be here tomorrow.

John Schultz who was Hans.

Henri Salvatore, who was going to give Duffey the scenario for the rest of his life.

Vincent Stranahan, the son of Patrick Stranahan and Monica Murray Stranahan, who was going to get married Saturday.

Casey Szymansky, now seen for the thousand-and-first time, and seen with new eyes.

Dotty Yekouris.

Mary Monaghan Schultz.

Mary Virginia Schaeffer.

Teresa (Show Boat) Piccone.

(Give more space than that and they'll run away with it.)

Absalom Stein.

Mr. X.

Twelve of them. There was a puzzle how Duffey could have been

spiritual and magic father to Mr. X who claimed to be a bit older than Duffey. The answer was that Mr. X was an unrepentant liar who was actually slightly younger than Duffey. There had been the case of Duffey, when he was very young, giving a talisman to an Italian man who was selling some kind of confection out of a hokey-pokey push-cart. But X must be reserved for later.

2

The Animated Marvels left, suddenly, with a great flourish. And people smothered their 'ain't-they-something' smiles.

Then another of them came in with a grin.

Charley Murray came into the Rounders' Club with his sister Monica Murray Stranahan and her husband Patrick Stranahan. And with them was Papa Piccone of the old Star and Garter Theatre. And another person, quite special.

Charley Murray had given orders for a supper to be served in a thrice-special room upstairs. Charley was the acting manager of Rounders'. Duffey was only the King of the place, and the founder, and the half-owner.

The other person with Charley's party was a talisman-child, and her set Duffey to quaking in a pleasant terror. This was the daughter of Papa Piccone, the incipient daughter-in-law of Monica and Patrick Stranahan, She was the god-daughter of Beth Keegan, Duffey's old girl. She was Teresa (Showboat) Piccone. She was as much a central creation of the Duffey Corpus as Duffey's creations had these two foci.

Aw c'mon, no one can describe her more than to say that -- well, she was sun-burned quicksilver. She was fire and ice and holy wine. She has been described as 'dark and lithe and probably little.' Well, in her own setting of the dazzling and larger-than-life people, she might have been called little. But in the world itself she might not be. She was of fair size and greatly compromised beauty. The compromising was done by her grimaces and pleasantly ugly facial contortions. But if one could ever get her face to stand still, then she had a thunderous beauty. And in no setting could she ever be called quiet. She was -- No, no, not now, maybe not ever, not in detail! It's dangerous.

"If her specifications were known, then some Magus other than Duffey might make another one of her, and one was enough," said Patrick Stranahan. "Oh my God, how one of her was enough!" Patrick loved his future daughter-in-law. So did Duffey love Teresa. She was a blue-moon person, not to be encountered more than once in a lifetime. Look at the others instead. It was dangerous to look too long at Teresa. You'll get welders' eye-burns. There are infra-red rays and other things coming out of that blue-light phenomenon. Look at the others. Teresa was talking constantly. Duffey did not hear her words. He heard only the cadence of her voice.

Duffey knew Patrick Stranahan well. Patrick used to come into the Rounders' Club when he was still quite a young man, even before Duffey had sold a piece of the club to Charley Murray. And Duffey had known Monica Stranahan, the wife of Patrick, the sister of Charley, for a very long time. He used to live to kiss her for the serenity she gave. She still gave it.

And Duffey had known Papa Piccone (he already had the name 'Papa Piccone' when he was twenty-two years old: he seemed older) in the old, old days. He was and was and would forever be till its destruction the proprietor of the Star and Garter where everyone went for the shows when they were young. Beth Erlenbaum, the ivory statuette, had used to work at the Star and Garter, and she was kindred of the Piccone family. But Duffey had never seen this Teresa Piccone before. And then she was gone suddenly, and he wasn't sure that he had seen her at all.

"Oh, I hardly ever get a good look at her myself," said Piccone her father.

The men were talking. This might have been the same night, upstairs after supper, when they had withdrawn to the trophy room for cigars and brandy and Irish whisky. Or it might have been another night in the big club room at Stranahan's house. It may even have been at Charley Murray's place.

Likely it was several of the nights of that week ran together, and the men were talking about weighty subjects. Duffey and Bagby and Murray and Stranahan were there, along with Piccone and Father McGuigan. Stein was there part of the time, or one of the nights. And Finnegan may have been there part of the time.

"We come to the crux, to the crossroads," Patrick Stranahan said. "But the crossroad sign, and the various arms of it, point: 'To nowhere', 'To easy house', 'To crossbar hotel', 'To the charnel house'. There is blood running down the gaunt tree-piece of the crossroads sign. Some of it was fresh blood, some of it was old and slow-flowing, some of it was placental blood. We had supposed that we had come to the end, for a while, of the rivers of blood. The crossroads sign-post indicates otherwise."

This Patrick Stranahan, a lawyer man who was just rich enough to come hardly into the Kingdom of Heaven, was a very large man, bigger than any of his four sons. He has been described in another place as "a big, hairy man. He rumbled when he talked. He even rumbled when he didn't talk. He had a large and busy stomach and there was always something going on in there."

"As to the blood on the sign-post," Duffey proposed, "Henry Salvatore says that the Devil was being released from his thousand-year duration very soon, possibly this week."

"Henry guesses at the dates," Patrick continued, "and likely at the year, though in all probability it was this year. Just a hundred years ago there was a rumor that the Devil had been released. Maybe that was some other devil, though the events in the past hundred years (1846-1946) indicate that flagrant evil was released into the world at that time. And now the noise was even more ominous. We have heard the big iron bolts sliding back for some time now, but there are a lot of bolts to slide and a lot of locks to unlock before the stout door swings open. That gaudy Stein also has some authentic private information, I believe, but he exaggerates. It doesn't really matter whether the Devil was released last year or this year or next year. The release was imminent, as we all know, and it was a condition that none of us will be able to live with. Some of us will be exalted and awakened by the assault of it, and some of us will be destroyed by it. But none of us will be able to live with it. We don't know just how much difference it will make. The Devil has carried on very effective warfare all during his imprisonment. But now it will be worse, and of a more immediate treachery."

"The Monster Giulio told me recently that a rigged council of Teras-folks had drawn up a petition for the release of the Devil," Bagby said, "so it wasn't just the humans of the narrow definition who have been bespoken by false leaders to petition. Groups of half a dozen other sorts of creatures also have joined in the foulness. Giulio was in St. Louis recently."

"Giulio? He's been dead for ten years at least," Duffey said.

"I didn't say that the creature wasn't dead. I said that he had been in St. Louis recently and had given me these reports," Bagby growled. Bagby had never liked to have his accounts questioned. "My brother, I have my own communications and meetings, and you have yours. Giulio told me something else. He says that at the councils of the Teras, they have both the living and the dead in attendance, and he believes this gives better balance. I believe that the U.S. Congress should adopt a similar practice."

"You know that Finnegan was the son of the Monster Giulio, don't you?" Duffey asked.

"No, of course I don't know it," Bagby said. "The Finnegan who got

into town today? He was here, and he left just before you got here, Duffey. Have you ever even met him?"

"No."

"And yet you say that he was the son of Giulio the Monster who was a Teras. You have so much, you know so much, one-aspect-brother-of-mine, for one who knows so little."

"I suspect that this Finnegan was another of your talisman-children, Duffey," Patrick Finnegan said. I myself have met this Finnegan long ago, when he shipped on the river, long before my son Vincent, who was his best friend, knew him. And as to Duffey's having created a brood of beautiful and bumptious people, I don't find this unlikely at all. I myself made a few people by the modified talismanic method before I made my sons and daughters from my loins. The latter thing precludes and shuts off the former, forever, always. Let us consider just what these creative conditions are.

"A non-creative human soul would not be possible. We all share in each others creations. We are even partly created by persons who may not be born for another thousand years yet. There was One who creates. And yet, on level 1-B, creation was a group effort and some are better at it than others. Some souls have more creativity than others. Not all souls are as resoundingly creative than others. Not all souls are as resoundingly creative as was Duffey. As to Duffey though: his creations are like a multitude of old, (no no, no old, of new and brightly painted) milk cans clattering down stone steps. They do make a noise!

"The mathematics of the talismanic-creation complex are fantastic. We are dealing with multi-dimensional equations with as many as thirty billion unknown and highly mysterious integers, in which equations every integer was a variable function of all the others. Yes, I believe that Duffey has conspicuously created my own son Vincent, and Piccone's daughter Teresa, and Finnegan, the son of the Monster Giulio (I also knew this Monster, and I once represented him against a motion to have him locked up), and big-brained Hans, and Casey, and many of those beautiful young girls also. But it all works both ways, or it works thirty billion ways. For I myself consciously created this Melchisedech Duffey, even though he was already fifteen or sixteen years old when I first met him. There's a lot more to him than there would have been if I hadn't muddied my creative hands with him. These additional powers that he got from myself and several others at that time aren't seen too clearly in him even yet, but they will be absolutely required in his future trials."

Duffey remembered that he had picked up a little suavity from Patrick Stranahan, and perhaps other pleasant things.

"You are speaking in false context about any person ever creating anything," said Father McGuigan. "You are indulging in unlawful metaphor."

"Nah, man, nah," Duffey said. "He was only putting into metaphor what was literal fact: that was Patrick's only offense in the present dwascussion. There was nothing metaphorical about my creations or about my kingship... I am a Magus... I am a sorcerer. I am a child of gold and minister of bread and wine. I am the Boy King, and I am the King of Salem. I command giants. I move with high royalty, and the trumpets know me by name. I have sat in Kings' conclaves with Solomon and Saul, and with Ptolemy and Chandragupta and Nebuchadessar, with Hsien and with Barbarossa, all the way down to --"

"Were you drinking before you joined us tonight, Duffey?" Charley Murray asked him.

"Oh, I've been making a day of it, Charley. There was once a proposed -- but never used -- Anheuser-Busch ad which read: 'After all, what else was there to do in St. Louis?' I've been to all the places and enjoyed all the drinks. -- Um -- down to King Stephen of Hungary and Conrad the Second of the Germanies. I believe that they were the newest ones who came to the Kings' Conclaves whthe I still attended. What, Charley, are you implying that I might be intoxicated by other than life itself? I thouht

that my powers had revived a bit today, and you think that it was only my drinking? But I can still work my golden magic. I can rub my hands together and then pour out anything you wash me to on this library table here. See, I rub my hands together! What do you want me to pour out here?"

"Coined gold," Patrick Stranahan said. "Dated coined gold."

"Any particular date, Patrick?"

"No. I'll not limit you there, Duffey. I know that magic was easily wilted by excess details."

"You will notice that my hands are empty and my sleeves are rolled up," Duffey said.

"Get with it, Duff, get with it," Papa Piccone said. "I have a new magician every week at the S & G. You'll do nothing I haven't seen before."

Duffey rubbed his hands together some more. Then he poured seven gold pieces out on the table. And Patrick Stranahan and the others examined them.

"These are all United States Five Dollar Gold Pieces," Patrick said, "and all of them were minted about ten years ago. You could easily have had them on you, God knows why. And I recall that you used to do magic tricks."

"No, no, it was Charley Murray here who used to do magic tricks," Duffey said. "I used to do magic. I could have poured anything you asked me out of my hands, a baby dinosaur, for instance. I'd have done that if you'd asked me to. Now I won't."

"I made a man once," Papa Piccone said suddenly. Papa was named Gaetano, but nobody ever called him anything except Papa. "I don't believe that it was a metaphorical man. Right at the end of it, at least, before he broke up, he was real. So I know that the thing can be done. I create a lot of characters at my theatre the Star and Garter, at least one new one a week for more than thirty years now. Some of these are classics and they will live forever. Some of them are numb-bums and they do not have any validity at all. Even a burlesque character must burlesque something that was valid, something that was possible, something that was within the human spectrum. It was only human things that can be burlesqued. Inanimate things can't be burlesqued, and animals can't be. Some of them, such as camels are natural burlesques, but they cannot be burlesqued further."

"One of my worst failures was Oliver Oscar Omygosh. He was bad. He stuttered 'O---O---O---'. He had a big nose and a big rump, but neither of them was the right shape to be funny. He had fiery red eyes. He wore size fifteen shoes, and he was continually falling on his face. I was going to drop Oliver Oscar as no good after the third day and night of him, but I got a phone call after the late night performance. 'This was O-O-O-Oscar O-O-O-Oliver -O-O-Omygosh,' some clown on the phone said. 'You hold me up to o-o-o-opprobrium when you make fun of me on your stage. You make me an o-o-o-ject of ridicule. I'm o-overly sensitive and this was a t-t-terrifying experience. I beg you to stop it.' 'Who was this?' I demanded of the telephone. 'Which clown was in? Orlando? Pietro? Caspar?' 'This was O-Oscar O-O-Oliver O-O-Omygosh,' the telephone said."

"The next night (I had kept the character on) he came to see me back stage. None of the jokers I knew would have done a character that badly, even for a joke. Oh, his rump was big enough, but it just didn't have burlesque shape or style. I kicked him on it and it wasn't padding. It was him. His eyes were fire-red, but they weren't the gaudy orange-red of the make-up crayon. They were swollen red as if he had been crying. He had. His nose was big enough for the role, but it looked like cheap and wrong-colored Pleistocene such as kids use, not professional quality make-up putty. 'Aw, get that silly thing off your face,' I said. 'I do hate slovenly workmanship. I swung at him flat-handed to slap that hopeless nose off. I brought blood from it, but I didn't slap it off. It was real, and he was real. He was exactly as I had envisioned him and made him, a hopeless botch, the worst character I ever made."

"You can check on this," Papa said. "I'm not lying. There was such a

person. He's in the St. Louis phone book for 1939: Oscar Oliver Omygosh. Go down to the main telephone office tomorrow and look in a 1939 directory. You will find that Omygosh was listed."

"I remember him," said Bagby. "He ran a little novelty shop just -- why, it was just two doors from your own Star and Garter, Papa. It was a novelty business with the unusual name 'The O-O-O What Fun Novelty Store'. Old triple O had glandular conditions and dizzy spells. He suffered a lot of pain and melancholy. He stumbled and fell down a lot, and he cried a lot. Papa Piccone, you are a fraud. He was true. But you didn't make him."

"No, no, nessuno! My whole story was true," Piccone assured the group. "If I hadn't made him for the burlesque set, then he wouldn't have been. I made the man by accident. But I made him, so I know that persons can be made."

"As to the release of the Devil," Duffey said, "there was another sense in which he may be released. Casey does not believe that the Devil should be eternally damned. He believes that he should have his release from damnation after a time, and he was working for that sort of release. In fact, he had made an offer to God to trade souls with the Devil and suffer damnation in his place."

"Casey has since lowered his sights and negotiated a lesser trade," Absalom Stein said. "He has traded souls with me. Really, it was just an old soul of mine that I traded to him -- the soul of Hugo Stone the Chicago red. And I believe that it was an old soul of his that he traded to me. He has kept his later and muddled soul."

"Is Casey a red now?" Bagby asked.

"He is a red," Stein said. "And now I am white -- white as a Gary snow after the furnaces have coughed on it for a few days."

"The enemy, in this century, was wearing a red stocking cap on one of his seven heads," Bagby said. "The heads of that old enemy change names; but the names of the seven present heads are Dialectic Materialism, Artistic Degradation, Judas Priestism, Secular Liberalism, Panaceac Pentacostalism, Murderous Molochism, Atheistic Communism."

"Do you believe that Bill O'Shivaree will hang, Stranahan?" Father McGuigan asked to try to divert the conversation. He was a progressive priest and he was angry at this pointing out of so many of the things that he supported. And Bagby could whip him in this combat.

"I'm defending O'Shivaree, am I not?" Patrick Stranahan asked pompously.

"I know you're defending him. I asked whether he would hang."

"No. Not unless I lose the case," Patrick said.

"And just what context are your Animated Marvels to be considered in, Duffey?" Stranahan asked a moment later to get Duffey out of a brooding spell he had fallen into.

"Oh, they are mostly in the context of the Argo Legend," Duffey said. "And, of course, that was intersected by the Finnegan Cycle. Finnegan was the original Finn McCool."

"And to just what species do these Marvels belong?" Patrick asked.

"Since you are the father of one of them, and Piccone here was the father of another, I might be tempted to say 'The Human Species'. But that was too narrow. They all have something of the Teras species in them too."

"I have heard that hinted of, but just what was it?"

"Oh, Gargoyles, Neanderthals, Boogers, Vaaries, Variants. We all have some of that variant blood. I put more than ordinary amounts into my creations."

But Duffey was still brooding.

"All right, I will prove it!" he cried suddenly, banging his hands together and going back to an earlier subject. He rubbed his hands, then they sparked blue and gold sparks. "I can produce anything on the table

here. Who wants me to produce a live baby dinosaur right now? I'll pour it out right here on the library table, and it'll be alive."

"There is great danger to you at your age, Duffey," Father McGuigan said. "Irishmen in particular are in danger of letting their genie be imprwasoned in a bottle when they come to about your age, and the imprisonment can well go on forever. You know what kind of bottle I'm talking about. You had better forego it."

"What? Forego my last lonesome vice?" Duffey asked. "Who will challenge me to produce a live baby dinosaur right here and now on this table?"

And, for some reason, none of the men challenged him. Duffey seemed a bit relieved that they didn't. He wasn't absolutely certain that he could have done that thing, but he could do kindred things.

"A baby pterodactyl then?" he asked. "Or an emu, or a dodo bird? What? Do none of you want to see wonders? A baby llama, a porcupine? A new-hatched duck with pieces of the shell still on it? Dammit, how about a living mouse?"

"A mouse was always nice," Papa Piccone said with a touch of compassion, whether for Melchisedech or for the mouse none could say.

Duffey sighed. And he poured out his hands.

It was a young, live mouse that he poured out on the table, and they all laughed a bit. Duffey, crooked or uncrooked, had always been pretty good at these little pieces of magic.

"You call that a dinosaur?" Patrick Stranahan asked with typical lawyer's illogic.

"No, I call it a mouse," Duffey said. "But if any of you had challenged me to do it, then it would have been a dinosaur."

"You could have had the mouse already in your pocket," Stranahan said.

"So? But I did not reach to my pocket. I could have had a baby dinosaur already in my pocket; or a baby horse. I have big pockets."

So the men talked that evening, several evenings really, on weighty subjects.

3

Here was an explanation of some of the happenings and some of the people who took places in St. Louis in that last week of May in the year 1946.

Vincent Stranahan, the son of Patrick and Monica, and a talisman child, was marrying Teresa Piccone that Saturday. She was a talisman child also. Vincent didn't know anything about the talisman business. Teresa likely knew all about it.

Vincent had been in the army in the same battery with John Schultz (who was Hans), with Kasmir Szmansky (who was Casey), with Henry Salvatore who was a Fat Frenchman from the Cajun swamps, and with John Solli who was Finnegan. Duffey had wondered by what means his various talismanic creations would meet each other. The U.S. Army was the answer. And the new question was 'Would there have been a U.S. Army if it hadn't been required to bring Duffey's creations together?'

The five boys had been good friends in the army, and had been known as the Dirty Five. All of them, out of the army less than three months and not very heavily settled into anything yet, were in town for the wedding. And Teresa the bride had an Italian nose on her that had to be into everyobdy's business. She found out about the girl friends or spouses of all of them and contacted them to invite them to the wedding also. And they came, that the scripture might be fulfilled.

Teresa already knew Marie Monaghan the wife of Hans. Hans and Marie were already living in St. Louis, so of course, they would come. Mary Catherine Carruthers, Mary Virginia Schaeffer, Dotty Yekouris were also

procured. These were all people of the Argo Legend also. It was the first and only time that they would all be together this side of the legend.

Absalom Stein also knew everything and everybody. He had known all five of the boys in the same army battery where he had been a sort of special-services person. He hadn't been of the inner intimacy. It wasn't sure whether he had been one of the Argo crewmen. He went under different names sometimes. He didn't tell anyone why he had come from Chicago to St. Louis. The truth was that Henry Salvatore had written to this Absalom, as he had also written to Melchisedech Duffey, to tell him to come to St. Louis to receive the assignment for the rest of his life.

So it was only by a coincidence of incredibly long arms that eleven of the twelve persons whom Melchisedech Duffey had created would be together in St. Louis Missouri that last week of May.

"Whomever the joke was on," Duffey said out loud in a seafood place, "It wasn't on me. I will have the bunch of them today, even in central creation."

"The joke, Duffey, was that your central creation was a hollow one," the big-nosed kid said, "and the joke was on me. That's the irony of all the cryptic stuff. I have some good scrimshaw here, and some ood paintings. And oysters."

"Don't say that," Duffey growled. "If my central creation were a hollow one, that would reflect on me."

"And on me," the big-nosed kid said. "Oh how it does reflect on me!" They were in the Broadway Oyster House, and the big-nosed kid had ordered one hundred oysters. What epic hero was it who ate one hundred huge oysters? That's right, one hundred oysters. And the one hundred oysters had been served to him on quite a large platter. Oysterman Charleroi who commanded the Oyster House didn't even blink at orders like that, but maybe he blinked inside. The big-nosed kid had motioned to Duffey to join him at eating the hundred oysters, and he had called Duffey by name. So the Duff had joined him. And the kid sent oysters from his latter, a dozen here, a dozen yonder, to other diners. But some of the diners refused the oysters in surly fashion.

"They are the ones who will go to Hell, Duffey," the big-nosed kid said. "This was the test, and they fail it. Mark their names out of the Book of Life."

"All right. I've marked them out," Duffey said.

And some of the diners accepted the oysters and waved appreciation.

"Those have a chance, they have a chance," the kid said. "It wasn't sure yet. There may be other tests for them. But they are, for the moment at least, on the road to salvation."

These were good and well-done oysters, with plenty of butter and sand. This kid was very lean. He pulled thick bulky packages out of hidden pockets and remained neither more nor less lean. "Just have a look at these Duffey. You may as well take possession of them. You can remit to me somewhere if you ever sell any of them. I have heard that, of all undiscerning art dealers, you are the most undwascerning. My kind of dealer."

"My God!" Duffey cried as he unrolled a big four by eight foot picture (how could the kid have had so long a roll in one of his pockets anyhow?) "This was an original Van Ghi."

"Oh, I'm Van Ghi," the kid said, "but I don't know whether I'll paint under that name again. I'm getting about good enough to use my own name."

"My God, this is worth thousands," Duffey said.

"Yeah, it's pretty good," the kid agreed. "But these scrimshaw pieces are at least as good and you won't be able to get more than three or four dollars for each of them. The only ones you can sell them to are sea men. But the sea men collectors will recognize them as carvings of Count Finnegan. My immediate aim and aspiration was to go to St. Kitts or Basse

Terre and be a beach bum. The lack of money was all that prevents. It takes a fortune of at least half a million dollars."

"When I was last a beach bum, back in the seven hidden years of my life, it didn't take hardly any money at all," Duffey said, handling the scrimshaw carvings with excited hands.

"A good beach bum has to have the air of big money about him," the kid insisted. "Of money impounded, or of money reserved, of money abrogated or refused perhaps, but of money that has left its aroma and green stain on him. Unless people will whisper of a beach bum, 'He has millions whenever he wants them', or 'He poured out millions as if they were water', unless people spin such legends about him, then he wasn't the highest sort of bum. There was no way it can be faked. Nobody ever attained the status of top bum without deserving it."

Duffey was shaking so hard that he could hardly eat his oysters. For the paintings, yes (there were a dozen truly magnificent), and for the carvings, yes, but mostly for the person here. Did not Fingal the Hero, and in another version it was Finn McCool, once eat one hundred oysters and each of them bigger than a wagon wheel? Was this kid, no bigger than Duffey in appearance, an incognito hero or giant? Who was it who had lived all those lives underground? Which high hero had been the son of a Teras? But Duffey's shaking son turned into delighted laughter.

Why should he be overpowered by one of his own creations? This kid was seven famous underground artistic geniuses in one, but he wouldn't have been any of them if it hadn't been for Duffey. Why should he be overwhelmed by the son of a Teras when he had been a close personal friend of that very Teras, the Monster Giulio? Why should... ?

The big-nosed kid was John Solli (Finnegan), the son of the Monster Giulio, of course, the central creation of Duffey himself.

"My father Giulio once said that he found only seven or eight friends in this world, and all of them were somehow related to you," Finnegan said. "He didn't really love a city; he loved the swamps. He took me down to the Cajun swamps several times, and he made 'calls' for me that I would call with when we drifted along in a flat boat with 'ceiling three feet' over us, of swamp fronds. Other fathers made duck calls for their sons, or coon calls, or swamp deer calls.

"My father Giulio made panther calls and alligator calls, and devil-fish calls, and swamp-boas calls, and hairy man calls, and white shark calls. I never knew what I'd call up from the water or down from the vined trees when I put one of those calls to my mouth. He whittled them out of the wood of the tupelo-gum tree. There was no wood like it."

"What will you do now, Finnegan?"

"I'll break my hands and my head for a little while on the customary things. Then I'll throw it all over and wander. Wander and paint, and paint and wander.

"I wandered for seven years once," Duffey said. "And now I can go back, almost at will, and wander still more in those same years."

"And I will wander for seven years," Finnegan said. "Then they will bury me on the Marianao Coast of Cuba. Whether they can keep me buried I don't know. Someday there will come to your hands a great painting 'The Resurrection of Count Finnegan'. The story in this painting will indicate that they are not able to keep me buried.

"I will go back to New Orleans. So will you go there, by the way. But I will stay there only a few months or weeks. Then I will wander. I haven't any scenario to follow. Neither God nor Henri Salvatore had provided me with one. For impediments I am given my own thorn in the flesh and my own monsterness. But there are certain documents that I can carry in my mind. These, and the things that I paint wherever I find a good painting surface in the world, are the closest things to a guide or scenario I have."

Finnegan shook hands with Duffey in that peculiar six-fingered grip that a Teras will use with a friend who was not a Teras. They joined in dark

and lean laughter, and they sat together for a while longer, Duffey looked closely at this one of the creatures he had made. Whether it was good or bad, he liked it.

4

It was necessary to introduce a number of original documents here. They are all essential to this account. Some of them were beloved by Finnegan, some of them by Duffey, some of them by everybody we know.

'Be calm and vigilant, because your enemy the devil was prowling like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Stand up to him...'
[First Peter 5,8-9]

'I walk in sunlight through the snarling dark
Defiant of that lion in the street,
The Noonday Devil in the noonday heat
That smirched the souls of Karl and Kitty Kark.'
[Dotty O'Toole. Sonnet.]

'I want you to be happy, always happy in the Lord: I repeat, what I want was your happiness. Let your tolerance be evident to everyone: the Lord was very near. There was no need to worry; but if there was anything you need, pray for it, asking God for it with prayer and thanksgiving, and that peace of God, which was so much greater than we understand, will guard our hearts and thoughts, in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, fill your minds with everything that was true, everything that was noble, everything that was good and pure, everything that we love and honor, and everything that can be thought virtuous or worthy of praise. Keep doing all the things that you learned from me and have been taught by me and have heard or seen that I do. Then the God of peace will be with you.'
[Paul, Philippians 4, 4-9]

'...for we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers, against the shapers of darkness in this world and against the spiritual army of evil in high stations.'
[Paul. Ephesians. 6, 12-13]

'It was they who are the spiritual army of evil in high stations, the sneering and deforing devils of the word-mills. And the high stations that they occupy are sometimes stations inside the Church itself.'
[Miles O'Connell. Handbook of Treasons.]

'We find in it the ground for the most cheering hope of the future; provided that the associations we have described continue to grow and spread, and are well and wisely administered. Let the State watch over these societies of citizens united together in the exercise of their right; but let it not thrust itself into their peculiar concerns and their organizations, for things move and live by the soul within them, and they may be killed by the grasp of a hand from without...

'Prejudice, it was true, was mighty, and so was the love of money; but if the sense of what was just and right be not destroyed by depravity of heart, their fellow citizens are sure to be won over to a kindly feeling towards men whom they see to be so industrious and so modest, who so unmistakably prefer honesty to lucre, and the sacredness of duty to all other considerations.'
[Leo XIII. The Condition of Labor.]

'I have said that the prime product of the Reformation was the isolation of the soul. That truth contains, in its development, very much

more than its mere statement might promise.

'The isolation of the soul means a loss of corporate sustenance; of the sane balance produced by common experience, a public certainty, and the general will. The isolation of the soul was the very definition of its unhappiness. But this solvent applied to society does very much more than merely complete and confirm human misery.

'In the first place, and underlying all, the isolation of the soul releases in a society a furious new accession of force. The break-up of any stable system, in physics as in society, makes actual a prodigious reserve of potential energy. It transforms the power that was keeping things together into a power driving separately each component part, the effect of an explosion.'

[H. Belloc. Europe and the Faith.]

'Bootless for such as these the mighty task
Of bottling God the Father in a flask.'

[H. Belloc, Heroic Poem in Praise of Wine.]

'Right in the middle of all these things there stands up an enormous exception... It was nothing else than the loud assertion that this mysterious maker of the world has visited his world in person. It declares that really and even recently, right in the middle of historic times, there did walk into this world this original invisible being; about whom the thinkers make theories and the mythologies hand down myths; the man who Made the World. That such a higher personality exists behind all things has indeed been implied by the best thinkers, as well as by the most beautiful legends. But nothing of this sort has ever been implied in any of them. It was simply false to say that the other... heros had claimed to be the mysterious master and maker, of whom the world has dreamed and disputed. Not one of them had ever claimed to be anything of the sort. The most that any religious prophet had said was that he was the true servant of such a being. The most that any primitive myth had ever suggested was that the Creator was present at the Creation. But that the Creator was present... in the daily life of the Roman Empire -- that was something utterly unlike anything else in nature. It was the one startling statement that man has made since he spoke his first articulate word...'

[G. K. Chesterton. The Everlasting Man.]

'These monsters are meant for the gargoyles of a definite cathedral. I have to carve gargoyles, because I can carve nothing else; I leave to others the angels and the arches and the spires. But I am very sure of the style of the architecture and of the consecration of the church.'

[G. K. Chesterton. On Gargoyles.]

'Nevertheless, the struggle between good and evil remained in the world as a sad legacy of the original fall. Nor has the ancient tempter ever ceased to deceive mankind with false promises. It was on this account that one convulsion following upon another has marked the passage of the centuries, down to the revolution of our own days... Entire peoples find themselves in danger of falling back into a barbarism worse than that which oppressed the greater part of the world at the coming of the redeemer.

"This all too imminent danger, Venerable Brethern, as you have already surmised, was Bolshevistic and Atheistic Communism...'

[Pius XI. Atheistic Communism.]

'Only because it was inclusive can Catholicism be exclusive; only because it comprehends all religious truth can it be intolerant of all error. It was because it was the Catholic Center that it cannot admit any other center, to regard as central any portion of the circumference.'

[E.I. Watkin. The Catholic Center.]

'But there are too the day to day, or rather the moment to moment choices of heaven and hell. Before every human heart that has ever beat out its allotted measure, the dare of goals a high as God himself was tossed down; to be accepted, or to be fled from in Terror.'

[Farrel & Healy, My Way of Life, the Summa Simplified for Everyone.]

"There are certain Iron Meadows that are inhabited by Aspects, and we cannot be sure that God knows about them. Some aspects of the Argo Legend dwell in one of these Iron Meadows, and neither God nor Duffey knws about them.'

[Bascom Bagby. Letters After I Am Dead.]

'A Duffey there was who had views
On subjects diverse and diffuse.
But we are the stuffy
Inventions of Duffey,
And Duffey's a gruffy magus.'
[Dotty Yekouris. Pelican Pellets.]

'The boys in the street often call 'Hot Stuff' at me, and it was a familiar and friendly name. But they do not know, except for several medical students among them who have heard of my case, that I have a body temperature of one hundred and eleven degrees. The doctors have told me that I should be a bird, or that I should be dead. Well, I am not a bird. I fly sometimes, but privately. And I am not dead. I will never die.

'I have asked for almost every gift that comes into my head, and I have been given many of them. One I much prize was the gift of calmness. I cannot command everything, but I can command tempests, alike meteorological and society and soul tempests, and they will be silent. I can rebuke the winds and the sea I can make hurricanes veer off and lose all their substance in rain.

'I have been given other gifts, but I wonder why some such strong gifts have been put into my hands: no hands have ever been weaker than mine. On the 'grip machine' at the 'Fun House out on the Lake' I can grip only thirty-seven pounds. Dotty Yekouris can grip a hundred and ninety pounds. But it was into my hands that the care of the whole world was placed for as much as one full hour out of every twenty-four.'

[Margaret Stone. Third Epistle to the Kids in St. Louis.]

'It was written that if they will not believe Moses and the Prophets, neither will they believe one risen from the Dead. My God, My God, they have got to believe the One risen from the Dead... Why should I not affirm the doctrine of the Real Presence of Dauphin Street at midnight? There are people on Dauphin Street at midnight to whom it has never been preached... Don't you ever have the feeling that this night one more must be found? Imagine the panic of the Patriarch when he could not find seventy. And the figure was reduced, and he still could not find them. This night, perhaps, something will happen to the world unless one more can be found. He may destroy it falls short by that one. I fancy that thousands of times it has just got by, and many times it has just lot by by one. And what if I alone can find that one tonight, and the world will stop if I don't... others who knew the urgency. Maybe one of them was worn out and not allowed to die until I came to replace him...'

[Margaret Stone. In Archipelago.]

'We are all of us Argonauts of the Argo, but we have been shipwrecked or stranded on this mundane shore. We are stranded with the caution that we must not allow this shore to remain wrongly mundane. This

has become a virtual exile to us, and we come to doubt whether we will ever sail on those sweet seas again.

'But we are more fortunated than most. And we have the surety, if we do not destroy it, that we will be on that Bark again, in another world if not in this one. We remember it and ourselves. Duffey may remember it less than any of us, but he was custodian of the talismans which were our recollection; his was the responsibility of activating us to new life after we had slept.

'It was the Risen Chrwast who said 'Wait here on this shore until I call you.' All who have been on the Argo understand this.'

[Hans Schultz]

'If Duffey did indeed make us, it was three thousand years ago, for we sailed together on the Argo that far in the past. But the talismans (they were part of the gold filagree of the Argo, laid over pieces of the 'Talking Oak' Dordogne, and the gold that was used came from the Great Fleece that we carried), the talismans have not the function of creating so much as the function of Anamnesis or Recollection. They were to awake us and fill us with remembering. It was by us having held the talismans at our birth that we now recognize and recollect each other, now that we are once again in a wakeful state. Our coming together and knowing each other now was a prefiguration of the Resurrection Itself. We are under a blessing. In our own life (our mysterious latter life now in the contemporary world) we have some of the experiences that are Beyond Life. We are born again more literally than are most. We have here our first resurrection in the Resurrection of Christ.

'It was a sweet, sad paganism that said,

'And if thou wilt, remember.

And if thou wilt, forget.'

And we have remembered, as yet in fragments only, but we remember more and more as time unwraps from us. The talismans that we grasped at birth were pieces of the Holy Argo. They re-create us and tell us who we are.'

[Teresa (Showboat) Piccone.]

'The temptation and fascination, Melchisedech, was always to be going somewhere. This temptation will become even stronger with the personal release of the Adversary. But better than going somewhere was being there already. There was a saying that 'Happiness was not a destination but a journey'. This was wrong. Oh, our life was a journey, but it was only a journey through time and space. It wasn't away from our foundation ever. We are born or reborn into the state of having already arrived. We have an inner orientation. We know where it was. The 'Quest Completed' was our basic state. The Golden Fleece had already been found, and we were already wrapped in it. The 'Grail Abundant', the 'Grail-Filled-to-Overflowing' has been possessed, and we eat and drink in that possession of it. We are in Paradise. Our task was to rebuild the world, but not yet to rebuild it in another place.

'Our construction will always be 'old-fashioned', and it will be hooted at by the hooters. It will be as old-faihioned as the first Creation: it will be from the beginning. Oh, we will drink new wine out of new bottles, but both the wine and the bottles were already new when the Day Star was made.

'Avoid the perils of the false activists who are always bedeviling one to be moving and doing. There was, among the urgencies which we must find or make, paradisaal laziness which we must cultivate. This was absolutely required of us. It was not slovenliness, it was not indolence, it was not pigritia. It was laziness in its proper form. When we examine our consciences at night, after no matter how many hectic hours, we must ask 'Did I take sufficient time to be blessedly lazy this day?' There can be no

peace or calm without it.

'Was this prospect of rebuilding the world sufficiently exciting? A spastic or jerky excitement was not consonant with grace. A stimulate was only a goad, and most often it was a self-torture. Excitement was one of the fleshy things that was easiest to give up and most useful in its absense.

'Are there, in rebuilding the world, any details too trivial to concern ourselves with? Oh, we concern ourselves where the spirit dictates. Right management of the muskrat population on Barataria Bay may be a detail that we should be concerned with. The election of a president will almost certainly be too trivial for our bothering. And do not be misled by evil persons who say that everyone should vote. In three votings out of four, no honest person can vote for any candidate listed, and no honest person does. It will be given us to know what things are important and what things are not.

'Duffey, whom I have not met yet, reminds us that we are all Kings in the Kingdom, from our childhoods, and in our own right. We may be leper kings, but the 'Leper King' was a holy man.

'Margaret Stone, whom I have not met, reminds us that we must always be aflame. Why yes, that was another thing. When we examine our consciences at night, we must also ask, 'Did I spend sufficient time in the Fiery Furnace today?' It was so easy to forget these things.

'Now the times become clotted and portentous. It was the second coming of Satan after his release from bondage. It has happened already, or it is happening right now. Some say that, if Satan was to be released, it seems most likely that he was released at the start of the First World War and that he was responsible for the bloodshed then and since. No, the blood so far was only a trickle to the blood that will come. What has gone before was only the Devil rattling the bars of his cage. Now he was out.

'The millennium has already been here. The bolting of the door on the Devil was done quietly by Otto I of the Germanies at Aachen in the year 946. Later, but in the same year, the prisoner was transferred to another and faster prison. This was on the peninsula called the Euxine Chersonese, and modernly known as the Crimea on the Black Sea.

'And you, Duffey, be in St. Louis the last week of May and I will give you your instructions for the rest of your life. That sounds pompous of me, does it not? It wasn't though.'

[Heni Salvatore. Letter to Melchisedech Duffey.]

(This was the longer letter, the one that was not sent.)

'The Argo Voyages are not merely something that we took part in many centuries ago. They still go on. This was our rich other life that continues in reserved places whthe we wake and sleep and wake again in this place which I call 'The World of Record'.

'There was one first instruction that we remember when we wake: "There are not any ordinary persons on the Argo; and such ordinary persons as you may find on the Shore must be reformed out of their ordinariness."

'Yes, we have with us King Melchisedech the Duff who was always intrinsic to our crew. A King on Land he was, but he was never Captain of the Crew except on a temporary acting basis when he took his regular turn of duty. His main assignment was always to activate us from any periodic sleep. Persons of other Holy Quests and Successes do sometimes fall into these sleeps, and they sleep until the end of time. Not so with us. We wake, and we wake again.

'God bless our Crew. God bless our Ship. God bless this shore, which was named 'The World', until we go to sea once more.'

[Dotty Yekourwas.]

and charm. She was one of those sly-eyed, urchin-grinning, gray-stone-carved Blessed Virgins who broke out all over Northern Italy in the latter part of the Tenth Century. Whatever forgotten rooms or forgotten grounds they are dug out of, they have a shouting freshness as well as a mossy sense of absurdity on them. It was almost certain that there was some moss growing on Showboat Piccone, for she was an Earth Creature. Green moss growing in the corners of her eyes, yes. It was quite certain that there was star-spakle growing all over her, for she was a Heavenly creature. There was no reason for Duffey to be ashamed for his workmanship in her or for her electric presence. This Showboat had great compassion and affection for her scenarist in the human comedy, for her maker Melchisedech Duffey. And she was the finest thing that the talented Duffey ever did.

And Vincent Stranahan -- Oh, he was the young man that this Teresa was marrying. He was the best friend of Finnegan. He was the best friend of almost everybody. He was brilliant, of course, since he was one of Duffey's Animated Marvels, but he may have been the least brilliant of the bunch. It would be close, between Vincent and Casey and Mary Catherine. And yet he was outstanding by any other standards. He was so outstanding that Duffey could say to his old friend, Vincent's father Patrick:

"They don't make them like they used to, Patrick," this to that huge and somewhat weed-grown father. "They make them a lot better now."

"I know it, Duff, I know it," Patrick Stranahan said.

And then there was Finnegan. Finnegan had all the goodness (what an odd, what an only word for him!), all the preternaturalness, all the monsterness of his father Giulio. He hadn't quite the sheer and shocking ugliness of appearance that had belonged to his father; he didn't have the great bulk of his father; he hadn't quite the same roaring protest under torture: he may not have suffered such abysmal tortues, though he had suffered. Finnegan believed himself to be half Human and half Teras; but it's only to the narrow vision that there's a difference between the Human and the Teras. Only in a manner of speaking are they different. There are, to one who sees with open eyes, half a dozen such nations of the one and intermingled people of God.

It was hard to come onto the essence this Finnegan who was as quicksilverwash as Teresa. It was Finnegan who explained to Duffey (probably at their first meeting over the one hundred oysters) the difficulty of finding the essence of any person.

"We had a great and high-ranking analyst," Finnegan said. "He was of the equivalent of demiure or archangel rank, and he was examining a contrary and powerful person to discover the essence of him. Duffey, he dissected that person, and stripped down the layers of him as if he were a Duffey onion. He took the hide clear off of that fellow and threw it into a corner where it glimmered and glowed with its electric aura pulsing and throbbing about it. 'Why do they put so much wrapping on them?' the analyst asked. He unstrung and removed the limbs, and he decided that they were not essential. They looked somewhat like giant limbs and somewhat like statuary limbs as they lay there. The analyst took out all the viscera and decided that they spent a very long journey to go a short distance; he decided that they weren't essential either. He removed all the organs and lights from the person's cavity, and he could find no essence in them. He took out the brains with their dangling cords. He discarded it all, layer after layer and wrapping after wrapping. 'We've got to be getting close to the essence of it,' he said, but he wasn't. When he unwrapped the very last portion, he found that it was all wrapping with nothnig inside it. He hadn't found the essence. The whole thing had been an empty jug wrapped in primordial straw.

"But, in the middle of the night, he got up and went to the dissecting chamber where he had unwrapped the man. 'I must have left the light on in there,' he said, but he hadn't. And yet there was a light. The whole scattered thing glowed with light. So the analyst wrote a note to

himself 'Examine, tomorrow, whether there was not an essence somehow diffused through all these wrappings themselves. This light has got to come from somewhere.'

"But the analyst himself died before morning, and his exploration was not and has not been completed."

Yes, you could skin Finnegan and throw his pelt into the corner, and it would still crackle with aura and smoke with essence. But one couldn't find all his essence bottled in one place.

Finnegan was an artist of transcending talent, and as such, he was recognized by Duffey the art dealer and artist dealer. The only medium in which Duffey was a true artist was in the manufacture or activation of people, and in this Finnegan was his greatest masterpiece. No, no, this wasn't a contradiction. It has been said that Teresa was the finest (but not the greatest) thing that Duffey ever wrought. Finnegan was not fine.

Finnegan was a vagabond, and Duffey had been a master vagabond for seven years. He recognized that Finnegan's whole life so far had been a displaced seven-year wandering through the purgatorial lands that seemed to coincide with the world.

These were all of Duffey's Animated Marvels. The essence of none of them was easily distilled out:

The big-brained and big-hearted Hans. What an edifice! The most open man in the world, and who could know him?

Henri Salvatore (The Emperor Henry of Neustria) who had whole empires within himself and to whom had been given the task of rebuilding the world. Not since Archbishop Turpin of the Charlemagne Cycle had there been so great a prelate who was also so great a general.

Casey Szymansky whom Duffey had known almost every day of that boy's life, and had hardly known at all. But some of his mentations and notions had already sent tremors through the whole cosmic signaling system.

Stein of the people! Stein had received one of Casey's old souls in a weird trade, but the combination was older than either of them. Der Kashmir-Stein is known mostly as a remote jewel of India, but it was a hybrid jewel of disparate essences. It was a new appearance here, and its glitter began to make itself felt everywhere. It was not Casey, it was not Stein; it was an abiding spark struck off by their glancing contact.

Marie Monaghan, 'Our Southern Nature's Solitary Boast', the greatest thing that Australia ever gave to the rest of the world.

Mary Catherine Carruthers ('But Thou, Chicago Ephrata, out of Thee shall come --'), how many of the great ones have overlooked her to their loss?

Mary Virginia Schaeffer who was the pride of both Galveston Texas and Morgan City Louisiana. More of her, more of her forever!

Dotty Yerkouris who was a journalist and a member of the prestigious 'Poison Pen Society', as well as barmaid.

And Finnegan and Showboat Teresa Piccone and Mr. X. X will not be given now. He plans careful entrances, and he will enter in his own time.

Aw c'mon, you know that there aren't people like any of these where you come from. Some pilgrims will wander through a lifetime without meeting even one genuine Duffey Animation. And there are eleven who were in one city at one time, if they had only been there.

Was it absolutely certain that this was the original crew of the original Argo? Yes, it was certain. It has been checked out and proved.

The wedding was a fine one, done by one of the perfect couples and by Father McGuigan in Teresa's parwash church (the Stranahan's church too; they lived only a block apart). There were numbers of distinguished Irishmen and Italians there, and smatterings of the people of barbarian races.

The reception was a grand one. Duffey shined by his antics, and he was outshined by many of his own people, especially the Finnegan who

surpassed himself. There was pleasure and grandeur (people are entitled to that on such occasions), and also some of the scrubbiest carrying-on ever. And there was the time when things were coming to their glorious winding-down and Dotty Yekouris with hands on hips had looked at the magus and laughed:

"Thou'rt perfect, Duffey!"

"Such early perfection will do the boy in," Henry Salvatore warned. "If he would be still more perfect, let him follow me."

And Duffey had to speak to Henry about that for a moment:

"You wrote to me 'Come to St. Louis', Henri, and I came," Duffey said. "But you have not yet given me the scanario for the rest of my life. Give it now."

"Come to New Orleans," Henri said. "You have been here in Damascus -- St. Louis, for a week, and you have been given the opportunity for blindness and recovery, though I haven't noticed you undergoing either of the experiences. Now you can go to New Orleans and labor there for the rest of your life. There was a blessed place there, an asphalt garden, and you will grow cucumbers in it for the rest of your days. You'll grow them for the Greater Glory, and they'll be superior ones."

Finnegan, Henri, Duffey, Dotty, and Mary Schaeffer all got into Mary's Ford and drove down to New Orleans. This was the last Saturday of May of the year 1946.

And also, on that last Saturday of May of 1946, on the almost-island of Crimea, out of a deep iron-doored dungeon, the Devil was released from his thousand-year imprisonment.

But hadn't he been released just a hundred years before that, in 1846? We don't know. Maybe the release was a recurring thing.

Book Two

'For this Melchisedech was King of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him to whom Abraham divided the tithes of all. First, as his name shows, he was King of Justice, and then he was also King of Salem, that was, King of Peace. Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but likened to the Son of God, he continued a priest forever... But he whose genealogy was not recorded among them received titfies of Abraham and blessed him who had the promwase.

[Paul. Hebrews.]

1

Several other primary documents are here. They are necessary for an understanding of the recent history and present condition of the world. Primary documents are always like treasures of gold and gems spread out to daylight. Or they are like gold and gems would be if they were many times more rare than they now are.

'With buck-swords in Neustria during the millennium! Duffey died there, durin the seven hidden years of his life, and somebody saved his ashes in a cigar box or humidor or urn. It wasn't an ordinary cigar box or whatever. It was an extraordinary sixteenth receptacle, and it had belonged to the King of Spain. Mr. X. later brought this receptacle with its ashes to Duffey. There are very few men who keep their own ashes in a cigar can on their desks.

'The 'Devil in His Dungeon' was both historical fact and valid element of the folk unconscious during the one-thousand-year period from the years 946 to 1946. We will miss 'The Devil in His Dungeon'. He almost guaranteed that things were well in the upper part of the house. Nostalgia was born with the loosening of the Devil from his Crimean dungeon in 1946.

The word 'nostalgia' was used before that, but not in the same meaning. The world had lived through a thousand-year-long 'good old days' without knowing it. Now there will not be such good days, and there will not be much nostalgia for the trashy evil that we now live and breathe. 'Neustria' or 'Latter Neustria' are unhandy names for the real empire of the one thousand years. 'Christendom' was a handy and true name for the era and extent, but use of such words will not very long be permitted now. We enter a new era of slavery where only incoherence and evil will be permitted.

'The 'Waves of the Future', of which we have heard for near a lifetime now, are backward phenomena breaking onto the past. Hitler was indeed a man of the future, or from the future, but he was raiding backwards into history. He correctly appraised that the province he was raiding backwards into, 'Greater Neustria', had a thousand year extent, but he was a man without direction in several ways. But surely he knew that he was traveling out of the future and impinging on a present and past from the wrong direction than himself. These are still with us, and they are achieving popular adoration. They show that the future will be so evil, but at the same time so cheap and contemptible a thing, that we need not fear to attack it.'

[Absalom Stein. Notes on the Finnegan Cycle.]

'The infestors or kindlers are themselves now stunned by the violence of the infection. They had gone in small groups for not much more than one hundred years. Since the metaphorical earlier release, they defiled mildly and they infected mildly, and they set their fires with small and flickering torches. Their doings seemed to be no more than token things, curious incursions of the several generations of the Sons of the Devil. But now there was effect. Believe me, they themselves are amazed by the present scope of the conflagration that has developed in the decade and a half since the deaths of the Papadiaboloi. It was almost as if the kindlers did not intend it.

'I knew many of these infestors, and I have data on all of them in my files. They were all incomplete and ineffectual persons, going about their dark business in almost somnambulistic fashion. They were dull and isolated botches of paint, carrying no message and understanding none; but they have accidentally come together to form a clear and fearsome picture whose initial design was too deep to come from themselves. Perhaps, as has been said, their Father Himself really has been released this time. But the infestors were jagged little shards of base metal, brittle and soft and worthless, and with no conception of pattern. Together, though, they formed the strong brazen key which unlocks the iron door and released him who was confined for the day of the great thousand.'

[Melchisedech Duffey. Letter to John Schultz.]

'Jesus Christ was the total opposite of the revolutionary. He was the strong partisan of every jot and tittle of the law. After all, he made the law. the only way He could be a revolutionary was against Himself. But Jesus Barabbas (we now know that this was the correct name of the instigator) was a revolutionary all the way. Barabbas was a cheap-shot artist and a cheap-effect artist, as are his followers even till this day. It was Jesus Barabbas whom the 'Jesus People' follow, but they pretend that there was only one Jesus. This brings us to the question of 'Dark Followers' or 'Dark Companions' or 'Dark Correspondences', to groups and institutions, as well as to persons.

'The Argo sailed westward again and again from Illyria, but the Hadriaticus sometimes proved to be a sea without any far shore, and sometimes it was a sea whose Western shore was not Italy. Oh certainly, I sailed on the Argo again and again and again. Do you not remember? I was Orpheus. We came to a wide variety of shores, named and nameless, but we did not come to any imaginary shores. All were real, and almost all of them were

dark shadows of other shores and voyages. Don Juan made a good thing out of this: he pulled a frame-up and arranged that a shoddy double of him should go to hell in his place. And it happened so. But Don Juan was himself the shoddy double of a most eleant and most depraved sinner, and he was entrapped into serving an eternity in a most elegant and most painful hell for a man of sins too refined for himself ever to find pleasure in.

'Casey Szymansky, out of compassion, traded souls with Stein and agreed to go to hell in his place. It was a successful deal from Stein's standpoint, and nothng succeeds like success. Stein came into Casey's brains and his talents as side effects of the same deal, and he grows grander and brighter whthe Casey shrivels. Stein had all the good things now, and they shall not be taken away from him.

'I am tired, and I go into incoherence. I see true connections that I cannot see in moments of clarity, but I am not able to express them. The enemy has designed this obstacle for us. But the enemy may not know that I have a wife who was able to make clarity out of my incoherent expressions. Please do so, dear.'

[John Schultz. Letter to his wife Marie.]

'Finnegan seeks death and does not find it. That was the main point of his puzzling quest. His own fleece was named thanatos and not mallion. Finnegan did not die in the ward in the hospital in the Philippines. But somebody died there in his name, and an army-doctor-friend of mine wrote me that Finnegan did die there in his presence, which letter I received the same day that Finnegan arrived in St. Louis. This amazed me, but it didn't seem to amaze Finnegan when I showed the letter to him.

'Finnegan did not, apparently, die on the landing at Naxos, though X swears that one of the bodies was Finnegan's. But X himself spent the latter part of that same week in Finnegan's company. A thing like that would not bother X, but it bothers me.

'Finnegan did not die in the cabin of the Brunhilde, but someone died there at the hands of Papadiabolous. He did not die at Tangier with Don Lewas, and yet there were two dead bodies at the bottom of the tell. He did not die at the hands of Saxon X. Seaworthy on Galveston Island, though Doll Delaney found a body she was sure was Finnegan's, and Miss Delaney knew Finnegan well. And possibly Finnegan did not die on the Marinanao Coast near Havana. I believe, in spite of all the reports, that he is still alive. I also believe that I have run athwart of several tall-story artists, not the least of whom are the army doctor-friend of mine, Doll Delaney, and Finnegan himself. But the death quest has always been there.

'Finnegan was a double phougaro or funnel, the link between two different worlds. Yet there are characters (X, Biloxi Brannagan, Doll Delaney, Melchisedech Duffey) who have verifiable existence in both of the worlds. Finnegan himself believed that he was subject to topological inversion, that one of thee worlds was always interior to him and the other world exterior to him, and that they sometimes exchange places. But where does that leave us who live in either of the two worlds? Are we not sometimes reduced to being no more than items in the mind of Finnegan?

'This topological inversion also occurs in the case of Melchisedech Duffey. In one form of the inversion, Melchisedech was the 'creator' of a dozen or so of us. Well, so he was then. I have felt it of myself and known it. But that was only in the least plausible of his contingent worlds.

'As to the voyages, there was the question of ships. Was the Brunhilde the first ship, or was it the third? Was it the original Argo? Or was it a later and unsanctified appearance of that ship, following the Bark in time? We have also the question of superimposed levels of experience in the Cruise of the Brunhilde. X says that not all of the events of that voyage happened to Finnegan in the first decade of the second antebellum period: he says that a strong substratum of them happened to Giulio Solli, the Monster Forgotten, the Father of Finnegan, in the decade before World

War I, and that Finnegan has filial memory of them. The atmosphere of that earlier period does sometimes break in strongly on the voyage. But so much of this information depends on X who was not to be depended on.

'Finnegan was out of the Yellow Book of Lecan (the Tain Bo Cuailinge). This pre-supposed that Finnegan was identical with Fingal and also with Cu Chulainn. Well, Finnegan was capable of being all of them. To those interested in this line, I recommend Thurneysen's Die Irwische Helden-une-Konigsage. There was repetition of some of the incidents of the Seven Hidden Years of the life of Melchisedech Duffey and of some of the Brunhilde-Finnegan incidents. It was not even certain that Duffey (whose Seven Hidden Years were all before the birth of Finnegan or in his earliest childhood) has first claim on the anecdotes. Duffey knew Giulio Solli the father of Finnegan, and Duffey pirated and ransacked the mind of Giulio as he did so many others.

'I myself was present at several of the Brunhilde-Finnegan episodes (whether in the flesh or out of the flesh, I do not know: God knows); I was present at one meeting of Don Lewis and Manuel of which Finnegan knew nothing, so I could not have lifted this from Finnegan's mind. And I was present and watched them dine in death-like glitter on the Grand Canary. John Schultz also experienced a rapport with one of the Brunhilde incidents.

'The loves of Finnegan are as puzzling as his deaths. Most of them did not happen in the flesh or in time, though several puzzled women believed that they happened.

'We are all of us in legend. It was absolutely impossible that anyone should be in life who has not first been in Legend. But no one of us understands his own legend. Mary Schaeffer says that I am the Wandering Jew, particularly in my writing style. I have not at all determined the exact relationship of the Argo Legend to the Finnegan Cycle.'

[Absalom Stein. Notes on the Argo Legend and Further Notes on the Finnegan Cycle.]

'Finnegan is a ghost, of course. Which of us was not? But he has the peculiar habit of coming and inhabiting people. All the Fivers understand this, and they are not spooked by the spook, except Casey a little bit. Have pity on all poor people who never had a ghost of their own! Vincent says that Finnegan was the third person in our marriage, sometimes inhabiting him, and more often me; that Finnegan was both Anima and Animus to us. Vincent has been reading Jung, and oh my poor husband, you have not the brains for him!

'It scared Stein the first time he experienced a Finnegan Visitation. He believed that it was a death visitation, and he made note of the time and date. It was the afternoon of Passion Sunday of the year 1948. Well, why shouldn't Finnegan be both a person and a ghost at the same time if he have a talent for it? I have that talent myself.

'I played a part in one of the episodes. I was the Oread Anemotrepes in the sequence on the Mountain. I was clearly conscious of it all: I played it like a comic skit at the old Star and Garter. I was displeased at the way the other two Oreads handled their parts. It's the ethnicity of them, I think. We get quite a few Greek girls at the Star and Garter in one act or another. They're kind of pretty, they're kind of sexy, but they can't act. Simplistic as hell they are, and kind of wooden. I don't care if they did invent acting: they're no good at it.

'I told Oriebates that if she couldn't do better than that, why hell, I'd get Mary Newshee out of the popcorn booth to play it. The Star and Garter had already been sold when this happened, and Mary Newsbee was married and living on Walnut Street downtown; but that didn't seem to be the case in the episode. It was not a dream though. It was a detached experience.

'What puzzles me was that Duffey knows so little about such things

at first hand. But he catches on fast. He pirates minds and gets the stuff out of them and pretends that he knew it all the time, That Maker Man, he just doesn't have it.'

[Teresa Piccone Stranahan. Private Letter.]

'Showboat wrote that? How did she know that Finnegan was a ghost? He was, though. But Finnegan and Showboat were not lovers ever. Their intimacy was of another sort. Finnegan was likely not a real lover of anyone ever, unless he could find another Teras to carry on with. With me, he was a ghost-lover. Well, am I a fornicator thereby? Not I. Ours was not a thing that can be put into flesh, nor into words.

'Of the adventures, oh, I was on all the original adventures myself! I was one of the Argo Company, yes, but the 'Adventures' were variants. I know what Finnegan told me, what X told me, what Melchisedech told me. There are some of the identities that haven't properly been unraveled though. One of the Papadiabouloi was the same person as the Private Gregory in that hospital ward in the Philippines. How many persons in the world can be expected to have such great purple pumpkins for heads?

'Teresa was an analog to Anastasia Demetriades, but she resented Anastasia. She rejoiced privately when Anastasia died. I am the same person as Doll Delancy, according to the account of X, but Doll wasn't too much according to other accounts. She was like myself, but with the brains knocked out.

'As to Melchisedech Duffey, at rare times he becomes identical with every one of his creations. I have felt him in myself as myself. It wasn't simply that he's a robber of minds, for he's a bit more. Whether or not he was our maker, he was our awakener and our mentor.

!How odd of God

To puff the Duff!

'We are a mutually creative group of about thirteen people. God sets such groups according to whim, and to prevent elitism from creeping in. That's why there's a Duffey-type at the head of every group -- to teach humility. We are all about one-thirteenth Duffey. We think about that whenever we are inclined to be thunderstruck by our own genius. In any random company of a dozen or so persons, one or two of them will be already dead, but with no real division between. Do the dead know that they are dead and in purgatory? Or rather, do we know whether we are dead or not? Whether we are in the flesh or not? Whether we are in the world or not?

'We were given Finnegan because he was part Teras, so all of us will be part Teras through him. This keeps us from being overly proud of being human. All who have dealt with Finnegan have acquired a rich intellectual stratum that rests somewhere between the conscious and the unconscious. This stratum can't be brought out, It can't be displayed. It can't be examined on any terms except its own. It melts away, and sometimes one fears that it was lost. Finnegan expresses part of this west-of-the-moon intellect in his paintings. But all his paintings fly away to obscure collections, since we cannot afford to own them for long. He expresses part of it in his words, but his words can never be recalled when he wasn't present. Finn says that this inaccessibility comes from his having Teras brains and we having people brains. All of them, Casey and Henry and Hans and Absalom, pass themselves off as being smart by cashing in a little bit of the hoard that Finnegan bestows on us. Finnegan was the most talented and intelligent man anywhere in spite of his ape-brained vagaries and antics. He was my beloved forever, and he was Duffey's Central Creation. Well, back to rebuilding the world.

[Dotty Yekourwas. Unmailed Letter, no addressee given.]

'It was a continuing mystery how a very small group, usually less than a dozen persons, has been able to save the world from destruction for several decades now. We have been doing exactly that, but the margin becomes closer and closer.

[Mary Virginia Schaeffer]

2

Now it was into the New Orleans Scene, in the time-defying stasis of Duffey, which moves back and forth through the years. But, in those first two weeks or so, before Finnegan flew the coop that first time, the scene wasn't quite in stasis yet.

Duffey and Finnegan and a man named Zabotski who owned the building were working one morning very early. It was the fourth or fifth morning dating from the founding of the Pelican Press in New Orleans. Early morning, yes, it had just struck midnight on the little wooden clock that Zabotski himself had made. The instituting of the Pelican Press was for the publishing of a journal called 'The Bark' for the renewal of the world, and for the publishing of other things also.

Zabotski was a gross and sometimes even an unpleasant man, but he was a fine artist. This combination was frequent. Zabotski was an ethnic artist. The art of the Philistines was the most enduring and the most underrated of all the ethnic arts. And Zabotski liked to busy himself at all hours, and he was a very sociable man. Such hyperactive and socializing inclinations are often found in completely useless people. But Zabotski owned the building, and he considered that he had certain rights of entry.

Duffey and Finnegan and Zabotski were rebuilding and reappointing a large room there: it would be the press room, and it would be the everything room. And, at the same time that Duffey was doing this, he was also making a recorder flute. And Finnegan, while working on the rebuilding of the room, was also painting a large picture. Actually, in their own ways, they were about the business of rebuilding the world.

Duffey would also have his 'Walk-In Art Bijou' as well as his pawn shop in this building.

The recorder, a musical instrument, an old type of flute such as had been made and played back in mid-millennium, was being put together out of walnut wood and Philippine mahogany. The stop-keys and filagree were being made out of bright brass. Since he had made his first banjo, Duffey had held in contempt all persons who play on instruments that they haven't made themselves. And the newest of Duffey's tall dreams was for a flute band to give an occasional alternative to the string band that he had found already thriving there in the neighborhood and had joined.

"There was a report on the radio, on the 'Late, Late, Late News That Was Different', about a prisoner being released in the Crimea last Saturday," Duffey said. "It got comic treatment. What else could it get? But it confirms some of the things that Henry and Absalom and others (myself, for instance) have been saying."

The picture that Finnegan was painting was a horizontal eight feet by four feet piece, and it was in the Finnegan 'Yellow Period' style. There was a leaping sophistication in its handling, but it handled primitive materials, ice-age animals and cave-man settings. "I get my own reports from the Old Country," Zabotski said. "This wasn't entirely comic, though there has always been a folk-comic element in tales of the Chort. This story was a simple one. The Devil was released from the underground dungeon which many people did not know underlay the peninsula. He came out of there light-blinded but in possession of most of his faculties. He stretched himself to a great height. He got ten kilos of balm from a pharmacy and rubbed it on the galls that had been made by the irons on his neck and wrists and ankles. He gave cryptic answers to reporters. 'What would you say would be the most important effect of your release?' a reporter asked. 'They shall know it, now that I have returned,' the Devil quoted. 'Wasn't it Achilles who said that first?' the reporter inquired. 'No, I said it first, a long time ago', the Devil said. 'He may have had it from me. I have the lever and the hammer boys. You will give me a good

press, or you will run into the worst difficulties that you ever thought of. 'Whenever did you not get a good press, since there has been a press?' one of the reporters said. 'That's true', the Devil admitted. Let's keep it that way.' I should have quite a few more details of it soon. A cousin of mine was present and witnessed it all."

"Ah, I'm afraid that we will know it, now that he was back."

"Where do you have your reports from?" Duffey asked.

"Oh, from my own radio. But it's a wireless that was literally without wires, and that speaks only to Slavic ears, and not to all of them. Cut me one more stud to the length of those others, Finnegan."

Finnegan sawed another stud of seven feet and one and one quarter inches. Finnegan did not measure and he did not square, but he cut to perfect fit. This was because he was an artist. For the first of the studs, he had measured the distance with his eye, and he had got it right. For the others, as Zabotski called for them, he cut them without looking. Why not? He had already looked. Does an artist have to look twice?

"Finnegan, I will hate you for that forever," Duffey said, "and I will hate you for accepting it without blinking, Zabotski. You are working rule-free and not by jot and tittle. I was once the best carpenter in St. Louis, and I am still one of the nine great carpenters in the world, but I always measure carefully. My wife was starting down from Chicago this morning, with a surplus army four-by-four truck with all our possessions not otherwise stored. My wife has never seen either of you, except through my mind and at a distance of hundreds of miles, but she has you both sized up perfectly. 'Tell that Zabotski that he had better lose fifty pounds,' she writes 'between the eyes'."

"I exercise up there constantly," Zabotski said. "There's a little fat there, I suppose, but oh the great extent and depth of fine and lean brains too! What does that second reindeer say, Finnegan? Oh, yes, I get it now."

Sometimes Zabotski stuck his huge hands into Duffey's flutemaking, but it was hard to fault him there. He was good with both wood and brass. He had brought some of his own equipment from next door, a small furnace (they would need it anyhow for making and repairing many parts for the press), a lathe, a mortising machine, a wood-turners' outfit, a brass-smelting arrangement with small drop-hammers.

And sometimes Zabotski stuck his big hands into the picture that Finnegan was painting, spreading globs of impossible pigment with a palette knife, and making possible some effects that even Finnegan had hesitated over.

But should people whose purpose was the rebuilding of the world be taking time out for picture-painting and flute-making? They should, yes. You'll never build a world right without such things.

"Here it will make a difference in the color," Zabotski said. "The purpose will make a difference. Why are you painting the picture, Finnegan?"

"This one was for money. It will go to a fraternity house where they should be smart enough to catch the lines. Dotty says that we will need quite a bit of money to get things rolling."

"Oh, for money. Then it is this way." And Zabotski caused an effect that would enhance the money value. Zabotski knew all about the enhancing of money. It was no wonder that Zabotski was an artist, or that Finnegan was. Almost everybody in that block was an artist. There are not three blocks in all of New Orleans with more artists living in them. Zabotski wouldn't have rented that building to Dotty and Duffey and their bunch if there hadn't been an artist, Finnegan, among them. And Zabotski, as one of the foremost Philistine artists in the world, had high standing in the art colonies.

"Why are there so many ungainly butterflies and birds hovering about the mouths of the animals and people in your painting, Finnegan?" Duffey asked. "And what was the complicated figuration of the fur and hair of the

animals?"

"Oh poor rotten Duffey!" Finnegan cried in amazement. "That's talk, Duffey, talk. Don't you know talk, don't you know words and statements when you see them? Do you know that leptidopterists have discerned a whole branch of Pleistocene lepidoptera rock paintings of Chamonix and St. Zermatto and Guebwiller? But the leptidopterists are mistaken in their own specialty. Those supposed butterflies around the mouths of people and animals in the rock paintings aren't butterflies at all."

"What are they then, Neanderthal Artist Finnegan?" Duffey wanted to know.

"Balloons," Finnegan said. "They are cartoonist-style, speech-and-song balloons. They are the words and the statements coming out of the mouths of the people and beasts. They are all in the original and complex language."

"You lie, Finnegan," Duffey said recklessly, and he left his flute-making for a while to put up a cranky little shelf in the rebuilding structure of the room. "I know that the cave and wall paintings at St. Zermatto and Chaminix and Guebwiller were all done by Neanderthal men. And the Neanderthals had neither speech nor writing."

"Oh Holozoic Hell, Duffey! Of course we had them, and we have them yet!" Finnegan exploded. "These birds and butterflies, on the cave paintings and the wall paintings, and on my painting on canvas here, are message blurbs being spoken by the creatures. They look more ornate than do contemporary cartoonists' balloons because we used to write on both the inside and the outside of the balloon. No, they aren't butterflies, and they aren't birds. They are words and sentences of written commentary. And you, Duffey, are left on the outside. You don't even know what the second reindeer answered the first. Even Zabotski caught that one finally. This was rich language that we use in our paintings. Language began in complexity and perfection, and then it degenerated into our present simplicity and poverty."

"You don't even know the meaning of poverty," Duffey said. "Not in this, not in anything. The lack of comprehension of poverty was at the root of so many of our trouble. Certain degenerate and evil persons have begun a 'war on poverty'. They are the same persons who relentlessly wage the 'war on obedience' and the 'war on chastity'. Waging a war on poverty was like waging a war on life or on goodness. Pay attention. This was a Duffey Lecture. It will not be repeated."

"Of course it will be repeated, many times," Finnegan said.

"There was something wrong with an economic and social system that cannot generate real poverty," Duffey stated, "when poverty is unblest and no longer to be found, then the whole world comes unblest. We will pray for holy poverty, and we will hardly find it. This lack of poverty imperils the Great Pot itself."

"Maybe the Devil will bring back poverty, now that he was released," Finn said.

"The Devil? What should he have to do with Holy Poverty other than to defame it?" Duffey asked, "and that was what he will do. In the years to come, you will hear endless defamations of poverty. You will hear it maligned and cursed; you will hear it slandered and classed as an evil. You will even hear 'cures' proposed for it. Some of these cures will be proposed by persons really wanting to find cures for various degradations which they miscall poverty. But also, there will be absolute and violent attacks on poverty itself. Look closely at the people who mount these attacks. They may be the most distinguished of senators and bishops and mouth-brokers and enterprising and diligent self-servers. They may be the fashionable Judas Priests and accommodations-persons. These things they may be on the surface, but underneath they are devils, every one of them." "Duffey, I've known poverty," Zabotski said. "It has rough edges."

"It's just that you're not holy enough to see it clearly, Zabotski,

and you may be calling other things by its holy name. The Devil, more than ever now, will be bringing in things to be called 'poverty' by the ignorant: sordidness, trashiness, degradation, debasement, deprivation, animality, certain of the deliriums, squalidness, shabbiness of spirit, debauchery, barrenness, hopelessness. But there was no way that the Devil can bring back Holy Poverty to us.

"There remains one solution to all economic and social and personal ills, to all the traumas caused by sin and false poverty: 'Ask and you shall receive'. That takes care of everything. There was no case of persons asking in good faith and not receiving, and the Lord promises that there will not be. There are so many persons who would like to find blessing in true giving, and so few who are available for the receiving. What if the Pot stands full forever, and nobody will ask for its Holy Slumgullion?

"Oh, you win, guys," Duffey said then, turning to the Finnegan picture. "Some days I really am dim. I caught it finally."

"Caught what, old Duff?" Finnegan asked him.

"What the second reindeer answered to the first reindeer in your painting. It's pretty good."

The Great Pot Itself was an intimate part of 'Project Rebuilding the World'. This project began with that fat-to-overflowing, young, Louisiana-swamp Frenchman, Henri or Henry Salvatore. (Where his name was given 'Henri' it was pronounced 'Onree' in the Cajun fashion; where it was given 'Henry' it was pronounced 'Henry'.) Salvatore had once had a maritime vision and heard a salt-spray voice telling him that his was the responsibility of rebuilding the world. Henri didn't know how to do it, but he did have a talent for delegating assignments. He delegated the Rebuilding of the World to Finnegan, to Duffey, to Stein, to Mary Virginia, to Dotty, to those first and mainly. Then he went off to a place where they were supposed to teach the rebuilding-of-the-world trade. (He then became to all of them 'Henry the Merry Monk' though he intended to become a secular priest.) Those to whom he gave the assignments, to work until he should come back, didn't know how to rebuild the world either. But each of them had several little catch-notions of it that might serve until a better idea came along. Among the notions were 'A Journal', 'An Institute', and 'A Pot'.

The Pot belonged to Zabotski. Zeb had once been a chemist or experimenter of some sort, and he had used this big, glass-lined, one-thousand-gallon capacity pot or crock for some distillation experiments. Duffey asked for it, and Zabowaski knocked out a section of the wall and brought it into the big room.

Here was part of the canonical account of the affair: "Duffey rigged gas burners under it and filled it with water. He announced that he would keep the Big Pot boiling forever. He got a priest from St. Katherine's to bless it." Such was the basis and founding of it. That had been the day before this. The idea was that people could put vegetables or meat or fish into the pot to boil, or that God would put these things into it secretly. And the resulting slumgullion in the pot would be available to poor people forever. But, in a full day, only six persons had taken fish soup out of the spiggots of the pot, and all of these had been impelled by curiosity and not by poverty. None of them had been poor enough to be members of Holy Poverty. There had to be poor people somewhere in that city and that world. Where were they, where, where?

"There has got to be a turning point for the pot," Duffey said. "Ah, that bird there in your painting, Finn, with what looks like a smaller bird in front of its mouth, is that --?"

"What you take for a smaller bird is, of course, a bird-cry in its balloon," Finnegan said. "It's a specialized bird, so it's saying a specialized message."

"All right, what was it saying, Finn?"

"It was saying, 'When the horse gets here, we will eat. And when the man gets here, then we will really eat'. That's the kind of bird it was, you

see." This, like everything else that Finnegan ever said, was prophetic.

The Widow Waldo came by then.

"I saw your light on and came in," she said. The Widow Waldo never slept. She looked constantly for persons to visit with. In the middle of the night it was always this, 'I saw your light on and came in'. In the day time it was 'Your curtains were up so I was pretty sure you were awake, so I came in.' The Widow was a wonderful and fair person. She brought a little jar of a new kind of coffee and made coffee for them all in the percolator. She had little cakes for them, cakes that she had just made. She talked in cadenced sharing for a while. Then she put three pounds of good hamburger meat into the pot and left. The Widow Waldo was moderately rich.

But it was about a month after this until the Pot managed to give itself its peculiar character and signature and flavor that meant that it would be a going concern. The first large animal to go into the Pot had been a horse, an ancient buggy-pulling horse that had hauled people around the French Quarter. It had died, and its owner had given it to the Pot. He had also given its old straw hat with its two ear holes in it to go in the Pot. This old straw hat had not finished living its life yet. It floated on the slumgullion of the Pot for weeks and even months and gave a character to it. People liked to look in to see if it was still floating there. This was the beginning of character and signature and flavor, but it wasn't the outstanding thing yet.

The Pot weighed a thousand pounds empty and nine thousand pounds full. It was ordained that it would never be empty again, once water and slum were put into it. A hundred bushels of barley had been put into it very early, and that gave the slum long-lasting bulk and a pleasant flavor. Later, rice would be used more than barley. Salt and onions, rough fish, country herbs and weeds were added constantly. But slum doesn't become slumgullion until a 'big meat' goes into it, and the horse was the first of that. Then there was a cow or two. (The six persons a day had increased to about six hundred after the first week or so, and quite soon went to several thousand.) Alligators went into the Pot then, and the famous Alligator Tail Soup was served on the side for several days. Quite a few rabbits and birds went in, and sometimes a sheep or goat or cow. Potatoes and turnips went in, and whatever the green grocers had of wilted or spoiled remnant.

There were a few razzers and jazzers around who would make brash comments about the Big Pot. And the jazzers were the pivot of the turning point when it came. Several of the jazzers fished three large bones out of the pot one day, and one large bone. They made a big noise about what they had fished out, and anyone who was familiar with humans could see that these were conspicuously human bones. What would this do to the fame of the Pot?

Things like that can go either way. They may be taken in good humor or in bad. But in this case, there was strong suspicion, and grounds for it had been seen, that those jazzers who had fished the bones out of the Pot were the same persons who had put them in. These persons, in fact, were three medical students. And when they struck next, with the garish sign painted on the Pot, and painted tightly so that it would remain bright almost forever, "Cannibal Duffey's Irish Restaurant", it was taken in good humor by almost everybody.

And something did improve both the actual taste and the reputation of the stew right about then. It may have been the human parts in it; it may have been something else. The stew acquired character and individuality, and it would retain these things forever.

And, as Dotty Yekouris said, what if an unfortunate cadaver did (now and then) find its way into the Pot? You've got to expect things like that in a large city. Everybody contributes what he can to the general weal, but some persons can contribute only themselves.

Duffey and Finnegan and Zabotski didn't finish rebuilding the room that early morning. That project, like the larger project of which it was a part, would go on for decades at least. They all had their distractions, for

one thing. Zabotski, for instance, was courting the Widow Waldo.

Henry Salvatore had entered a seminary to learn how to rebuild the world. But he had put other people at the task in the meanwhile. Duffey and Dotty Yekouris began to publish a little paper named 'The Bark' (in the sense of a boat or a ship). The first organ to take notice of 'The Bark' (except for a one-shot burlesque of it named 'The Bite', and that was done by Absalom Stein with vinegar and kindness) was Casey's 'The Crock' in Chicago. These two journals joined battle over the issue of how the world should be rebuilt. Duffey went about the project in various ways, and he picked up some allies. Stein had come down to New Orleans just at launching time, and Finnegan flew the coop and left. The two events were related. Dotty Yekouris was desolate when Finnegan left. Well, he would be leaving a lot, and she had a lot of desolation in store for her.

Letitia Duffey had arrived with the cream of the Duffeys' worldly possessions and with enough cash to carry things on for a while.

Mary Virginia Schaeffer belonged to the Schaeffer family that owned the Red Dog Motor Freight which ran from Galveston and Houston to Morgan City and New Orleans. It also covered Baton Rouge and Shreveport and Port Arthur and Orange and Beaumont. Mary Virginia transferred herself to the New Orleans terminal and worked with Dotty on 'The Bark' and on other things, as well as for the Red Dog Motor Freight.

Soon, Margaret Stone would come down from Chicago to set them on fire.

And, one of these months or years, Salvation Sally would come from Australia to aid in the Salvation. But rebuilding the world was a difficult task even for a crew that contains a Fat Frenchman and a Magician-Sorcerer-Magus, and a Dotty Yekouris, and a sometimes Finnegan.

Duffey also formed associations with other persons who were building or inventing worlds or moments or situations or scenes. There was Joe Smith the vagabond painter who had begun, in Galveston, the famous triptych of Dotty O'Toole that Finnegan would finally finish. Joe Smith did not ever finish anything, but he had a disturbing excellence to everything that he did, and it was a necessary condition that every piece he did should be incomplete. He had left more than a dozen unfinished masterpieces with art dealer Duffey.

There was Adam Scanlon of New York and Groben of Chicago. There were Rita Tinder, Gilbert Brisbane, Crystal O'Boyle (the untraditional glass goblet lady), Neil Holway, Dorcas Whiteduck, Wesley Neosha, Pedro San Carlo, Jessica Shrike (that princess of porcelain), Mary Ann Goldbrook, Hugh Thatcher (the Yellow Kid), Humphrey Speckle, Peggy Munster, Elroy Redheart (wrought-iron work was not dead but only sleeping, and Elroy was waking it up with his hammering on its white-hot iron), Timothy McMasters, Alvin Huckster, John Bently Oatmeal (the Renaissance of Pottery had begun with him), Kester Coogan. Oh, those are some of the artists of the neighborhood and the world (regione et orbe) whose work Duffey had for sale very early, and whose creative ideas contributed mightily to the Rebuilding Thesis of Duffey and his company.

These were the most talented artists to be found. At least five of them were among the hundred greatest American artists, and two of them (Adam Scanlon and the fly-the-coop Finnegan) were among the two greatest.

Duffey knew from the first that his part in rebuilding the world would be carried out largely within his own vocation as Art Dealer, yes, and Pawn Broker. He could influence the world uncommonly from the first of these vantages. There are flaming moments and scenes in every job, and the world can turn either way at every flame-point. Duffey may have realized sooner than anyone, except the Adversary Himself, the rabid and overwhelming attack that would soon be launched against all the arts. His Walk-In Art Bijou would be a flexible fortress against all such assaults.

Duffey didn't acquire all these clients immediately, but he had them

all quickly, and he added and added and added to his list, Heloise Tantrum a really good sculptor, John Claxton who painted on slabs of slate, people like that. It must be understood that, whthe other characters and groups were following out their lives in normal sequence of the years, Duffey was in a creative stasis that disregarded the years. So he moved back and forth through them henceforth.

Duffey was continually struck by the fact that there was so much good stuff in the world. On the surface, Duffey had seemed more of a pessimist than the young people he was associated with. But, in the creative interior of him, that wasn't so. In rebuilding the world there were plenty of good stones available for reuse. It might be necessary to make only token acquirments from quarries. Or there might be enough stone so that none at all need to be quarried.

3

Another ally or counter-ally who came to help them or to harm them (to affect them anyhow) was Mr. X, that running rumor of a man. We have now arrived at the time of his first coming to the in New Orleans. Bagby had written from St. Louis that X was coming. Letitia had asked several times when he would arrive. And Duffey had never heard of him. No, he hadn't heard of him, but he remembered something about a hokey-pokey, Italian, push-cart confection man from when Duffey was about three years old. The first of the talismans had been given out by Duffey then, but what had that earliest of the talismans fruited in?

Duffey had been working late one night. Dotty had said 'Put him on the sofa when he comes; everything else was full.' 'Put whom on the sofa, dear?' Duff had asked. 'You are the most exasperating man I ever knew,' Dotty said, and she went off to bed. And half an hour later, the sleepy Letitia arose.

"Aren't you going to let him in?" she asked Duffey inconsequently.

"Let whom in, butterfly?" he asked her.

"The X quantity at the door."

"Oh, I didn't hear anybody knock."

"What? You really don't understand that he would be too shy to knock?"

Letitia threw the door open. She threw her arms wide in the famous Koch gesture, and they remained wide and empty. But they couldn't be allowed to remain so.

"Dammit, X, I'm one of you," she cried. She reached out and captured and enfolded the little man and gave him the famous biggest kiss in town. Oh, but then he melted out of her arms like tacky vapor, and re-formed at a safer place with a table between him and the danger.

"Oh, X, X," Letitia laughed. "I thought it was only your wife that you were so terrified of. Was it all women?"

"No, no, that was not terror, gracious lady," X said. "That was something else."

X was at the same time a happy-looking and a wistful-looking clown. He seemed to be about the age of Duffey, probably a couple of years younger than the century. He was a mid-nineteenth-century, north Italian type though, a small nobleman come onto small days, wrapped in tattered elegance, and full of secret information.

"I am X," he said. "Need I say more? I know everyone. I saw your Finnegan (he was in Chicago then) and others there. I saw the Pope in Rome and he asked to be remembered to you. He worries about your soul, you having so many feet in so many different worlds. I saw Levi van Wei in Paris and he said that he could take a couple more Finnegan pieces. I saw your sister, gracious lady Letitia, and she said 'Don't tell her anything; make her guess'. I could not get to see the president. I don't trust him anyhow; why should I? I saw Fat Henri. I saw Teresa when I was in St. Louis with Bagby.

But, my time being so limited, I can see only the most important people. I saw Sebastian Hilton and the Countess in Carpathia. I hope they will be able to do something about the situation there. I do not want to travel under false colors. I name you the fine and important people whom we both know, but I do not state that any of them would recommend me for anything. Really, I don't know who would ever recommend me."

"I would," said Letitia.

"I would," said Dotty Yekouris who could always wake from the deepest sleep on the arrival of any real personage. "You have come to the right place, X. For about four days, that is, you have come to the right place here. Have I missed anything important, little person?"

X talked for about four hours then. And he talked pretty steadily for the four days that he was with them that first time.

"Doofey, I have two things here of the most utter importance," he said after a while. When he had first come in, he had put a black box on the table there. And he had also set a canister or urn beside the box. They looked like art objects carefully wrapped.

"Both of these contain some things that you have seen before, Doofey," X said. "Both of them contain things that are part of you, both in your past and in your future." In this black box there was a gray box, and in the gray box there was a brown box. And he removed the gray box from the black and the brown box from the gray.

"Now we're really getting somewhere," said Letitia. "But I know that box."

"Where's the red box?" Duffey asked.

"Oh, you mean as in the magic act," X rose to the allusion. "Yes, the red box is the one that appears and disappears. You can put it in any of the larger boxes, and close and then open the cover again, and the red box will be gone. But then it will be in one of the other boxes when you open that. I hadn't seen or thought of the red box for years, but I believe I can still do the trick. The brown box was full of other things too important to play tricks with."

"The brown box is quite red enough," Letitia said.

"Doofey, was the red box in the black box or in the gray box?" X asked.

"In the black box," said Duffey.

"No, you are wrong," said X. "It is in the gray box. And X opened both of them. But it was X who was wrong and Duffey had been right. The red box was in the black box.

"I was known as the Great X-Capo when I was in Vaudeville," X said. "I did magic tricks as well as escapes, but what you did was not a trick."

"No, it was real," Duffey said with some pride in his powers.

"Doofey, you more than anyone in the world should know what was in the brown box," X said. "I have brought it from Chicago to you. Oh!"

The red box was gone suddenly, but in its place there were three red roses. A flamboyant car drove up outside at the same moment.

"It does not matter," X said. "The red box was an intrusion by you, Doofey. It has gone back to whence it came, to nowhere. But the roses are nice."

X took the three red roses in his hands. He gave one of them to Letitia and one of them to Dotty Yekouris. The flamboyant man from the car came in, and X gave him the third red rose.

"You are Hugo Stone the infamous communist from Chicago," X said.

"A Red Rose for the Red," said Absalom Stein, for it was he. "Was there a card on me in the Brown Box that you bring to Duffey?" "Certainly, certainly, you are well documented there in all detail."

"What's the last entry on my card?" Stein asked.

"A question mark, put there by myself," X said. "For some reason, you haven't been acting like the infamous Communist lately."

"Oh, Casey Szymansky and I have traded souls," Stein said. "Sort of

traded. Sort of souls. It's done more than you would imagine."

"Then Casey was now the infamous Communist in Chicago?" X asked.

"Exactly. And I'm the good guy," Absalom said.

"I thought that Casey had been building up a history of funniness lately," X mused, "Oh well, that was easily explained. Now in this brown box --"

"It doesn't belong to me, X," Duffey said. "It belongs to 'The Crock', and 'The Crock' belongs to Casey and his friends. Did you steal it?"

"Certainly I stole it. They were not properly using the information that was in it. As to the other item, it was a pottery cigar box or urn with ashes in it."

"Ashes?"

"Utter ashes. They belong to you, Doofey. I said that they belonged to you. Do you know in what sense it was that they belong to you?"

"Oh, those ashes! Yes, I know in what sense they're mine. I don't take up much room when I'm cremated and canned, do I? Did you steal them too?"

"I took them furtively, but it was not really stealing, since they belong to you in every possible sense. I knew that I would someday become a buddy, even an agent of yours. And, as there are so few of us who travel from that country to this, I thought I'd better bring them to you. But it was tricky, I tell you, Doofey, bringing them out of there."

"Was it too gauche for me to inquire how these could be your ashes, and you still alive and functional?" Dotty Yekouris asked.

"An anachronism, that's what it is," Duffey said.

"An anachronism, that's what you are, Duffey," Dotty said.

The brown box contained index cards scribbled full of information. Most of the cards had been filled up by Duffey himself. Others of them had been filled in by other persons, including X.

"It was information on the plotters, on the infiltrates," X said.

"I know what it was," Duffey told him, "but I'm not as interested in it as I once was."

"Then get interested in it once more," X lectured him. "It was a sort of game before. Now it becomes serious. It was in only a sketchy manner that you know what it was, even though you made many of the notes. This was the hard information on the diabolists who infiltrate the People and the State and the Church. You will notice one new card of of fluorescent or phosphorescent or diabolical orange-red that was not in the file whthe you had it. And you will notice that this card, while apparently three times the other cards in all dimensions, yet fits in neatly with the others in this small box. It was an illusion that was more than optical."

"I understand the illusion. I could probably do it myself," Duffey said. "But why add such a card at this time?"

"Because he is loose and working at this time. If the Lady Letitia will pour coffee for me and brandy for the rest of you, I will tell you about the recent release of this person or entity. I was an eye witness."

"I have heard of several hundred eye witnesses to it, and they do not agree," Absalom Stein said.

"That's possible," X agreed. "There were quite several hundred persons present at the release, and not one of them was the sort of person who would keep quiet about things. As to the accounts not agreeing, well it was mostly a disagreeable business. Did you field that one, Miss Dotty? It was in the nature of a joke."

"It was a lovely joke, X, and you are a lovely person," Dotty said. "Tell us about the great moment when history was unmade and the Devil was released from his prison."

So X quickly went into his account of the incident.

"The peninsula with its oblast was known to the Greeks as the Tauric Chersonese and to the Romans as the Euxine Chersonese. The Goths called it

simply Cherson. At the time of the imprisonment, the peninsula was owned partly by the Kingdom of Kiev and partly by the Principality of Tmutarakan, an advance host of the Khanate of the Golden Horde. So the Prisoner, though brought from Aachen by Christians, was delivered first to Mohammedans on the peninsula, and was then given over to Devil worshipper allies for the actual prisoning. This was in the year 946 or 947. The Devil always had a small group of Devil worshippers as his guards. The peninsula was called Krym by the Russians and Crimea by ourselves. But it was also known as The Prison (Phylake, Carcer) for more than a thousand years before the actual imprisonment.

"The Crimean Mountains rise to an altitude of over a thousand feet near the south coast of the peninsula, and the prison itself was dug down a thousand feet below sea level and below the roots of the mountains.

"Notables had been coming to the vicinity for several years, to check on the time of the release and to consult with the imprisoned Devil. The Yalta Conference was based on such daily, in fact hourly, consultations with the Devil by all the principals of the conference. Very much was promised at that conference. It might seem to a disinterested observer, of whom there can be none, that all the promises were very one-sided. They were pledged to further the Devil's work if only the Devil would come out of his prison after his release was obtained.

"In the imprisonment bit, the Devil, an evil king, was playing a part mostly played by good kings or leaders, the part of the imprisoned or enchanted or trance-sleeping leader. Barbarossa, Alaric, Brian Boru, The Cid, Arthur, all sleep in enchantment or prisonment somewhere, with their loyal subjects waiting and hoping for their awakening or release. But the Devil, they say, did not sleep very much during his imprisonment.

"This past spring was not a pleasant one on the Crimea, as it attempted to return to being a pleasure resort after the war years. It was chilly right up to that fateful last Saturday of May, and yet there was a flocking of notables there such as has not been seen for many lifetimes. They all just wanted to go to the Crimea to enjoy the beaches, now that peace had returned, they said. People with futures were there. They obtained and confirmed their futures by being there. Here were the architects of all the new realms. They came to adore, and to receive their patents in the nobility. There were disproportionate numbers of Catholic Cardinals and lesser Clergy among them. There were disproportionate large numbers of leaders of Jewery. And the Liberal Consensus was especially well represented, and most overly represented of all was the floating world of the intelligentsia, or the cognoscenti, or the gnostics. There were many of the venerable and long-lasting advisors to premiers and presidents and prime ministers and kings. They had waited so long to see their real King! Now the older of them would be able to look on him and expire.

"Representatives of all the decadent and goatish arts were there. Decadence would be in now, and centrality (except for the dark centrality) would be out. And there would be deformed counterparts of every one of the bright arts.

"Only one thousand persons had permits to be present, and my own permit was number nine hundred and eighty-two. I have masqueraded as many different men, and my permit was made out to one of my old masquerade persons. It was only because of the large complement of fraud that has always been in me that I could be there undetected.

"The Devil came out, and I knew him. I had seen him before and talked to him. But I hadn't talked to him, apparently, in his real flesh that was imprisoned there, but in a sort of effigy flesh. This brings us to the question: What will the Devil be able to do in his real flesh that he was not able to do in his effigy flesh? The next few decades may devote themselves to answering this question.

"He came out. He was of a puzzling size. One moment he seemed giant-sized and the next moment he was merely man-sized. Several of the

Cardinals prostrated themselves and adored him. They sang 'Te Satanum'.

"The Devil was misshapen. By that he may always be known. It was hard to describe, but everything about him was out of proportion. He is the enemy of proportion and shape. He is slant-faced and everywhere slanted.

"The Devil signed out in the release book. The Devil cannot write in script. He prints in deformed and scatter-set characters: one letter large, one small, one up, one down, one in one color, one in another. Whenever you see proclamations or posters or models for the young to draw by in such deformed letters and words, you will know that they are really in the hand of the Devil.

"People began to speak in squalid tongues, in a reverse pentacostalism. The Devil stretched and scratched. His servitors began to rub balm on his shackle-sores.

"He spoke about his plans. He said that he would hold about ten thousand meetings a year with select groups, and that every one of the meetings would be a key meeting of utmost importance. He would preach and teach defamation. He would preach the scenic and crooked way. Of all things that stand, he would say, 'Pull them down!'. Of all things alive, he would say, 'Kill them!'.

"I have the names of all one thousand persons who were present at the release of the Devil. There are a few more of their names than that in the cross-index, as many of the devious persons travel under a variety of names. I will have this most secret list and index brought here if you will publish it in 'The Bark'."

"I don't know," said Melchisedech Duffey.

"No. I'm sorry, X, but we will not publish it," said Dotty Yekouris.

Ah, but during the next several days, they did have a good time playing "Who was There?" Some of X's attested names and answers would dumbfound you. X stayed with them for four days that first time. Then, like morning dew, he was gone.

4

But X had been correct in one of his sayings. There did appear the deformed counterparts of every one of the bright arts. Almost at once, they came flying on bat wings out of the old pit that had been closed all during the prisoning of the Devil. Duffey, in his New Orleans time stasis, felt some things as immediate happenings that were, to others, spread out over a decade or more. And yet, even to an objective observer, many of the appearances came overnight, or out of the night. It was no good saying that there had always been such deforming counterparts, such a trashing of the arts. Yes, there had been, but there hadn't been such a massiveness about it before. This wasn't bad art done by accident. It was putrid art done on purpose.

Besides the major arts of painting and sculpture and drama and literature-and-letters and classic jazz and long hair music and architecture, there was the massive trashing of every one of the lively arts of daily and nightly life. The style went out of them, the class was gone. Consider only such popular arts as: string bands, horn bands, flute bands, bicycle riding, soap-box spieling, country and ballad music, rag, Dixieland, barbershop quartette singing, opera, operetta, burlesque, little theatre, road show theatre, repertoire theatre, musical comedy, night club comedy, dirt track racing, horse racing, harness racing, radio listening, radio building, frogging, fly fishing, live bait fishing, shrimping, crabbing, oystering, deep sea fishing, wine making, possum hunting, beer making, automobile making and styling, baseball, boxing, sail boating, coffee making, journalistic reporting, two-reel comedy making, foreign travel,

bird-dogging, bread baking, tramp teaming, civil litigation, romantic courtship, restaurant dining, home dining, train travel, carnivals, circuses, county fairs, pub-crawling, bridge building, poker playing, highway construction, rodeo riding, football, six-man football, soft ball, pecan raising, cattle breeding, deer hunting, coon hunting, concert singing, park strolling, hay riding, kite flying, hoe-down dancing, cotillion dancing, quarter-horse breeding, handicrafting, hell-fire retreats, political cartooning, domino playing, comic strip drawing, widow wooing, organ grinding, horseback riding, airplane piloting, auctioneering, parish bazaaring, editorial writing, sharivaries, play-going, small talk, big talk, honey tree raiding, wolf hunting, picnicking, telescope making and lens grinding, political debating, flower growing, rabbit raising, sourkraut making, sports page writing, lecturing, newspaper columning, monocycle riding, soda fountaining, juggling, sermon preaching, tent shows, verse writing, verse reciting, park rides, raft racing, wild onion hunting, neighborhood barbecue dinners, sauntering, science fiction, masquerade partying, the everyday art of wearing clothes (and allied, minor arts, such as wearing spats), letter writing, visiting, dead waking, rink skating, rifle shooting, duck hunting, street dancing, electioneering, corn-dog making, flap-jacking. Anyone can list a hundred such minor arts. But some of them were endangered even then.

Many of these minor arts actually disappeared, or ceased to be arts, in those days. And all of them were trashed. They lost class, they lost style. And how had this come about?

"An enemy has done this."

"Forget the Siege Mentality" was the title of a leading article by a 'Leading Theologian' in a diocese paper, an article that was widely reprinted in other diocese papers. On seeing the name on the article, it was the second time that Duffey had come onto the name of this 'Leading Theologian'. It seemed a curious title, and a curious attitude to take, right at the beginning of the siege itself. It had all the planned dishonesty of an 'all clear' call when sudden danger had just made appearance.

Duffey reviewed all the theology writing for 'The Bark,' and at the drop of an indult he could have named the hundred leading theologians, but this one wouldn't belong to the hundred. The first time that he had encountered that name was on a list of the one thousand persons who had been present for the release of the Devil near Yalta on the Crimea. Yes, Duffey had seen the list and the index, during the third visitation of X, and he had most of it by heart. He was even able to enter into the minds of many of those on the list, and to prowl in those minds with his old power.

"Ah, what bat wings are coming out of that cavery!" Duffey moaned. "The Company of One Thousand came there only out of sordidness and mean-mindedness, and a greed for success, and with a passion for the sight of their own father. And they came away from it with -- ah, it's as if they had been created a-old by the Devil there. Did he use instant talismans for his creations? I can feel a cheap-jack trickery, a cheap-shot artistry running through it all. They have trashed the things, they have trashed the world, they have trashed the people.

"Oh how they have trashed dirt track racing and boxing, and pub crawling and soda fountaining, and train travel and comic strip drawing and juggling and duck hunting! How they have trashed Dixieland and burlesque and kite flying. How they have trashed wild onion hunting and night club comedy. Of the minor arts, they have left hardly a joy upon a joy!"

Book Three

'And even Levi, the receiver of the tithes, was also, so to speak, through Abraham made subject to tithes, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchisedech met him.'

[Hebrews. 7,9-10]

In New Orleans, the season and feel of later summer prevailed for the greater part of the year. Melchisedech Duffey was in a late summer state of mind around the calendar and year after year. Things seemed to be going well. There were all sorts of prospects for large and heavy harvests. The nightmare that they might prove to be poisonous harvests was kept in a secure stockade where all nightmares are supposed to be kept, And, really, there was a sharp and exciting taste to poisonous fruit and grain when it comes in less than critical quantities.

For Melchisedech Duffey, in those noontime years of his life, there were delights by the acre. He was in the enduring middle of his golden age. He was bound before God to be joyous (all members of the Argo were so bound: that was in the ship's articles). His was a life sanguine, a life besieged, a life militant, and there were drops and gollups of joy all along the blade of it. It was a stasis-present and a kinesis-present, double-time, anomalous years at their best. There were assassins around every corner, but they killed not yet. It was all one delectable noontime of a highlighted late summer.

A large part (about a hundred and thirty-seven per cent of it by measure) of Duffey's delectable noontime was made out of spacious and carnal adventures with Letitia. If there had ever been any misunderstanding between these two, there was none now. Melchisedech and Letitia fit together like the continents of Old Pangea, which they both now remembered more and more clearly. There was no cloud at all in their sky, but how they did generate lightning out of that blue! It was a world beleaguered by the most insane leaguerers ever, but those things couldn't get you as long as the perpetual light shined upon you.

"It was wonderful to be alive in such a bright noontime as this!" Duffey cried out one couple-of-hours-after-midnight between choruses on his recorder flute. "By the great Sun-Drake, it would be wonderful even to be dead in such a bright noontime!"

"Be you alive or be you dead/Come find a rime for me with bed," said the Letitia. "Nah, man, nah, I'm not insatiable. Just greedy." It was more than just coincidence that these two happiest people should have lived in that continuing happiest time ever.

Oh well, suppose that the world was crumbling between their feet, and the great arts of sidewalk and pavement repair had been trashed. There was underground sunshine in New Orleans even at midnight, and it burst up through every hole that was made in the paved world, burst up like exploding flowers. These were hot, red and yellow and purple flowers named Philos and Eros and Agape. Hot purple Agape, that was the real theme flower for that one-hundred-and-twenty month long, late summertime.

That chubby girl Letitia had long since been transfigured into a person of proto-legendary beauty.

"You are even more beautiful than your daughters." And how is that possible a person had admired her. "Yes, and younger too."

That person had thought that Letitia was the mother of Dotty and Mary Virginia and Margaret Stone. How could anybody be more beautiful than they? Come around and Letitia will show you how.

Letitia kissed lots of people, folks who came into the Walk-In Art Bijou and the book store and the pawn shop, people who came into the press room or the institute or the soup kitchen. She greeted all persons with open arms. She kissed Zabotski on his big nose and Stein on his pearly ears. But the thousand other people she kissed on their mouths and made their day for them. People lit up like candles when they heard her voice.

"Can we come in?" people often asked at their door.

"Of course you can come in," Letitia would say.

"Was this some kind of show?" they'd ask. "We didn't see any signs, but we had a feeling of anticipation when we went by here, like there was

some kind of show or entertainment goin on."

"Come in and see," Letitia would say. "We will try to have an entertainment show, an enjoyment."

Beyond themselves, and the Lord who made them, and the world He had ten to them for their house, everything else was bonus for Melchisedech and Letitia. The hot and happy person named Margaret Stone was one such bonus, as she was to everyone who was touched by her life. This Margaret was all ethnics in one, and she was a dago type even beyond the urchinness of Teresa Piccone of the Stranahans (they were the closest of friends, and one of these years they might even meet). You could call Margaret a Street Arab, and she was that too. Ishmael himself was her Lebanese uncle. And she was blood cousin of Absalom Stein ("Oh that damned Jew! Can't he do anything right?" she would sometimes rail at his doings), and she was a niece of that dealer in dwastressed merchandwase in Chicago, Askandanakandrian, the ancient and comic Armenian. She was also a Galilean and a close kinswoman of Jesus Christ. She was a midnight street preacher. She was the one person in the world who made the big difference during the difficult years.

And there was Dotty Yekouris, a beautiful bonus forever. Where Dotty was, there did the eagles gather. Dotty had suitors, and they were swift, high-flying, and fast-swooping suitors. Dotty would love no one but Finnegan in her life, but he was almost always gone, and she very much liked all the fine fellows. She had her pick, and they were the best. They made the bright place even brighter.

Well, some of the suitors, the best and the brightest of them, were connected with those papers, other than 'The Bark', that Dotty and Duffey brought out on the Pelican Press. The Seaman's Paper came out on Monday, the Union Sheet on Tuesday, and the Sporting News on Wednesday, and the Jazz Magazine on Friday. There were usually two others, but they varied during the years. A print shop has to do a lot of printing to come out, particularly if it has to go in the hole for a paper like 'The Bark'.

There was Gabrielovitch who worked for all the sheets and even for 'The Bark'. And he also worked for the Slavic language press, a thing that was going to get him killed. There was a succession of suitors connected with the Jazz magazine, and Dotty named them successively Benny B. Flat. So if you find Benny B. Flat described as one sort of person one time and as another sort of person at another time, it was because they are not the same people. All of them were nice and swinging young men, though all of them were a trifle deaf. Jazz people really don't know that they play as loud as they do.

There was Bello Belonki of the Sporting News. He was the Prince of the Cauliflowers. There were half a dozen of the fellows who were involved in the Union sheet, whole committees of them. Nobody had ever seen one of them alone. Take them out of committee and they will die the death.

And there were the seamen. They brought news of the world, almost the only accurate news of the world; and many incredible bits that they brought turned out to be true. Terry Cork, one of the forty scribbling seamen, did a column 'The Plimsoll Line' for 'The Bark'. And he did about half of the Seaman's paper when he was around town for a few months. Then another Terry (Terry Anderson, Terry Jamil, Terry Renier, Terry Bannon) would take over the task. All of the 'Forty Scribbling Seamen' (that was the name of a song that Dotty had composed) were named Terry.

All of these persons loved Dotty, and many of them wanted to marry her. Dotty herself was a journalist of immense talent. Stein was a professional in the field, but he bowed to her superiority. Duffey was a reckless amateur in the field, and he admitted that she was the best journalist he had ever made. 'The Bark' under Dotty's editorship could whip those rival sheets put out by the Devil and his cohorts because it was livelier, was more intelligent, was better printed, had better writers, had finer and more far-ranging features, offered more intricate and more interesting battle, and was right where the rivals were wrong.

And Dotty herself was ("Dotty, go to your advertising writers and borrow adjectives from them." "No, no, they need all of theirs. We will have to borrow them some place else.") (Ah, here's some adjectives for the thing) -- Dotty was --

Graceful, ever-blooming, magic, dazzling, attractive, miracle-new, floriferous, gorgeous, velvety, popular, fragrant, glossy, handsome, exquisite, luscious, thrilling, superb, exotic, bell-like, sweet, tropical, juicy, showy, unsurpassed, delicious, enchanting, flashy, stunning, succulent, hardy and disease-resistant.

Certainly those adjectives are out of a Nursery Plant catalog. Where do you get better adjectives? But even they will not adequately describe Dotty. Nor are the poets able to do it, though Finnegan rimed her once as --

"More beautiful than birds that fly,
More deeper than a doe-ses eyes."

And the scribbling seaman Terry Cork did her with:

"Was this the face that launched a dozen tugs,
Nine tramps, a brig, a coracle, The Bark?
Was this the form that drove all Frenchtown bugs
And blew the lights and left the Quarter dark?"

And Dotty, like Finnegan, was a native of New Orleans so she didn't have to learn the New Orleans trade or talk. In the words of Absalom Stein she was "The most gracious French lady in New Orleans, and she turns out to be a Lithuanian."

Mary Virginia Schaeffer was a bonus beyond price. Many of the fellows who said they wanted to marry Dotty really wanted to marry Mary Virginia. Even in the 'sweet blackberry ads' of the Nursery Plant catalogs there were not the right adjectives to describe her. Dotty called her the Saccarine Kid, partly in affection and partly in jealousy. Mary V. had been the affianced lady of Henry Salvatore and the Emperor Henry always had the best of everything in the world. He had given her up only for God, and he said that he wasn't sure that God was good enough for her. Well, she was an ornament and a joy. She was a very valuable working ornament.

Salvation Sally was a bonus too. Just barely though, as it seemed sometimes. Even her guitar had a Australian accent. There were a lot of poor sinners who saw the light just to stop her from playing that damned thing. "Sure I'll be saved, yes, right now. Just stop that twanging racket." Well, what does it matter what brings them to the light?

Actually, the Seven Pillars of Righteousness, the true bonifacients, were Henri Salvatore, Melchisedech Duffey, Absalom Stein, Dotty Yekouris, Hans Schultz, Draja Gabrielovitch, and John Solli (Finnegan). These were the trustees of 'The Bark' and the members of the board of directors. There would be some replacements as these died or were killed, but they were the founding originals. But Hans had gone into the construction business in St. Louis. Finnegan was almost always on the other side of the world somewhere. Henry the Merry Monk was in the seminary for some years, and then he was assigned to a church so deep in the swamps that he numbered the musk rats among his parishioners.

Well Dotty and Duffey and Stein, and Mary Virginia Schaeffer (who was not a designated pillar of Righteousness) ran 'The Bark'. And 'The Bark' was quite cardinal to the power struggle going on in the world.

But the members and associates in willing exile sometimes came on pilgrimage. Some of these were from Chicago and St. Louis, but others from all parts of the world. Most of the visitors, of course, had been to New Orleans before. But showing the City to close friends was a pleasant ritual that must not be abridged because of any previous acquaintance with it. And it wasn't a thing to be hurried through in just a few days. It should take

weeks and weeks. In one case, it took more than twenty years.

"These ten blocks square of the old town," said Lily Koch who had come down with Sebastian Hilton and the Countess Margaret, "I believe that I could sell it all in one lot. Other art dealers have handled larger and more mixed lots. It would all be trash if split up, but together the hundred square blocks have an arty sort of coherence. It was poor-boy Esplanade Spanish mixed with poor-boy Place de Grace French. It's not really antique, but it would make a good period set. I will finger a buyer and see what can be done with it."

"Oh, I guess that I could buy it," the Countess Margaret said. "It would be more to throw you a commission than anything. It would have to be moved to Transylvania, but I don't see any real difficulty there. There are about thirty shabby properties to each square block, and they shouldn't be worth more than about thirty thousand dollars each. Say a million dollars a square, and a hundred squares of it. Yes, see if you can get it for me, Lily."

"You couldn't get it for twice that," Duffey said.

"And some of us simply wouldn't want to move out of the Quarter," Dotty stated.

"Move out of it? Who said anything about moving out of it?" Lily asked. "If the moving is done well, you'd hardly have any sense of motion. Oh, naturally I intended to buy it complete with people. It wouldn't be any good to us otherwise. It wouldn't even be a work of art without the people."

It was nice to have them all here. Sebastian and the Countess and Lily all knew about the talismanic children, Duffey's Animated Marvels, and they found them and others really marvelous. After all, the Countess was an Animation of someone. It was never quite clear of whom she was an animation, but there were quite a few sorcerers in that field.

There was a lot of fun had and a lot of old songs sung while those three visitors were in town. They sang 'The Gadarene Swine Song'. And Finnegan, who was in town that week, knew that the song had been inspired by his father.

"This is the last time, Melchisedech," Sebastian said as it came up to departure time, "that we meet in the unsanctified flesh. Next time, in the Kingdom!"

"Oh him and his not-long-for-this-world-look," The Countess jibed. "He has had that look and that talk for forty years that I know of. I'll not let him die till he marries me first. He owes me that much."

"Oh, you two had better hurry then," Letitia said. "You have so very little time left. I'm not sure that we will get up to Chicago for it, having had you here now. Will it be next month?"

"Yes, it will be next month," Sebastian said. The Countess opened her mouth to say something, and then closed it again.

One month after they went back to Chicago, Sebastian and the Countess Margaret married.

And one month after that, Sebastian died. Really, he was killed.

Charlotte Garfield came to town. She came to attend "The Royal Rogues' And Graceful Swindlers' Ninth Annual Convention and Confidence-Men's Congress", which was held at the Royal Orleans Hotel and had about five hundred confidence people and thieves in attendance. It was supposed to be a fun thing, but there were seminars by experts for experts in recondite fields. Charlotte visited the Duffey Nation in cowgirls' boots and seven-and-a-half gallon hat, and not much between. And she still looked like a nine year old girl.

Now wait a minute. Charlotte had said that she was thirty-eight years old when she had met Duffey on the train in 1925. So she was about thirteen years older than the century, and the century was now a little more than half gone. This was getting out of hand.

"You had better repent, little girl," Salvation Sally worried over her. "There is something the matter with you. I think you have been consorting with the Devil. And it isn't nice for little girls to smoke cigars. I will just --"

"Watch it, Sister Sal," Charlotte cautioned in a very snappish voice. "The last lady who tried to take a cigar from this little girl is now called 'Lefty'."

"Oh, Charlotte, you little monkey-faced monster!" Margaret Stone railed at her. "Your jokes are old and tired, and so are you. You've got your toes curled over the brink itself, and you're too dumb to know it. There is something somewhere that shows just how old you really are."

"Oh, my 'Mendacious Midget Doll', is that what you mean, Maggie? How did you know I had it? It works better than that picture of Dorian Gray of which Duffey has the original in his Walk-In Art Bijou and doesn't know what it is. Maggie, that doll looks two hundred years old now. And that's really about what I am. Oh, I lied to Duffey that first time I met him about how old I was. I was a lot older than that. I haven't actually consorted with the Devil though. I've turned him down again and again. He made an appearance at our Convention in Baltimore two years ago. He isn't really an expert on the details of the trade; he'll put money into almost any spiel just like the veriest Rube would. I never saw a fellow who could be taken so easy. But he does have a lot of 'overthought' as he calls it. He believes in fraud for the sake of fraud, and for the character formation that it brings about. And he suggests that we give up this pretense about going easy on widows and orphans and those who can't afford to be fleeced. He says that what we really have in us is the lust to pillage those who are clear down and out of their last coin and credit. It is easier to grind the faces in the mud, he says if they are already brought pretty low. And he's right. It makes me uneasy to have somebody like that in the 'Royal Rogues and Graceful Swindlers'. He isn't graceful, but he is royal. Ah, Maggy, yes, I do know what my toes are curled over. Do you think I'll beat the rap in the end?"

"No. No chance at all of that," said Margaret Stone who disliked being called Maggie by that damned runt. "It's like playing 'Nine Dollar Dog'. There really win the game or lose it nine plays before the end. There isn't any way you can change it after you're into the last nine plays."

"That's not fair. There should be a two-minute warning called before the end."

"There isn't, Midge. But you chose the game, Baby Face."

"But I won't know when I'm into the nine last plays."

"No. You sure won't. But you chose the game."

Bagby and Mary Louise came down from St. Louis. At the moment they walked in, about eight o'clock in the morning, Duffey had just got his weekly letter from Bagby. "Wait a while, folks," he said. "This is more important. It's the high point of my week." Duffey got these letters early every Monday morning, before the postman came "whereat there is some small mystery" Duffey said out loud this day. But he disregarded his two cherished visitors and set about opening and reading the letter of one of them.

"Melky, aren't you going to greet us?" Mary Louise sulked in a strong voice. "My brother and my passion, we are here ourselves."

"I'm not sure that you are," Duffey mumbled as he began to read. "This is equally yourselves that I hold in my hand, and it's in a more efficient form. Why should I see you when I can read about you from you? I always preferred books to the movies made out of them. And I've come to distrust Animations, even my own. Make yourself at home, good people, and I will be with that version of you as soon as I finish with this one."

Letitia was there then, and she embraced the Bagbys with her hot sincerity. And the whole bunch of dazzlers was soon there, Transcendent Dotty and Sugar Cane Schaeffer and Glorious Stein and Midnight Margaret and Salvation Sally with her aggressive bony face and her pewter heart.

But Duffey ("He always looks like a bear who's just learning to read whenever he has something to pour over," Letitia said of him) was still busy with the Bagby letter when they were all starting out for Breakfast at Brennan's.

"One should always leave good reading for good company," Salvation Sally quoted. "The Lord of Chesterfield said that." Bagby kissed Sally in delight, He already knew her a little. Marie Monaghan had known Sally in Australia and had sent her fare to come to America. Then she had shipped her to New Orleans as a unique contribution to the enterprise.

"Come along, Duff, right now," Letitia insisted. "Stop running into things. We're going to breakfast."

"Yes, yes, Oh Bloody Heart, we will do that thing right now," Duffey said. But he banged only one hand together, and he continued with the letter in his other hand while they walked to Brennan's. (It was only two blocks. In the Quarter, if you belong to the Blessed, everything is always only two blocks.)

"Duffey simply cannot begin a week without reading your letter, Bascom," Letitia said. "You are the most faithful correspondent in the world."

"Bagby is?" Mary Louise asked bewildered. "He never writes a letter. This whole thing is as fishy as the Gascinae River."

"These are letters of another context, Mary Louise," Bagby said, "and they are outside of the daily time. Should I not have a time stasis as well as Duffey? No, of course I never write letters, Mary Louise. This is a separate thing."

So they passed it off for then, but could it be passed off forever? Really there was something of an exterior state about those letters from Bagby. It was as if they were written by Bagby's unconscious to Duffey's unconscious. And they didn't come by any regular delivery. They simply appeared on Duffey's table every Monday morning.

("What does he say this time?" Margaret Stone later reported that Bagby had asked Duffey in a very low voice. Nobody else heard this, but Margaret Stone had the sharpest ears of anyone around there, regular lynx-ears. Possibly she misunderstood the words. If she did, it was the first time that she ever misunderstood anything. But she had to have misunderstood, or this would open up a whole new area of mystification.)

The stamps on the letters were curious also. They looked very much like United States Stamps unless one looked at them from a very close range, five inches or less. But then one had to remember that Bagby was engraver and spoofer for two of his trades, for those were 'otherwhere' stamps, the rarest aberrations that collectors ever come upon. But they were good enough to fool the U.S. Post Office Department, for all of them were post-marked correctly. No, they weren't either. For this, one must look at them even closer, from a distance of three inches or less. It wouldn't be fair to say that they were post-marked wrongly, but they were marked with 'otherwhere' post-marks that were very like a valid St. Louis post-mark.

Maybe Duffey should have taken them to a stamp and post-mark expert. But he did. Duffey was a stamp and post-mark expert. He was a dealer in such things. Maybe he should have asked Bagby what it was all about. Well, he did, in a way. And Bagby answered in a way. Duffey may have been satisfied. Others of the curious people would always remain curious.

There was one blessed thing about New Orleans on the River. It was not a slave to the small hours of the night. A party could go directly from Breakfast at Brennan's to a barrel house or a night club and find something going on. Why should the hours after the sun has come up be slighted?

"But there will not be anything here like the Rounders' Club in St. Louis," Mary Louise bragged, just as if the New Orleans-proud Duffey hadn't invented the Rounders' Club in St. Louis.

"Not quite like," Duffey said, "but on the same high order. Let's go to 'Good Guy's'."

They went to 'Good Guy's', and a band was playing Monumental Jazz. It was playing it loudly and solidly and with a good foundation.

"How would Lord Chesterfield decide between good jazz and good conversation, Sally?" Bagby asked Salvation Sally. "How would Solomon decide?"

"I don't know," she said. "I don't think they had very good jazz then."

"Well, have they now?" Bagby asked. "Have they, Duffey? Has this thing become less than holy even in the city of its birth?"

"I suppose it's still holy," Melchisedech said, "and it hasn't been trashed as much as most of the arts. But Monumental Jazz has lost its green youth and is already playing at its own long, long funeral. Jazz at wakes and funerals is more common in New Orleans than in other places. And it's no odd thing for a jazz man, especially a horn man, to sit up in his coffin and add his own note to his obsequies. This is what several styles of classical jazz are doing now, giving their last licks to their own funerals.

"The classical jazz has grown old raucously. I don't believe that it was ever intended to become one of the ancient arts. A hundred years for it, maybe, and half of that is already gone. It is too little creative now, and too much reminiscent, and it builds monuments to itself. But, man, man, listen to those three horns build monuments!

"It hasn't been trashed as much as many other things, but it is hard to talk with it going on."

When there was a lull in the morning and mourning, Bascom Bagby went up and took one of the horns and began to blow down the gusty corridors of the 'Gadarene Swine Song'. And then the Monumental Jazz men took it up. It was really a sea-shanty tune, but the monumental jazz men worked it in.

2

A little bit later, the Duffey and the Bagby Nations went out of 'Good Guy's' and around and into an art shop on Royal Street. And Bagby, like Duffey, always strode into a new art shop as if he meant to conquer it forthwith.

"What piece is that?" Bagby asked as he stood before a four-chambered red heart. The heart was made of porcelain or ceramic, and each of its four chambers was as big as a dog house. The four chambers were shelved and filled with pictures and small statues and artifacts.

"It is by Elroy Redheart, of course," Duffey said, "and it is an autobiographical work. It changes, but not very much."

"Why don't you have it in your own shop?" Bagby asked.

"I've had it in my own shop several times," Duffey says, "but now Hennessy has it in his."

The first of the dog-house-sized red rooms was filled up with blue sky and red clay and green pasture scenes. It was rural Louisiana or Mississippi or Alabama. There were peanut and cotton patches, and rice fields. There were tractors and come-along plows. There were hundreds of figurines of children and younglings and men and women, working people and negros and travelers, dudes and high-binders. There was a school house with a sign on it 'School's Out'. There were dancers, with fiddlers to the left of them and a blare-box to the right of them. There was young fun stuff all over the place.

There was a young girl dead on a sofa in a room with a wall cut away to show the scene. Beside her on a little table was an opened box of candy, and several favors and souvenirs and a party hat scattered about. In the midst of it, and a dozen times as large as the other candy pieces, was her own red chocolate heart. It had been taken out of her opened breast. And her 'card' was daggered to a wall there beside her. It was the Jill of Hearts.

"I will have to own that collection or combination," Bagby said.

"I have some pieces for it in my own shop," Duffey said. "They are

the better pieces, really, but they stand out too much and detract from the balance. Elroy Redheart sells some of the miniature statuettes and paintings out of it when he gets hungry. Then he makes others."

"We haven't any room for it at home, Bag, and we really haven't any money for it," Mary Louise objected mildly.

"Then I will sell you for money, Mary Louise," Bagby said. "And with you sold and gone, there will be room for it in the house and there will be money to pay for it also. I must have this red-heart cosmos."

"I'm a red-heart cosmos myself," Mary Louise told him, "with rooms that you've hardly ever been in. Time is getting short for it, Bag. You had better make up for your neglect." Then Mary Louise was examining and later buying a French-Lady Purse-Pistol, very small, very old. It used wad powder and round shot.

The second of the four red rooms was, in one half of it, of richer interiors and of richer carryings-on. There were brash and opulent people in its crassly figured scenes, some of whom had been in the earlier bucolicity and some of whom hadn't. There was a free-swinging success in the stylized sets here. There were chrome babes and chrome cars and chrome domiciles. This was all a high-toned summertime shuffle with words and music, brag words and brag music.

In the other half of this second of the red rooms, there was artificial lightning and thunder, very well done, though the thunder was produced by the crackling of a bright sort of parchment paper, and the lightning by the fracturing glitter of it whenever one leaned close to took and breathed on it. This was a totally outdoor scene with some men of the same brash and opulent types as before. Now they were running a shoot-um under green skies and bluish jungle fronds, with great activity coming out of mint-green seas and sidling up on to coral beaches. There were combat buffalos and combat alligators in the show, and other such amphibious armed vehicles coming out of the mouths of landing crafts. The scenes were of war-invasion and its bangy action.

Then, in an offset scene, there was a bone-thin, after-the-fact man sitting on a stump with his head lolling on his folded arms on another stump. And set out there, on a second and larger stump, were one hand, one foot, one eye, and a flutter-valve out of a heart, almost enough stuff to start to make a new man. All of these things on the stump had somehow come out of the after-the-fact man who was slumped there. A card daggered to the stump identified him. He was the Jack of Hearts.

"Hennessy, a thousand dollars is too much money for this," Bagby said. "I am a poor man from up the river, and you are a rich city blood dealer taking advantage of my love for peculiar art."

"Bagby, man, this certainly is not too much money for it," Hennessy protested honestly. "Why do you think that your half-brother Duffey is no longer showing it in his shop? It is because the maker of this, Elroy Redheart, has put a the price of one thousand dollars on it. He says he is selling himself in this, but he wants somebody else to have this essence of him. He says he will not profiteer in his own flesh and soul, and that is why he has put this ridiculously low figure on it. But you haven't seen it all. Nobody could see it all in an hour or a day. We have here more than two thousand separate exquisite miniatures in round and in low round and in painted flat."

"You could make one like it yourself, Bagby," Mary Louise said. "You know how to work in porcelain and bronze and walnut wood and tin and oil paint. And you really make things better than this Elroy Redheart does."

"I could make it better, yes, but I would have to pull my own heart out of me," Bagby said, "and I'm not through with it yet. But here's a big red heart already pulled out of a body and put up for sale with more than two thousand miniatures. I will buy it."

The third of the four red rooms was filled with scenes of more hurried and more feverish opulence. There was the bone-thin man again, and

he had a black tch over one eye now, but he had become a hectic dude. There was a beathtakingly beautiful young woman romping through episodes and adventures. The cars in the scenes were more chromed, and lower and longer than the pre-war cars had been. There was hurry, high-priced hurry about everything. There were so many things to be done that in one scene the man was using three hands to do them all. There was one little room that was wallpapered with green money, and there were piles of the green stuff everywhere.

The artist Elroy Redheart had made deft use of new, hot, artificial colors to indicate new, hot, artificial sins. There was an artistic cheapening here, not that the artist was trying to skimp things, but that he was trying to show that cheap quality. Most of the figurines here were plastic-cast little pieces that were made in Hong Kong. They were not made by the artist at all. They were like the little things that are put in cracker-jack boxes for prizes, and they were a dime a dozen on the trifle market. But they were set in with prismatic reflecting things that gave a fractured light to all of the scenes of this group.

Small and glinty hints told that here were drinks of a more sophisticated sort and that they would give more sophisticated bang-heads.

Overpowering sound was there. It was portrayed by deforming the scenes to make it seem as though they were filtered through a vision cracked by 'hard rock'. And the ghostly powders were somehow indicated the dip and the deep-sleep, the glow and the snow. A real touch of the o@or of them was set there. The beautiful and romping young woman, wherever she had been dancing, now had her feet bloody up to the ankles. But she was not lying dead, not she. She had her own heart out in her hands, and she was sticking pins into it and giggling. Certainly an artist can indicate a giggling figure. There's nothing to it.

The beautiful woman took a pin larger than the others, a pin with a Moloch face on the head of it, and stabbed her own 'Queen of Hearts' card to her own heart in her hands.

The fourth red room was vacant. There was a noose dan@ling from the ceiling, and there was a stool standing under the noose on which a person might stand to hang himself. There was a sign there:

"This room for rent. Will decorate to suit tenant. The noose is an optional feature."

"Oh yes, one thousand dollars, Mr. Bagby," Hennessy said as he counted it out. Baggy always carried his money in ten dollar bills though the rest of the world had gone to twenties. "Shall I send it over to Duffey's shop?" Hennessy asked. "Then you could enjoy it for the remainder of your stay in town, and Duffey could ship it for you to St. Louis."

"No. Duffey would steal some of the pieces," Bagby said. "You ship it to St. Louis from here, Hennessy."

"You paid too much for it, Bagby Wrongheart," Dotty Yekouris said. "It's only a novel, you know."

"I paid some of that just for the beauty of Hennessy's spiel about the artist putting a ceiling on the price. I will have to add that one to my own repertoire. A novel, Dot?"

"Sure. It's one of the Open Heart Novels that are big in paperbacks now. There's a hundred novels wiih names and plots almost like that, 'Queen Card High', 'Game of Hearts', 'High Hand Loses', 'Death of Hearts', 'Great Red Heart'. You can get them at any paperback stand for forty cents and read it in forty minutes. A thousand dollars is too much."

"He is like a kid in a China Shop," Mary Louise said. "He'll buy anything."

"Have you noticed," Bagby said to Duffey one day, "how our old stalkers, the SFM, have been appearing more and more in the stories and continuities in the rag-pulp magazines?"

"Why would a man of my class and style be reading anything less smooth than himself?" Duffey asked. "And I don't even know what the SFM is."

"The Slant-Faced Men who travel in threes," Bagby said. "You killed one of them, and I killed one of them, but there must be spares. There are still three of them, or many threes of them. They are given a humor treatment in the letter departments of the pulps, comic monsters like BEMs and HLPS."

"They have turned up in three of the comic strips." Dotty Yekouris said, "In 'Flame Man', in the 'White Avenger', and in 'Captain Justice'. I'd find them comic myself if I didn't know that they were real."

"Comic strips?" Bagby asked. "Why would a man of my class and style be reading anything less comic than myself?"

"They are the ones who bug me the most," Margaret Stone said, "because I know that they really do kill so many people. I can get along with all the others. The assassins of the Jebel Shammar sect flash knives at me and tell me that they will murder me if I don't cease preaching the doctrine of the Real Presence at night. They say that their Djinn is the only Real Presence at night and that he is a jealous Djinn. But I just give them a little Arabian sweet talk and tell them that New Orleans is a truce city like Khamis Mushait. Besides, I'm not sure that there is any Jebel Shammar sect. Those three are all the Arabs there are around here, and they go to Tulane University. They may be wrap-head kidders. And the Red Fisters from Sardinia say that they will wear my guts for scarves. But when I have dawn coffee at Messina's or Anthony Ghost's, they are always there. I tell them a shaggy duck joke every morning, and they say they let me live through the night just to hear the next one even if I am a Whore of Rome. But I'm afraid of the Slant-Faced Men. I tell them that they're zombies with winders between their shoulder blades and that they're getting run down. They do have little humps on their backs under their coats, and they may be winders. But the Three Slant Faces won't talk and they won't joke. They scare me more than any of the people who intend to kill me."

"Yes, I think the Slant Faces do have winders," Duffe said. "But is it a 'self-destruct' or a 'disappearing record' that they are wound up to act? I saw the death of Sebastian Hilton in a transport or a detached experience. The Three Slant-Faced Men killed him, and they cut the Devil's tetragrammaton design on his chest. But the official report was that Sebastian died of an infectious fever. I flew up there and I demanded to see everything at once, and I did see everything. He had died of an infectious fever (actually, it was the old plague itself), and the plague sores on his chest did form the design of the Devil's tetragrammaton just as I had seen them. But they were fever sores. They were not knife cuts. Whatever winders the Slant-Faced Men have stuck between their shoulder blades, they wind up some pretty tricky records for them to play."

"I'll be killed by them myself," Bagby said, "and yet my death will be attributed to my liver, a gentle organ that never harmed anybody."

"How is your liver really, Bag?" Duffey asked him.

"Oh tell us how's your liver, Mr. B.," Dotty sang.

"I believe that, with a little help from some of my creations, we could make a song out of that," Duffy proposed. Mary Virginia Schaeffer went to the piano (this was in 'Trashman's Girl-a-Rama', and several of them hammered out the song then. More songs have been born in Trashman's than in any place in the block. Duffey accompanied them on a house banjo (he hadn't his own banjo with him) and all of the unofficial members of the Pelican Glee Club sang thus:

"Is it true you have abused it?
Have you battered it and boozed it?
Are you sorry you misused it
Horribly?"

Does it need the Great Forgiver?
Is it feeling sensitiver?
Is it shrunken to a sliver?
Oh tell us how's your liver,
Mr. B."

Why, they were untrashing one of the minor arts there!

"I certainly prefer Duffey's flute to his banjo," Letitia said. "He can't sing when he's playing the flute, and the rest of us all sing so well!"

But Duffey sang with the rest of them as they went on with it:

"Is it silted like a river?
Does it rattle like a flivver?
Does it quake a lot and quiver
Tenderly?"

Bascom Bagby added in verses to the Pelican Song to himself, and all the silver tongued people sang the grand finale:

"Is it mighty coy and clivver?
Comes it down to now or nivver?
Oh tell us how's your liver,
Mr. B."

And Bagby did look rather bad.

"It's the last time you'll see me in this life, of course, Duffey," he said. "I'll just go home and create a few more loose ends, and then I'll die. But I've enjoyed it all."

The Bagbys were around there for a couple of weeks and they had a mildly festive time of it. Bascom discovered heresies in many of the parishes of the city and he reported them to the Archbishop as well as to Duffey. Then they went back to St. Louis.

But that wasn't the last time that Duffey saw Bagby in this life. Bagby lived for at least two more years, and Duffey saw him at least twice more, once in St. Louis, once down in New Orleans again. And the Bagby letters were still received every Monday morning.

Duffey discovered, quite by accident, the names of the Three Slant-Faced Men. These were given one day, almost in throw-away fashion, in the comic strip 'Flame Man'. The names were Amraphel, Arioch, and Thadal. The slant-faces were depicted as no more than three stooges in 'Flame Man', and yet here were their revelatory names. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings, out of the pens of comic strip writers, comes wisdom.

These were three crooked kings. Amraphel was the King of Shinar or upper Babylonia. Arioch was King of Ellasar or Pontus or Lower Babylonia. Thadal was King of the Nations, or of the Goyim. These were the opposite kings, the anti-magi, who had no magic at all. It is unnatural, or at least it is inhuman, for a person to have no magic at all. To be human is to have at least a handful of magic, and these three didn't.

All three of them were followers (though this was not given in the 'Flame Man' comic strip) of Chodorlahomor who was King of Elam or Susiana, a Devildom east of the Tigris.

"I always thought that Abraham was biting off some big chunks there, tackling four kings of such realms as those with only three hundred and eighteen men, and they naught but sheep and camel herders," Melchisedech said. "Well, so do I think so now, so did I think so then. I don't believe they liked me blessing the man."

Duffey had begun to create a great number of small statues and groups. He made several large sets or mansions on the order of the chambered

heart display of Elroy Redheart that Bagby had bought. He made displays of his primordial lives and kingships, and also of his twentieth century childhoods and lives.

One huge, surrealistic assembly was, according to Absalom Stein, intended to indicate the seven hidden years of the Life of Melchisedech Duffey. It was not divided into seven chambers though. It may have followed some other time.

Duffey became adept at moulding figures out of clay and baking and painting them. He also made figures out of bread dough, wheat flour and corn meal mixed and with pigments added when he mixed them; then he baked them hard and varnished them. He probably made ten thousand of these figurines to fill in his thematic displays and collections and provinces and mansions. And some of them he just made for personal need.

3

'Three things are necessary for the preservation of the world: the Law, Worship of God, Deeds of Kindness and Charity.'

That seemed clear enough and easy enough. Get enough people to comply with these things and the world will be preserved. And preserving the world is really the same things as rebuilding the world. It is the everlasting raising up of pieces of it as often as they fall down.

Duffey himself had a great respect for The Law, and a working respect for laws-lower-case. He ostentatiously worshipped God. But does not ostentation take much of the grace out of worship? Sure it does. It takes some of it out, but not all of it. And some people are made with the ostentatious character in them. Duffey could be kind. He could be charitable. It was just that he had trouble being both of them at the same time. And do not try to tell him that the meaning of the two words are the same. The chances are that Duffey knows more about the meaning of words than you do.

It is the first two things that are really the same under different names: The Law, and the Worship of God. The comprehensive name for the congruence of these two things is 'The Faith'.

Faith and works it must be then. And faith and works had come under deadly and devious siege. Duffey valiantly defended a sector against this siege. No, that wasn't safer than other sectors, and it wasn't bloodless. There were skulls to be split here, and enemies to be eviscerated. There were sub-segments to be defended, and some of them had become slippery with blood.

Art as Law. Art as Worship. Art as Kindness. Art as Charity. Art as Creation. A synthesis of all these things must be built. The synthesis was already present in the articulate body to which we belong. But could it not also be made on a clay-human and daily basis? Possibly. It already had been, almost certainly.

Duffey was haunted by the feeling that he had already built this synthesis somewhere. If he had built it, why couldn't he remember it?

Vincent and Teresa came down to New Orleans from St. Louis for a visit about that time. Then Duffey remembered. This Teresa was the synthesis of all these arts, and Duffey had already built her.

She came with Vincent and a couple of their children. The wanderer Finnegan was also in town, and Teresa sent Vincent and Finnegan off to carouse together. She sent the children out to play.

"And stay out," she told the children, "for a week at least. I don't know where the custom ever developed of letting children and dogs come into the house. Oh, at home I let them come in two or three days a year, in very cold weather. But here there's no need for that."

Showboat Teresa put out an issue of 'The Bark' by herself, writing every word and line of it, and setting it up too. "Yes, it's botchy

looking," she acknowledged, "but it's got soul. None of that correct and professional appearance of a Dotty edition. I meant it to look correct and professional though, but the main thing is excellence of content. Dotty, did you fully appreciate my article on --"

"We fully appreciate you, Teresa," Dotty said. "The issue is truly a Special, and the essence of a Special is that it should happen only once."

Teresa also put out an edition of 'Show-Bill' by herself. This was a little show business sheet that they had been doing on the Pelican Press every Friday morning. They had always used to send it to Teresa in St. Louis. In fact, the Star and Garter in St. Louis always carried an ad in 'Show-Bill' until the S and G was forced out of business. The issue that Show-Boat put out now had a large advertisement for the Decatur Street Opera House.

"There isn't any Decatur Street Opera House, you dumb Guinea," Dotty told her. "What's the matter with you anyhow? How do we get money for ads from imaginary aces?"

"There is a Decatur Street Opera House, now," Showboat said. "This is just the first appearance of it. Oh Duffey, there's no reason for you to shake like that just because one of your premonitions comes home to roost. Yeah, here's a hundred dollars for the ad, Dotty. They'll pay you a hundred dollars a week to run the same ad." Showboat gave the hundred dollars to Dotty.

"They are very futuristic people who are behind the opera house," the Showboat said. "It's one of the places that had to happen. There wasn't any good place in town to present eschatalogical dramas."

Teresa Showboat Piccone Stanahan put a hundred pounds of Italian vegetables into the Giant Pot that was simmering forever. Sure Italian vegetables are different from other vegetables. They aren't grown, not anywhere. They are imported by Importers into all the major ports of the world, but no one knows where they originate. Even in Italy they are imported from elsewhere. They are received on open-ended manifests.

"It is a test, it is a test," Showboat said.

"Yes, people will have to be really hungry to eat out of the Pot for a few days," Mary Virginia told her.

Teresa Cooked all-Italian meals for everybody, three times a day for three days. Ah, they weren't like those you get in O'Conner's Italian Restaurant or even in Peterson's Italian Restaurant. One had to love Teresa to eat them. They were works of art, yes, and they were fine to look at. There should have been a way to make them edible, Margaret Stone said.

Showboat went out street-preaching with Margaret Stone one midnight. "That's the time to get the really unsavory ones, between midnight and six in the morning," Margaret said. Showboat had been addressing herself to every sort of audience since she was three years old, and she wasn't bashful about things like this. She knew all there was to know about showmanship and presentation. She had been making lots of political talks as well as rebuild-the-world talks in St. Louis. She had a voice that would carry to every corner of a theatre and to every recess of a city block. Her spiels, like everything else about her, were works of art.

What went wrong then? Over-confidence probably. Her talks didn't go over not in the night-time Quarter. Never in her life had she come up against so complete a bad-show as this.

"Aw stuff it, Dago!" the rough guys would holler at her. They booed her and made dirty noises. Showboat could always handle hecklers, but this was massive and contrived heckling. But Margaret Stone always began to talk after Showboat had been shouted down, and she hooked every one of those ruffians. She broke them down. She shook them up. She poured out love and tongue-lashing. She enchanted the damned fools off their feet. She made them sob, some of them, and repent of their sins.

They tried it on another corner. Once more, Showboat busted all over the place. And then Margaret would sweep whole blocks of people clear out of

themselves. Margaret Stone didn't know anything about showmanship or presentation. She hadn't the voice to fill a theatre or a block. Sometimes her voice failed her so completely that she cried in frustration, and the fellows would refer to her as Whispering Maggy. The people often had to crowd in very close to catch all that she was saying. But when they came in close, they were changed forever.

But Showboat saw something out of the corner of her eye, and then something else, and then a third something. She knew about the 'three-spot device' for instigating or corrupting a crowd, the device that the red-brains use so successfully. It's a minimum of three points for manipulating a mob. Three hyenas were working three corners of every gathering crowd, three hyenas with disguised faces and disguised voices. And they had been getting in part of their dirty work even before Showboat and Margaret arrived. One or more of them knew Margaret Stone's routes.

One of the hyenas was Finnegan, Damn him! Another of them was Showboat's own husband, Vincent Stranahan. Damn him twice! And the third one of them was Absalom Stein. Treasons such as this pass for humor with some people. Oh what a vile trio of entrail-eating, presentation-shredding hyenas they were!

Ah well, Showboat fingered them to the crowd then. (This wouldn't have happened to begin with except that Showboat was so short-sighted that she couldn't distinguish people at twenty feet.) The crowd had already been conned and subverted by the hyenas, but it could be turned around. And Teresa turned those hooters around. People quickly pinioned those false three and ripped off their false noses and Mardi Gras masks and held them there secure. Teresa railed at those three sick perverts and had the street folks ready to perform an Old Testament stoning execution of them within five minutes. And Margaret Stone got some of her old faithful friends to force those three jokers to their knees and to pour dust and ashes over their heads. "That the Grace may enter into their unwilling souls and they will may be saved by the miracle of interposition!" Margaret croaked out in her cracked-laughter voice. People didn't bad-show Showboat very long after she caught onto a thing, and they didn't bad-show Margaret at all.

This rebuilding of the world on street corners can be a lot of fun.

Teresa said one day that she wanted everybody assembled. The Showboat was going to explain the fundamentals to all the special people and lay bare the roots of creation and substance. They had wakened imperfectly from a long sleep, she said, and it was time that they remembered their own earlier episodes. She phoned Father Henri Salvatore at his parish in Boondocks Louisiana and told him that she wanted him to come to town.

"Be quiet, woman," Henry told her. "Go home and be subject to your husband. Oh, I forgot, your husband is my old buddy Vincent, isn't he? Well then, take him home and make him be subject to you. No, Showboat, I really can't come. And I do know how it is. Was'l Euphemus for nothing? But explain it to those with heads and memories less open than mine."

Teresa got her husband Vincent, and Finnegan, Duffey, Stein, Dotty, Mary Virginia, X (who had just got to town on his third or fourth visitation), Letitia, Margaret Stone, Salvation Sally, Gabrielovitch, Zabotski, maybe several other folks, all together.

"Quite a few of us are special people, very old people," this Showboat Teresa said. "We extend very far into the past and also into the future. Give me your ashes there, Duffey. We are too much in the daily world, and we tend to forget just what substance we are made of."

"Not for tricks, Showboat," Duffey said. "My ashes are holy."

"So am I," Teresa said. She took the ashes in their urn that artful cigar canister that had once belonged to the King of Spain, and opened it. She washed her hands in the ashes, and they were so fine as to be almost liquid. Then she was washing her hands in flame.

"It isn't everybody's ashes that will flame like this," she said.

"Melchisedech has a lot to him." She washed her face and hair with flame also. There was only the slightest smell of burning hair and of burning flesh. Teresa seemed to be in passion or pain, but not from the ashes-turned-to-fire. She gathered up the flame again. "There is another one in your hair," Margaret said. "No, on the other side."

Teresa gathered that flame in also. She put all the flames back into the urn, and they crawled back under their ashes.

"We are all flame-persons," Teresa said. "Well, most of us are. Even under the appearance of death and reduction we can still flame. We had been active a long time ago, and then we had rested and slept. Then one of us came and woke the rest of us up again. He woke us up in blundering fashion, for he was still half asleep himself. And he still is."

"Melchisedech, you haven't even understood your own role. You didn't make us. That's only a way of speaking. You can't make people, but maybe you can assemble them. You aren't a creator, Melchisedech the Magus! You are an awakener. No, really, that's all you had to do, just wake us up. And now you've done that. Don't try to do too much else. You're not capable of a very great lot."

"Yes, you woke us up. And you made us to go into other bodies and bellies to be born again. That was no great thing. But why were we waked? It was because we were among the few folks who were around before the Devil was imprisoned. Now he is loosed. So we are loosed also and set to action to be able to combat him. We knew his on-the-loose tactics from of old. Gah, won't they ever change!"

"Casey in Chicago, Mary Catherine in Chicago also, Hans and Marie in St. Louis, Henry in Boondocks Louisiana, listen, I want to talk to you! Of course you can hear me! We were not the first crew nor the first pilots, nor did we go on the first voyage. But we did sail on that first ship The Argo which is the actual as well as the phonetic equivalent of the Ark. We put the first sails on it and the first rudder. It had neither before, since it was going nowhere except afloat."

"We'elleh shemoth. And these are our names. Duffey is the real and original Melchisedech, though his argonaut name was something other. All of our names have many depths and versions to them. Finnegan is Iason himself, but the later Romans called him Jason. Hans is Orpheus, and at a later time he was manifest as Faust. Henry is Euphemus (his ocean-father taught him to walk on water, but he seldom does it now). Vincent is Meleager. Casey is Peleus. Dotty is Medea the vile sorceress (but it is all a mistake about her having a vile name and reputation). Marie is Eurydice. But did not Eurydice die and go to the underworld? No, she pretended to misunderstand, and she pulled a trick. She went to the down-under world of Australia instead, and she is the mother of all Australians and South Island people. Mary Virginia is Laonome. I am Atalanta, and that's only a small part of whom I am. Mary Catherine is Antigone. Stein is Ab-Salom, the Father of Peace. He was a ship's chandler and provisioner on the Euxine, and he decided to go along on the Argo to look after his investments. I don't know what dynasty you others belong to, but you would hardly be in this company now if you weren't special. I don't know what company Gabrielovitch and Zabotski and Salvation Sally belong to. It may be one even more ancient than ours. I do know what company Margaret Stone belongs to, but I'm not telling. And I sure don't know about X."

"You are talking about people in a Greek myth." Zabotski asked.

"Why?"

"No, no, not in Greek myth. In ancient fact before that. We are older than the Greeks. Even Homer referred to us as unaccountably ancient. And our quest was the prototype of all quests. We went to Colchis on the Black Sea on the best known of our voyages. We went past the Devil's preordained prison on the Chersonese on that same voyage. We found the shining garment, the Golden Fleece, at the end of our famous voyage, and we have it yet. The Devil would give his thousand-year molars to know where we

have it hidden. As long as we have it inviolate, the Devil is not completely loose.

"We went over rock beaches and rock wastes that were sown with Dragons' Teeth; we went over them to get the Fleece. We got it without triggering the Dragons' Teeth to spring into armed-warrior life. They were the guards and the threat. We buried them very much deeper under rocks, and now the Devil wants them and he can't wake them up. He blows on that Dog's-Horn Bugle of his, but he can't wake them."

"He is cashing in quite a few dragons' teeth lately," Stein said, "and they are devilishly well-armed warriors."

"Those are from lesser dragons' teeth," Teresa said. "He has not been able to use those in the main caches. The obliteration of the Black Sea in the Thunder-Colt aspect of History (we're within a couple of decades of that, one way or the other), is only an attempt by the Devil to obliterate all traces of his prison on the Black Sea. There was always the chance that he might be locked up there again. But the shore is obliterated along with the sea, and part of it is dragons'-tooth shore. Are they destroyed there, or can he save them? Can he have it both ways?"

"What's the matter. Don't you people remember these things even yet?"

"I remember only snatches of them," Mary Virginia said, "but now you bring other parts of it back to me. I hated my name of Laonone then and I hate it now."

"It seems to me that there were several voyages we took," Dotty said. "There were others besides the one to Colchus."

"There were nine voyages, I think," Teresa Showboat said.

"There were thirteen," said Absalom Stein. "But I forget where the Argo is now."

"That's a thing the Devil would give his five-hundred-year molars to know," Melchisedech said. "But I'm assured that the Argo is still seaworthy. You'll not demean me with your words, Showboat. It was the Argo herself that was called the Show Boat. Oh what a castled masterpiece she was when we got all that superstructure on her! The Show Boat was not the lady love of the third officer. But people, I did make you, though it's hardly worth arguing about. I evoked your clay, yes. That's the same thing as to make you."

"Was it the thirteenth voyage on which you were reduced to ashes, Duffey?" Margaret Stone asked him.

"Nay, it was the fourteenth. Some of the others don't remember it yet. It's technically in the future, but the ashes here are proof that some parts of the future have already happened."

They had quite a few such talks together during the few days that Vincent and Teresa were in town. It isn't every gang that has such sort of talks. It isn't every gang that holds the shining fleece in a place that the Devil would give his thousand-year molars to know.

It isn't every gang that was around before the Devil was imprisoned a thousand years ago, who knew him when he was loose before, and who therefore know how to combat and obstruct this loosened Devil.

There were meteorological trash-falls over the whole world for years and years. They are still going on. The accounts of these partly immaterial trashings have not been allowed in the papers or journals, and they may not be referred to on radio or TV. So they are ignored.

But still it falls, trash, trash, trash, into every cranny of soul and person in the world.

"There are still a few bright spots left in the world," Dotty said one day. "And mostly they are ourselves."

"Yes. The world can't be all bad with so many very good people in it," Duffey agreed.

Then several of the very good people began to fall out of the world.

Bagby in St. Louis was the first of the very good people (during the last few years, he had become a very good person) who died and fell out of it.

Book Four

'It was originally built by a prince of the Canaanites called in the vernacular 'Righteous King' (Melchizedech), for he was indeed righteous. Wherefore he was the first to officiate as priest of God, and being first to build a temple, gave this city, till then called Salem, the name of Jerusalem.'

[Josephus. Jerusalem and Rome.]

1

After Duffey got back from Bagby's funeral in St. Louis, he found on his table one of those weekly letters from Bagby. The funeral had been on Saturday. Duffey and Letitia arrived back in New Orleans on the following Monday morning. Bagby's weekly letters always came on Monday.

"I will miss him," Duffey said, "He had become, though he wasn't always so, a faithful man as well as a faithful correspondent. He must have written and mailed this last of his letters Thursday before he was stricken."

But the following Monday, there was another letter from Bagby. And on the Monday after that there was still another one.

"Even in death he is a joker," Duffey said. "He wrote some of these ahead of time. There was never anything timely in his letters anyhow, no 'news' in a literal sense. He always despised the 'timely' in letters and in everything. And he gave these to somebody to mail, once a week, after @is death. I wonder how long they will continue?"

At last report, very many years later, they were still continuing. Bagby must have written more than a thousand of those undated weekly letters before he died. That's carrying a joke a long ways. Could they have been written by somebody else? By an even more outlandish joker? No, they couldn't have been. They were from Bagby's hand and from his mind and person. Nobody else, except Duffey, was at all near Bagby in any of these things. And Duffey wasn't writing the letters to himself.

Dotty Yekouris had gone away, to meet Finnegan somewhere, possibly in Cuba, and she hadn't come back. Finnegan hadn't written to her directly. A lawyer named Ignacio had written to Dotty. And a girl named Elena had written to her. They told her that Finnegan was coming apart, and that she might wish to come down there if she cared. It was mysterious. Dotty went down there, and she didn't come back.

The folks around the Pelican Press always expected her to return within days or weeks or months, or years anyhow, and she didn't. And there was no solid news from her or from Finnegan again. There was a little bit of quakey news from X and such people. That sort of news is always as easy to come by as it is difficult to build upon.

X said that both Finnegan and Dotty had been slain in a futuristic episode on the Marianao Coast of Cuba near Havana. As to just how final their deaths had been, he would not swear. X said that he still felt presences of both Finnegan and Dotty. Well everybody who had known them still felt their presences. They had both been permeating people whose presences would prevade for a long while.

"Tell me X, were they killed by three slant-faced men?" Duffey demanded once.

"I am sorry to disappoint you, Duffey, but I don't believe that they were," X said. "I know those three. They haunt a lot but they don't kill much. Often they take the credit for killing persons who were already dead or who were otherwise killed. No, this killer was the shabby and heavy stalker, the heavy man who follows forever so slowly, and who is there and

waiting when his victims arrive at a new place."

"Ah, I know him. But you really don't know much more about this than I do, do you, X?"

"Not much more. But I intend to find it all out. The one behind it all I know. He is a Cheap-Shot Artist who is the father of all cheap-shot artists."

"Ah, I know him too, and his agents."

Well, Duffey and others had returned from futuristic deaths, Could not Finnegan and Dotty do it also? They were special people, and it was unlikely that their deaths were completely final. But would they have to be waked up all over again? And by whom?

Well, not very long after these disappearances, Duffey had an encounter with the Cheap-Shot Artist and Father of all cheap-shot artists.

Letitia Duffey had become the new editor of 'The Bark'. She paid less attention to the Jazz sheet and the Union sheet and the Sporting news and such things that the Pelican Press had been publishing for money, and several of those accounts were lost to the Pelican. Letitia kept 'The Bark' going out of private funds, which Dotty would never have done.

Duffey and Letitia and Mary Virginia went to a meeting put on by the New Catholic Press Guild, a somewhat suspect (but already powerful) organization. Well, what was this New Guild? It was very new. Possibly it was born just for such occasions as this. It was not the same as the old Catholic Press Association. Two-thirds of the members of the New Guild also belonged to the old Association, and the other one-third of the members of the New Guild had come out from under the rocks.

This was a highly secret and at the same time a very heavily advertised meeting. It was stated in the advertisements ("Classified, not to be given to unauthorized persons") that the Guest Speaker of the meeting would be "The Most Important Person in the World, The Most Important Person Who Has Ever Been in the World". That was a tall claim. And it was stated that this Guest Speaker was also the busiest person in the world, and that he attended ten thousand meetings a year with select groups.

Duffey caught a whiff of the situation when he came into the meeting room.

"Who do we know who holds ten thousand meetings a year with select groups?" he asked. "What, ladies, what? Well then, who do we know who is the Cheap-Shot Artist and the Father of all Cheap-Shot Artists? You really don't know? I bet you will be hearing that phrase 'You really don't know?' a lot this evening."

"Oh, stuffy Duffey, that's what the several groups of giggle-nuns who are here keep saying," Letitia protested. "'You really don't know who he is?' they ask each other. And then they go into their giggle act."

"Who do we know who sets off the giggle-nuns?" Duffey asked. "I will bet nineteen to one that it is Old Cloutie Himself."

The guest speaker ("Possibly, ever certainly, the best-known person ever, anywhere," the introductory speaker was introducing him) was standing in a bit of shadow, and yet it seemed that he was being picked out by low-resolution, purple spotlights. The introductory speaker was on that list of the one thousand persons who had been present at the releasing of the Devil near Yalta, according to X. Duffey hadn't believed it of the man, a churchman little known but of high station. Now he three-quarters believed it.

And the meeting itself, it was scheduled to begin at three o'clock in the morning. No, that wasn't such an hour as would bother Duffey or Letitia or Mary Virginia. And it didn't seem to bother the little groups of giggle-nuns and giggle-priests ("You really don't -- giggle -- know who he is?"), but it stood out as a possibly convenient hour for a person who held ten thousand meetings a year with select groups, and who did not sleep. That's a bit more than twenty-eight meetings every twenty-four hours.

Meetings, meetings, is there no end of meetings?

"The real name of this person is the only four-letter word that may not be spoken by us always and everywhere," the introductory speaker was saying. "There is no proper pronoun to refer to this person who is an androgyne and beyond grammar. The person is always to be referred to simply as 'The Majesty'. The accepted method of adoration of 'The Majesty' is the snicker."

"You here, Duff?" asked George Koran who reported for the Picayune. "I came in here a bit ago and got a whiff of it. 'Judas Priest!' I hollered out I was so startled by it. 'Yes, yes, you want an interview?' eight of the Judas Priests snickered, and they crowded up with their tongues lolling and their noses twitching. Hey, this is one fruity place! I got to keep moving, Duff, in one door and out another. Those three edge-heads keep trying to kill me. They can run me out, but they can't keep me out."

"Don't you have your press card?" Duffey asked him.

"Sure, and I showed it," Koran said. "'That's no good. That's a dead man's card,' one of the edge-headed guards told me, and he was switching that switch-blade knife. 'You're wrong,' I said. 'It's my own card, and I'm not a dead man'. 'You will be, you will be,' another of the edgies told me. 'In five minutes you will be.'" "Oh, I didn't know that the slants had any humor," Duffey remarked.

'The Majesty' was a built-in optical illusion. Duffey had encountered such illusions before, and he could ess the size pretty well. 'The Majesty' was a giant disguised. There is nothing uncommon about that. But he had the apparent size of a man. Well, let's see. Where will his head really come to? Duffey climbed up into the jungle of hidden cables and struts above the little stage of the hall. Duffey had been a rigger. He could climb, and he knew about the above-stage apparatus in that jungle.

Ah, a swinging boom that sometimes carried spotlights. It was at just the right height, maybe eighteen feet above the stage. Duffey swung the boom out and fetched 'The Majesty' an echoing 'klunk' in the back of his head. This was a dazzle of humor that not everyone caught. The boom klukked staggering into the real head of 'The Majesty'! But it was the illusion head and form, twelve feet below it, that reacted so spastically and grotesquely. Oh, only the blessed understood what had happened, and the ringing silver laughter of Letitia filled the hall.

"It's a laugh all too rich for humans sometimes," Duffey had once said, "but God enjoys it."

Consternation soon calmed, however, and the magnetic personality of 'The Majesty' surmounted the happening. There was so much spastic and grotesque going on there anyhow that most of the people took it for normal.

"An enemy is here," 'The Majesty' said: "and will be disposed of."

"One does not laugh at 'The Majesty'," a coven of giggle-nuns gave sincere warning to Letitia.

"Oh the hell one does not!" she said.

"Ladies, pay attention to just what 'The Majesty' says," Duffey told Letitia and Mary Virginia. "Yes, you have a recorder, Mary Virginia. Use it, but it may not prove accurate. This is a special case. We will see what you remember 'The Majesty' as saying. We will see what the recorder says that he says. And I will see what I find him saying interiority in his mind. With the three versions we may be able to triangulate it on him. I have been a pirate and ransacker of minds, and I won't be intimidated just because his mind is that of an evil giant."

Duffey climbed into that mina then, and 'The Majesty' that the mind belonged to began to talk. It's a good thing that Duffey had been a rigger and climber, or he'd never have made it in that steep jungle.

There was lots of wreckage, and high piles of bones in that mind. It was a wasteland. Duffey recognized many of the landscapes in it, those that had been done by Dali and Dore and Hieronymous Bosch, those that had been

done by Peggy Munster and Adam Scanlon and Count Finnegan. Duffey climbed and clambered in the manner of Douglas Fairbanks Sr., through surrealistic clutters and mountainous and evil trash. Sure, Duffey was the Thief of Baghdad. An ordinary thief doesn't break in here and steal these secrets.

These are secrets? Can trash-giantized be anything but more trash? This speeching was real speeching of the kind to unhinge and destroy the world? How? How?

"Why don't they laugh?" Duffey asked himself. "Why doesn't everybody laugh?"

"I have got my physical and temporal release, which is to say my token release," the mountainous mind of the Devil began to grind out mice, "Now I strive as I have ever strove for my eternal release. I can never win this release in the existing case of things. I can win it only in the case of Creation being negated and withdrawn. I work always for that negation and cancelling out, whatever I may call my work. 'That it may not have been, any of it, ever!' that is what I ultimately work for.

"I will inculcate a hatred of mankind in mankind. I will have it that no person will ever speak of mankind without a sneer. Mankind must destroy itself, but first it must deride itself until it earns its derision and destruction.

"My best game is to convince the commonality of people that I don't exist. The best game for you, my conspiring followers, is to convince the commonality of people that conspiracies don't exist. Yet I say to you, Conspire Always! And Again Conspire!"

("Out, out, you intrusion," the ungainly mind was saying to Melchisedech, still not knowing who he was nor how he had got in.)

"I have been called a Cheap-Shot Artist," the huge mind went on. "Yes, I am, and I glory in it. Let you all be cheap-shot artists! It is the easy way to fame and glory, and it short-cuts the enemy. But that is the tactic. The fuel is hatred. Hatred is both the cake and the frosting on the cake. It is the meat and the drink. It is the bodies ransacked and raped. It is the whole catalog of carnalities. It is the ultimate lust and the perfect perversion. It is the uncreation, the reversal of everything, it is the murder by torture and the murder by defamation.

"But never let me hear defamation defamed by any minion of mine. It is the very hinges on which we swing. Slander, which is defamation, is always the servant of hatred. We will work for red murder and red revolt. There is an obligation to disobey. Teach that obligation! We will work for the trashing and toppling of everything. And then we work for absolute nullity.

"Do not use a straight line where a crooked line will do. Do not say anything in two words that can be said in three. Order is our enemy. We cannot allow order in anything. Law is our enemy. Attack these things forever, and attack them crookedly. Remember that a crooked tongue can penetrate into recesses where a straight tongue cannot."

("Out, out, outsider!" 'The Majesty' was angrily ordering Melchisedech. "Easy, Cloutie, easy," Melchisedech was saying. "Do not buck like that.")

"Do as I say," the trashy mind was grinding out, "and for your reward, I will give to you certain persons to dismember and destroy for your pleasure. Oh, some of them are high persons! Howl and be weird! Ours are the gibberish tongues. The Paul said that God was not the God of gibberish. I say to you that I am the god of gibberish, and by this gibberish we shall know each other. You will carry out the tasks assigned to you by myself and in return, you will be given all riches and final oblivion.

"The richest reward is the Devouring of Entrails in the Holy Places. There is no more rampant pleasure than this. But for the present, before we are able to blow out all the lights, we will refer to our Devouring of the Entrails in the Holy Places as 'Holding More Meaningful Liturgical Services'."

That was really about all that the evil giant was able to formulate in cluttered mind. Oh, it went on for fifteen minutes more, but it was all repetition. 'The Hell about Hell is its repetition,' one dissatisfied citizen of that realm said recently. 'Over and over, the same things in the same words and acts. It is damnation by the suffocating staleness.'

"Bad show, Cloutie, bad show," Melchisedech said as he came out of that surrealistic wasteland. So he came back more solidly into the assembly. The tiresome and illusory giant was still talking, but no matter. He was only talking with wobble-mouth words.

Duffey checked with Letitia and Mary Virginia. Yes, the speech that the Devil had given with his mouth was about the same as he had given with his mind. The mouth speech was garnished with such terms and words as 'involvement' and 'relevancy' and 'faith-life' and 'life-style' and 'charisma', but it was the same speech. It had words like 'socialization' and 'noosphere', and it attacked Pharisees and Legalists and Rigidists, and Reactionary Members of the Curia, and Insensate Hierarchies, but it was the same speech. The Devil has only one.

"He gives several more talks in the city tonight," the reporter George Koran said, "to an economic group, to a group of media masters, to a donkey's dozen of politicians, to a clutch of labor masters, to a coven of historians. And he will make a talk to the Student Repudiation Congress."

"When is his next Epistle to the Romans?" Mary Virginia asked. "It's a very early communion breakfast in Oklahoma City if he catches the Braniff flight. A bishopric board of directors there is trying to re-orient a diocesan publication so that it will be more in accord with the thinking of 'The Majesty'. They need catch words and double words for it, and they want to pledge their allegiance. He can't very well refuse to be there. Then it's double back to catch a Baptist bunch in Waco ("Even those hard-shells I can crack"); then to Dallas to fleece the sheepy rich (five talks there). He'll make Cow Town and San Antonio and Houston later in the day. It's a busy life, but I guess that his Majesty enjoys it." This reporter George Koran led a busy life also, and he seemed to enjoy it.

Margaret Stone and some of her rowdies from the Quarter came in and disrupted things by singing the Gadarene Swine Song. She had learned it from Duffey and Letitia. The Slant-Faced Men moved towards the disrupting singers with switch-blades twitching. But rowdies from the Quarter pinnioned all three of them, jerked down their zootie coats, and jerked out the winders that were between their shoulder blades. And, with their winders removed, the edge-heads collapsed with a racing of gears and a stuttering of sprockets.

An old priest with crying eyes came up to Melchisedech Duffey. "Oh, believe in him, Duffey!" the old priest cried. "Believe, believe. He's all we have left. First they took God away from us. Now some of you want to take the Devil away also. No, no, no, let us keep him! We've got to believe in something!"

There were ovations for a 'The Majesty' who had wound down his speech and was starting to depart. Several of the persons present took off all their clothes out of sheer ecstasy. It was all pretty meaningful. Giggle-nuns and androgynous priests were still clutching each other with claws and snickering "You know -- giggle -- who he really is, don't you?"

"The bare account it is unfair.

Hi! Ho!

The bare account it is unfair.

It leave out half the hide and hair,

Hi! Ho! The Golli Wol!"

Oh, get back to the Quarter with that stuff, Margaret. They should never have taught you the Gadarene Swine Song. Drink Coffee, Save Souls, Get out of here with your gang!

Yes, the bare account is unfair. The canonical ratio would still hold: only one priest out of twelve would be a Judas Priest. And only one nun out of twelve would be a giggler for the Devil. But, during those 'tedious years' there, it sure seemed as though there were more of them. And only one out of twelve of the laymen joined the abomination of desolation, but they made much more than one twelfth of the noise.

Why has history been made difficult? The 'never use two words when three will do' people have controlled it for too long. But the real history of the last few decades, as given here and in other places, is straight and simple.

2

This is the whole framework of recent history and the forces that matter.

The Devil was released from his imprisonment.

Then, by a sort of center-trap play, the Emperor Henry (Henri Salvatore) was sprung loose to score upon him. Melchisedech Duffey had first been released to be ready to oppose the Devil. Then, for his pride, Melchisedech was forced to serve as a satellite to one of his own satellites. This was Henri Salvatore (The Keeper of the Enclosure of the Savior). Henry had once been Euphemus. Later he had been The Emperor Henry of Neustria. Now he was Emperor of the Invisible Neustria, He was a balanced and powerful and intellectual man, though he had been a sinner in his youth.

To common eyes, it seemed that Henry didn't rule to great effect. After his first enthusiasm he became a little bit dreamy about it all. But he had set several one-person and several-person fiefdoms into intense action, enough so that the destruction of the world was averted or at least postponed for decade after decade.

(Quick out to Salvation Sally doing 'This World Was Destroyed Before' with that voice and that guitar that both had Australian accents.)

The struggle was joined between the Devil and the fiefdoms of Invisible Neustria. The details of the struggle make up the 'History of Modern Times'. The Devil lost credit for his tiresome and premature predictions of his total victory. The Fiefdoms had only to produce a minimum for the world, and there was some possibility that it could be done.

"It's really no great trick to find seven just men in the world, if you count women," Margaret Stone said. "But the number Seven is symbolical, and it may mean seventy times seven. That makes it very, very hard. I'm surprised that we get by every day." But this minimum was maintained (whatever it was), for every day year after year, though some days it was very close and it really seemed that not enough just persons could be found in the entire world. Close, close. But they were saving the world from destruction.

The trashing of the world on a massive scale was undertaken by the massive enemy of the world. The Law was subverted to anti-law or license. The custodians of form were perverted into accepting deformity. Morals disappeared completely: that was said again and again, and louder every time. It was one of the lies of the father of lies. It was a cheap-shot statement by the father of cheap-shotters. Morals never quite disappeared from the world: they fought their way back against every natural and unnatural assault.

Structure had been perverted to un-structure, so the unstructured crowd crowed like red roosters. Watch out there! We will see how enduring real structure can be.

Patterns and customs of treason were imposed by the ravaging enemy, and the commonwealth of cowardice was instituted by the anti-institutionists. Brittle variety was brought into the areas where it

becomes a blatant stultification and cloying, and rigidity was forced onto all free fields. Art, which is another name for life-well-handled, was trashed almost beyond belief.

This was a war that was not always seen as war. A war may be between grass growing in one place, and erosion taking over a neighboring plot. And the Fiefdoms maintained a spotty loyalty very much of the time, so the thing was never lost.

Absalom Stein made elegant war by system of interlocking promotions in fields both familiar and scarcely known. Absalom had big hands. He had big brains. He had a huge heart. He had more gall than is given to ordinary humans. And he was absolutely loyal to the ordered and structured arts. He reintroduced shape and order into places so abandoned of them that they came now as something new. "Oh, that Absalom has pulled another one!" one of his rival impresarios railed. "Decency! Imagine someone introducing that as an art concept. Imagine anybody pulling that one again and getting away with it. Some things are out for so long that they are in again. It's a permeating form of structure, I believe. Ah, let's see what we have of decency. We'd better stake out a few plots in the decency field. A going thing deserves company." Absalom did well at everything, even at this. Ah, he was an expansive and expensive fellow!

Teresa Piccone Stranahan made her own war against the stifling confinement of the un-structureds. She was the St. Louis housewife who made noises that were heard around the world.

Hans Schultz got rich accidentally in his businesses, and he couldn't keep himself divested of that sticky green stuff. He was like a boy who got a new boomerang for his birthday and went crazy trying to throw the old one away. But he created a consensus of conscience in one field of business where conscience had almost disappeared.

Vincent Stranahan counted coups somehow, in spite of a great measure of incompetence that was his. Finnegan fumbled it all away for twenty-three out of every twenty-four hours, and then tried to make it up on that hectic last hour. There weren't any final results in on Finnegan.

"We don't even know whether he's dead," Salvation Sally said. "With Finnegan, how can you tell?"

Letitia, Mary Virginia, Dotty --

"Be she alive or be she dead,

Hi! Ho!

Be she alive or be she dead,

She'll serve baked brains from the Devil's head.

Hi! Ho! The Goli Wol!"

(Why did they ever teach Margaret Stone that damned Gadarene Swine Song?), yes, Margaret Stone, Sally, Mary Catherine, Casey in Exile, Zabotski, X, they fought a war against the big smokiness.

Duffey did it in art and in stubbornness. With Fire and Finesse he did it. Oh what smokey and sputtering fire and what clumsy finesse, Duff!

There were several other Empires doing battle against the Principality, but we do not have full data on them.

This is a world history of modern times into the present. Clip it and save it.

"My dear brother," Bagby wrote in one of those 'Letters After I Am Dead', "we have it pleasant here. We are freed from the tyrannies of hours and places. We provide for ourselves and for others. It requires hard but not torturous work, and we are given plenty of leisure. We do not sleep. What would we have to sleep about?"

"We still have our passions, and they are immeasurably strengthened and heated. But we break them to bridle again and again, like breaking horses. There are no evil passions, and there are few evil horses. But a passion unbroken or a horse unbroken is in evil case for a while.

"We work in very complex personal relationships. That is what

refines us and improves us. We enter into relationships with creatures militant and triumphant, with our own kindred, with species whose reality we had once doubted, with aliens, with angelics, with damned. (Not all the damned are irrevocably damned: it is not known whether any of them are.) Our own characters grow in complexity. These are very fruitful interchanges.

"We do have particularity. And our particularity is not accompanied by all the phenomena that philosophers have thought should accompany the possession of particularity. Really, it isn't a new gift. It is only an enhancement of a general human gift. We know things and relationships in their billion-aspected and-billion-detailed particulars. We know all about you. We know all about everything.

"There is no analogy to our difficulty in explaining to you what our state of being outside of time is. A waggy-tongued man might be able to explain colors and minute differences in colors to a man born blind. He might be able to explain, in salivary detail, the taste of a persimmon to a person who had never known that fruit. He might be able to explain the direct reception of radio waves to humans who know them only in their audio translation.

"But he could not explain the -- (the correct word here, extemporaneous, has taken on a different meaning so we may not use it in its real meaning), he could not explain the out-of-time case to one who had never been outside of time. There isn't duration. There is only moment. I always come back to that. The moment cannot end, for endings are within time.

"We have our Earth-hours, though they are not inside time as are the hours of Earth. Our Earth Hours are appointments from which we contemplate Earth. We review your happenings there, with growing maturity and with wide particularity. I can see now, as I could not see when I was in the middle of it, that we neglected certain crucial fields and left them to the enemy. Theoretical mathematics is one of the fields that we neglected in the world. We allowed false theory to move into this field, which is also a tool. Especially did we abandon the field of mathematical philosophy to the enemy, and yet we had superior qualifications in that field.

"Economic philosophy is another area that we left to the enemy. We still combat him in economic theory, but that is not quite so fundamental a thing. We barely contest him in theology. We assume all too quickly that all the theologians have gone over to the party of the Devil. The enemy does have all the theoreticians of knowledge processing, but such theoreticians can be made out of almost anything.

"We still have beach-heads in art, which is another name for the schematic ordering of life. Beware of those who promulgate false schemas or no schemas at all. We live in pleasant thatched huts in the first circle. We thence (not in the future, but in intensity) move into other circles. The hierarchies of circles are not inner and outer; they are only more intense and more transfigured.

"Am I content here? Of course I'm not content. I'm not at all sure that contentment is one of the things we're supposed to be learning. But I am happy, with a growing kinetic happiness (kinetics outside of time and motion? That's right, brother, that's right), and I am happy with the mustard-seed happiness that expands exponentially until whole worlds can nest in its branches."

There was more. There was always much more. Duffey would get a full week's enjoyment out of each of Bagby's letters, rereading parts of one of them in his mind several times a day, following out the branching implications of some of the phrases, sampling beforehand personal relationships more complex than he was used to, experiencing patches of particularity. Duffey, in his person of Melchisedech, had often experienced brief moments of near total particularity, but he hadn't encountered the particularity that is beyond moments.

Then, before the last letter had been near exhausted, there would

come another Monday morning and another letter.

"There is an art dealer in New Orleans who is more than four thousand years old. The name of this man is Melchisedech Duffey. Let the reader smile if he will, but there is proof of this statement of izreat age. This proof would have to be accepted, as based @pon scientific sources, if it showed the man to be of more likely or less extreme age. But valid scientific proof must be accepted even when it gives unacceptable answers.

"What began as a routine physical examination eventually showed that this man was actually more than four thousand years old, on the basis of his birefringence flow index, thrombocytes-shaped remnants, Howship's lacunar frequency, linkage patterns of Volkman canals, wall thickness of the splanchnic capillaries, lateral line remainder of the post-auditory placodes, Krebs's cycle consonance, Gompertz function analogies, collagen contractility, secretion of Golgi bodies around the lipid vesicure, diatomic diffusion, lobation of Metanephrio, Pentose phosphate pathway data, peptide linkage characteristics, and every other standard test that is used to determine age of body. Over four thousand years old was the answer in every case. Stereogram studies of the glomer-ules gave the same answer, and a general archaism of characteristics was in accord with it. These things cannot be challenged.

"But at the same time, there are general indications that the unessential body material is that of a fifty-five year old man. The characteristics thus are much older than the body itself: and the unseemly conclusions of medical experts are that the man is older than his body. Mr. Duffey's own conclusions concur with this to an extent.

"'From the inside, one body looks pretty much like another,' Mr. Duffey has said. 'I am sure that I have passed through several bodies. I am equally sure that I have brought my essence and pattern and individual substance (my signature cytogens) with me into whatever body has served as a temporary vehicle. Or possibly it is the same body, renovated and given back to me each time. I will not contradict the theology of the case. But I believe that a man can be older than his body, just as a body can be older than a car it rides in.'

"'Do you consider your history to be a form of reincarnation?' Duffey was asked. 'Incarnation? No, only an utter fool would believe in reincarnation,' he said. 'Then how would you explain your case?' we asked him. 'It's simply that I have lived a little longer a life than the average person has,' Mr. Duffey said. Mr. Duffey also brought in several of his acquaintances, who however do not wish their names given, who tested more than three thousand years old in their essential make-up. The evidence is convincing in all of these cases. Do you know any people of proven greater age than these?"

[The Eighteenth Book of Strange Encounters, by the Editors of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Books of Strange Encounters.]

3

Quite a few years slipped by one way or another. The battle lines were never finely drawn. The people of the world weren't greatly concerned about the battle that was being fought over them. If told that the battle concerned their degradation and extinction, they answered "That's as good a way to go as any." The battle wasn't in sight on any decision, but the Devil was ahead on points. One afternoon, Duffey was reading through a bunch of clippings that Letitia had saved in a scrapbook. The words "Oh Murder!" were lettered on the cover of it, And smaller letters on that cover, in the perfect and orderly inking of Letitia, gave the information "All Murders and Mayhems and Excerpts here are exactly as indicated. Nothing faked, nothing uncontexted. Everything is in its original tedium." Well, the words on the cover were better than anything inside it, but Duffey was going through it

because it had recently been pasted up by the loving hands of Letitia. Her silver laughter echoed out of it, that laughter! "God loves it, and I kind of like it myself," Duffey had said of it.

But Duffey was having a slow go in leafing through the scrapbook. He sobbed and snuffled, and his eyes were brimming with tears, which made the reading difficult:

"I believe in the total education of the young person," Father Blevins told your reporter. "In particular I believe in education in the most important things in life, which are the pleasures of life. It curdles me that we have college girls here without any first-hand experience in Fornicational Intercourse. This has been a gross neglect on the part of everyone. I give them that first-hand experience myself. Frankly, I am good at it, and it is best for them to learn from an expert. I had previously given this instructional experience to high school girls and to grade school girls. So what is all the fuss now when I am giving it to college girls? What is the matter with everyone anyhow? The yuks and cretins have had their say long enough. No, technically it isn't compulsory yet, but for my part I am making it as compulsory as I can. No, I don't see anything 'wrong' with a chaplain at a student center holding intercourse with students as part of an organized program. But I do see something wrong with the whole concept of 'wrong'. Let's throw that out."

"What are the views of your bishop on this?" your reporter asked.

"The bishop is a clerical-fascist, and as such is not entitled to have any views," Father Blevins said."

"We'll not deny a slippage of ten years in attainment levels, so that now the sixteen and seventeen-year-olds are reading at the level of material that the six and seven-year-olds formerly read. This was planned so, and rightly planned. It is part of our leveling process to reduce tensions. When all are of equal attainment, what will there be to be tense about? It is essential that the rising curve of intelligence be reversed. We are reversing it. We are pioneers in this. Certainly we are introducing pornography into the texts, but it is pornography geared to the level of six-year-old and seven-year-old reading ability."

"The difference between just wars and unjust wars? Any war waged by Amerika or any other fascist country is unjust. Any war waged by a peoples-Marxist country is just. No, I don't believe that is too simplistic. It is merely clear-cut and incisive. And we have the teaching of the Church that one may support a just war but not an unjust war. The trouble is that people now accept the teaching of the Church only when they want to. They do not accept it in fields such as this."

"The kicking to death of an effigy is a legitimate procedure. And all members of the crypto-fascist establishment are effigies. Kicking one of them to death is no more than kicking a sack of potatoes to death. Yes, we do it in the press and on the air and by posters and slogans. No, we are not surprised when gangs of young people do it literally. Popular solidarity demands that we be furnished with such effigies to kick to death. And it demands that the effigies be in human form, however repellent to all progressive people they should be. They are not human, of course, in the charismatic sense that we are human. Yes, I believe that the literal act is the new dimension of it that we have been seeking. This is both bread and circuses to us and we will not be denied it."

"I long ago gave up the belief in the Historical Christ. I can see Christ in the dope addict, in the thief, in the hooker, in the pimp, in the poor man masturbating openly beside a public wall, in the cheat, in the rapist. These are my neighbors, and I see the a-Historical Christ in them."

But I do not see him in the man next door. The man next door is always the stereotype of a fascist fink and is no neighbor of mine."

"My door is always open, always. Anyone can come to see me. I am the president of the Popular Revolutionary Priests' Senate, not to be confused with the Social Revolutionary Priests' Senate. By my position I am the highest ranking dignitary in the diocese. But I am charitable to defeated opponents. If the bishop should come here he would be omitted. He'd be kicked out pretty quick, but he'd be admitted first. If the president of the nation should come he'd be admitted. He would immediately be placed under citizens arrest, but he would be admitted first. If the Pope of Rome came to this door, he would be allowed to come in. Yeah, if he crawled, he would."

"Sister Mary Merhione the topless nun, was interviewed today in the topless bar where she works. Sister spoke without bitterness of the phariseeism of those who have spoken against her mission. 'I say that anyone who ob'jects to it is prurient as hell," she said in her gentle and forgiving voice. 'I say, if they have them, they ought to show them too. 'nis is the most rewarding place I've ever worked in. I can actually feel the human heart here sometimes. This is my dedication and my service. The reprint articles are fifty cents a copy. Buy a dozen and pass them out to ur friends. It's a reprint of my article 'Topless Before God' from the 'Paralplegic Church Today'."

The scraps in the scrapbook were really kind of funny. All of them were genuine, and most of them were dated, representing a naive phase that was about finished, being replaced by a more frightening movement. But if they were funny, why then was Melchisedech Duffey crying and snuffling as he turned through them, fumbling and almost unseeing?

Letitia Duffey had iust died. They had taken ffer away not a quarter of an hour ago. The funeral parlor men had told Duffey not to come around down there for at least an hour. He couldn't be with her. He was lost. He handled distractedly this last thing that she had handled as she was stricken there, and it happened to be the old scrapbook.

There had been a bitter moment right after her death.

"I do not accept this," Melchisedech had said heavily. "This must be explained immediately, immediately."

There was a large plant or bush called "The Elephant Ear" growing right outside the opened window there, and its huge leaves came in through that window. The bush flamed with light and heat. It burned. Duffey talked with the bush for a while and listened io it. Nobody else could understand the words either, of Melchisedech or of the bush. They respected it as a private agony and communication.

"Fiat voluntas tuas," Duffey said after a bit, grudgingly, and yet accepting the explanation. Then the flame went out of the bush and left only a permeating odor, something like holly.

Somewhere in the building, Margaret Stone was singing in her whisper-toned voice, 'Viena la sera', 'Evening is falling', from one of the dumber operas. It was not evening: it was about eleven o'clock in the morning. Somewhere, in another room, Absalom Stein was blowing that big, elegant nose of his, but he blew it with sincerity and compassion and a muted orchestration of deep feelings. In the press room, Mary Virginia was saying the Glorious Mysteries of the rosary with neighbors and with people from the Seaman's paper and the Jazz sheet and the Sporting News. Zabotski came in.

"I've got a good coffin," he said. "I took it in for down payment on a lot once. Letitia would look good in it. Shall I take it around to the funeral house?"

"It doesn't matter, Zabotski," Duffey said, "Just so it doesn't

cause trouble there or here or anywhere."

"It's never been used," Zabotski said. "I'll just take it over there and tell them to use it. Letitia saw it at my place once and patted it. 'Hey, that's class,' she said. 'It'd be fun to go in something like that.' She liked class."

"Yes, she did," Duffrey said. "Let her go in it in class then, if you're willing."

Bagby's yesterday's letter had talked about it. "I am sure that you have made appointment to meet later," he had written. "Such appointments have legal standing in the further context. They are honored." Bagby had known about it, of course. They had all known about it for several years, that she would be going soon, and suddenly. But Melchisedech hadn't been disposed for it to be quite so sudden when it came.

"You leave her eyes open," Margaret Stone had told those men who came to take her. "She likes to have her eyes open. They always follow one, her eyes. Every person in a room always thinks that her eyes are following him." So Letitia had gone with her eyes open and seeming to look at everybody with individual recognition.

The doctor had something for Duffey to sign. So, apparently, had the priest. And also an insurance man who came there. There was a rough hour or so, and Duffey played on his flute to pass it.

It was all right after he got to see her at the funeral home; and later in the afternoon they brought her back home for her wake. Lily came in on the afternoon plane from Chicago, though Duffey had forgotten to phone her. Mary Louise flew in from St. Louis, though she hadn't been notified either, unless Bagby had notified her.

They had a good, old fashioned wake. Letitia's smiling eyes were open and sparkling and seemed to follow every person in the room with love and amusement. That had been a likeable quality about Letitia, her individual concern for each person.

4

"What you need is a long summer in Transylvania," the Countess Margaret told Duffey three days after the burial of Letitia. "There are so many of the Dracula-slept-here castles in Transylvania, and I own several of them. We could have his and Hers castles on facing crags, and a pleasure pavilion in the valley between them. All this I will give you, Duffey, and it's only a slight and token falling-down act you'll have to show for them."

"Countess, the Greeks have a saying 'Beware the Transylvanians bearing gifts.'"

"I know they do, and they're right. But everything that's good in the Greeks is better in us. People have supposed that we're an eastern version of the Latin peoples, that we are analogues of the French and Italians and Spanish and Portuguese. Oh, I suppose that a Transylvanian wolf is the analogue to a Mexican Hairless Dog, but it isn't a close analogue. It's said that we're related to the Slavs and the Greeks and the Albanians and the Armenians, and even that we are a piece that fell off the moving Gothic Nation. No, we aren't those things really. We are people on a land-locked or mountain-locked island who escaped most of the permutations that other people suffered. We have remained what other people should be and aren't."

"Nah, Countess, nah," Duffey said. "I read a book of Transylvanian Witch-and-Fairy Tales recently. You are toying with some of their themes."

"Come and see. I am some of those themes. Do you know why our estates are not to be found on The maps or the tax rolls? The Reds sent in Estate-Hunters to locate our estates and those of ten thousand other families. But the Estate-Hunters cannot find them, and the country is not that rough. It is a gently rolling country for a thousand leagues or more."

"Nah, Countess, nah. There are no such distances in Transylvania."

"Are there not? Come and see. And the Reds have sent out castle-hunters to locate the castles and get them on the tax rolls. But there are thirty thousand castles that they cannot find."

"Countess Margaret, ou make it all up. There should be a tome, 'Tales of the Skinny Countess' to be set on the book shelves with that true and incredible tome, 'Tales of Sebastian'. An expert has told me about the Sebastian Tales, 'If it isn't printed on human skin, it sure is a good imitation'. No wonder it's so expensive. Thirty thousand is a lot of castles, Countess Margaret."

"Come and see. Do you know, Melchisedech, that there are nineteen generations of my family still living in Transylvania? And they are long generations, Melky."

"Nineteen generations still living would reach back a ways, Margaret."

"And I said that they were long generations, Duff. You have one way of reaching back, apparently. We have another. Do you know that we never reach puberty till we are more than fifty years old? And we --"

"These are tall old tales, Countess."

"Are they not? Don't you just love them? Come with me to Transylvania. You may have wondered why Sebastian and I did not marry until the end. He understood my case. Oh, and I understood his! I loved him, and he is dead. There is another piece to the tale. We are not ready to marry until after our mid-century, but we can love no one new that we did not love when we were quite young. I had mind encounters with you when I was very young. I loved Sebastian. I loved several others. I loved you. The others are all gone, but you still endure. Come with me to Transylvania, Duff. It extends all the way to Colchis."

"No, it does not, Countess. Meg, I wonder what you will look like in a hundred years?"

"Come and see. Your own 'creatures' will hardly last another lifetime. They are pitchers who have been to the spring no more than three or four times, and already their clay begins to crack. Who will you look to for companionship when they are all dead and gone? You'll be as mopey as one of those last-of-the-line dragons who have no kindred left in the world. But you and I could make genetic music together for a long time."

"You are a witch who would suck my blood."

"Of course I would, and you mine. It's one of our most amorous delights. What do you think it is that keeps me so skinny? Do you know what 'sanguine' really means? Do you know what 'bloodcousin' really means? Do you know what the Dracula legend really means? Come with me? Is it the Devil that you're worried about these last few years? Melky, there are certain wolves who have served my family for many generations. These wolves are larger than horses, and the Devil is afraid of them. He'll not come around to bother us. Could we not have a fine life in the centuries ahead? Marry me, Duffey, and come to Transylvania with me."

"Ah, not right now, Countess. Ask me again in fifty years."

"You think that's a joke. I will."

The Countess Margaret went back to Chicago that day. She had come down to New Orleans with the elder Kochs to Letitia's funeral, those parents really being elderly now, and Lily having gone down a day earlier than they had, and staying several weeks later; and the Countess being very close to all the family.

So Duffey did not marry and go to Transylvania with the Countess, not at that particular time anyhow, not in that particular context.

And then there was the gilded Lily herself.

"You can have it both ways, Duff my luff," Lily told Melchisedech. "Marry me for fifty years or so, and we will set up our own Transylvania just anywhere you want to. Then, 'when I am dead, my love, and all the world

is green', you can marry the Countess and go to Transylvania and live on wolf stew and blood. Yes, they're nubile at fifty, but they're not into it right till after they're a hundred.

"And I will tell you something else, Duff. That million dollar dowery that has been on my head so long, it's tripled now. It's the cost of living adjustment and all, you know. Besides, Letitia had phoned me not too long ago and made me promise that I would see that you hid everything that you ever needed. Do you need me, dear?"

"I need you, yes, Lily. It seems that I need everyone, everyone in this whole wobbly world."

"Oh well then, I'll get them all for you if you really need them. I do love you, dear, and I will do anything for you. Let me know. Come up several times a year, and I'll come down here more often. Civilized people do travel one week out of every month, you know. Oh, why do people never realize how much I love them!"

Lily decided, by what calculation she did not say, that it was Melchisedech Duffey's four thousandth birthday just about then. Zabotski took her to a baker who did cakes for every sort of birthday. She told the baker what she wanted.

"It will have to be big enough to hold four thousand candles," she said.

"No problem," the baker told her. "If I make the cake sixty-four by sixty-three inches, it will hold four thousand and thirty-two candles, figuring one per square inch. I had better make it sixty-four by sixty-four inches, That would give room for forty-one hundred and ninety-six candles, but there is always some caveage along the edge of a cake. I'll make the cake about three feet high. That'll be about nine hundred pounds of cake. Serve half pound servings, that's two times nine hundred -- hum, I wish I had a pencil -- that's eighteen hundred servings. Does he have eighteen hundred friends?"

"Yes."

So the cake was made and the birthday party was held. Four persons at once had to light the candles with tapers, one thousand for each of them, and they had to hurry so that the first candles would not burn out before the last ones were lit. Then, could Melchisedech Duffey blow them all out in one breath? He could and he did. He had not been' blowing the flute all those years to run short of breath now. Besides, there may have been big-mouthed and big-lunged giants adding their blowing to him. There was, for a moment there, a certain gustiness in the place that was almost unnatural.

Zabotski had two heavy steers barbecued whole for the party. It was a good birthday party. People around there still talk about it sometimes.

"Are we out from under the shadow of Chicago yet?" Margaret Stone asked their little world the day after Lily had gone back North.

"No, not yet," Mary Virginia said. "The barometer is falling, and so is the hygrometer and other instruments. I feel another wind coming from the north."

"I hope it won't be a cold one."

"No. It won't be."

Charlotte Garfield came down from Chicago again. No, she didn't look any older. Just meaner and prettier. She looked like the rottenest damned nine year old kid in the world, and the most expensively gowned delinquent in any of the worlds.

"This stole I am wearing cost me thirty thousand dollars," she told Mary Virginia. Charlotte was in New Orleans in June, and wearing a fur stole that Would set anvbody's eyes wobbling. Nah, it wasn't hot wearing it, not for Charlotte.

"Oh Midget, it couldn't have," Mary Virginia protested. "Oh, it's elegant beyond anything, but it's small, I know something about prices and

makr-ups. I know something about you: I know that you wouldn't pay such a steep mark-up on anything. There isn't any way that could have cost thirty thousand dollars."

"I'd have bet that there wasn't any way either," Charlotte said. "But they caught me so cold that they had me there with mink hair growing out of the palms of my hands. I was using, in my act, a mother who was a personal dazzler and was also a knowledgeable faker of fur talk. She seemed to be a discerning hot-money customer, and that nine year old girl of hers was always skipping around the shop. I got a few fine small pieces out of the doors of a few of those emporia. But then I was caught by the hardest-eyed fur man in Chicago. He brought me to one of those everything-proof vaults to deal with me after he had caught me fur-lifting.

"This is the pay-off, midget," he said. "'I am going to kill you. And there isn't much of you to take a lot of disposing of.'"

"I have wrong use of words, Angelo," I told him. "'If you kill me outright like that, where is the pay-off? All right, how much is the tab? I've only tagged three of your shops.'"

"That's all, midget? I can never be sure who does the tagging. I kind of had my heart set on killing you, but business comes first. Thirty thousand dollars within thirty minutes, midge, or it's sixty-one pounds of cat meat you will be.'

"What are you, a man or a peanut-pusher?' I asked to make him feel cheap. 'All right, I'll get it!' I got it and paid him off. Then as he was getting a little bit sweet on me by that time, he gave me this little stole to remove all enmity from the transaction. And it is fun to be able to say truthfully 'This little stole that I am wearing, it cost me thirty thousand dollars.'"

Charlotte was looking for a new family and a new situation. She thought that she might possibly go southern for a while. She was now operating under the name of Carrollton rather than Garfield, but names are made to be changed. She put an ad in the Picayune, and also the same ad in 'The Bark':

"Charlotte wishes new family and new connections. Mother must be dazzler about thirty-nine years old. Son-father-husband to be about nineteen years old but look older. Professionalism in 'The Profession' is required. Must be willing to assume the name of Darnley. If you don't know who Charlotte is, then forget it!"

Both the street number and the box number of the Pelican Press were given for answering, and several pairs of the better confidence people came around to talk to Charlotte. But Charlotte didn't seem to be too anxious to make a new tie-up just yet.

"Duffey, I know that you've always wanted sons," she said, "and not just your Splendid Animations. Listen, I can have sons any time, nineteen year old and full-grown sons, as many as I want, as often as I want."

"But you let one of them walk out of here an hour ago, Charlotte, and he seemed to fill all the requirements," Duffey said.

"I don't mean like that, Duff," Charlotte answered. "I latch onto them like that only when I'm in too tedious a mood to go for the real thing. But sons of my body I can have, and sometimes I do. They could be your sons, Duff."

"Small as you are, Charlotte, how could you birth grown sons?" "The way is too weird to explain, Duff, but I can do it."

"You're too old for me, Charlotte. "I seem to remember when we first met on the train, that I was twenty-five years old and you, I believe, were thirty-eight. And now I'm possibly sixty, and you are --"

"We both of us belong to branches of the 'old people', Duff, of closely related branches of them. Age doesn't gnaw on me much. And I see that you are using whiting on your hair to disguise the fact that you're into one of your youthful cycles and getting your hair color back. Take me, Duffey. We are both prodigious people, and we could have a prodigious time

of it."

"Strange words coming from a little nine year old girl, Charlotte. How did it happen that so many of us prodigious people became acquainted with each other? It's in defiance of the odds that we should have done it."

"I suspect that we were lonesome, and we sent out signals, as your moth once did. There aren't really so many of us in the world, and we might as well be acquainted."

"Isn't the Devil a prodigious or variant person, Charlotte?"

"Certainly, and we both know him personally. In a world this size, he would naturally have heard of us, and we would naturally have heard of him. But we don't make him too welcome in our Prodigious Peoples' Club. At least I don't. But he's not unique in his trade."

"Duffey, there are at least two other Prodigious Devils who are passing themselves off as 'The Devil Himself'. And the 'Devil Released from Prison', by the way, is one of the oldest of all con tricks. It's really only a version of the 'Spanish Prisoner Trick', grossly magnified. I am told that his take, that last time around, in 1946, was huge: it ran into the billions. And yet this Devil, in the few brief conversations I had with him, didn't impress much."

"Well, make up your mind, Duffey. I change families every three or four years, and I think that my next manifestation should be in the 'Patriarch and Angelic Child'. The world is getting hungrier and hungrier for prodigies, and we should be able to ride that con for several centuries. I'll be back in about four months and we can talk more on it then. I bought a nice little business in town today, and I get control of it in just four months."

"All right, Charlotte. May you have sons like clusters of green grapes around the old arbor."

Charlotte did tie into another 'family', and she called them the Darnleys. They were real professionals in the 'profession', a dazzler of a mother, a son-husband-father who should have been anything that the mendacious midget desired. The two Darnleys were so good at their parts that it almost looked as if Charlotte had overreached herself. Did these people intend to use her instead of she using them? Never mind. They'd go sweet on her soon enough, and then she'd have them, the blasted runt tyrant."

"Anything else from the North, Mary Virginia?" Margaret Stone asked the day after Charlotte Darnley had gone back to Chicago with her family.

"One more, I believe, Maggy," Mary Virginia said.

Mary Catherine Carruthers came down from Chicago. Mary Catherine had always seemed to be the least of Duffey's Splendid Animations, and yet she and Duffey had been very close. Remember when Duffey had used to wrestle her on that old black leather sofa in the back of his bookstore in Chicago, from the time she was nine or ten years old. He should have been horse-whipped for such things. Instead, he was blackmailed for them, for the pictures that that damned kid Hugo Stone took of them. But remember how Mary Catherine, from the very first, would scatter Duffey's worries. It almost seemed as if she were older than he was, the way she rationalized the worry out of him.

"There is not anything to be bothered about, Mr. Duffey," she would say when she was no more than ten years old. "You are not being the funny uncle with me. This is all right. It isn't somebody else carrying on with some little child. It is you. And it is me. And what is between us is all right."

And a year or two after that, she had said "I love you, Duffey, and of course I love Aunt Letitia. But if she dies, and she might (you two think you are the mentalists and can sneak-preview the future, but maybe I am a mentalist too), if she does die, then I will want you to marry me. Promise me that you will."

"This I will not promise to a little girl," Duffey had said.

"When it comes about, I might be an old girl," Mary Catherine had said. Now it had come about that Mary Catherine was an old girl. She never had married Casey Szymansky, though they had been engaged to marry quite a few times.

Mary Catherine was about twenty years younger than Duffey, so she was about forty or fifty, depending on whether Duffey was about sixty or seventy by now. Duffey was looking much younger now though, younger than he had looked twenty years before. The Patriarchs have these peculiar tides in them that ebb and flow.

Mary Catherine stayed around town for a couple of weeks. She had leisure, as much as she wished to take. She had been a hard-working business girl for many years and had made good money. Then she had gone to work for Hilary Hilton and had made fantastic money. Now she was on leave.

She spent quite a bit of time wandering around the town. She spent a lot of time talking to Duffey. For some reason, Mary Catherine seemed entangled in his future, more so than the Countess Margaret, or Lily, or Charlotte, more so than the New Orleans ladies.

But the clotted future sometimes seems to be coming out of its jug not at all. And then, it comes out with resounding glugs, all mixed, and not as it was supposed to be. Well, whether she went back to Chicago only briefly, or whether she went back there permanently, Mary Catherine went back then.

"Any more blowing in from the North, Mary Virginia? Margaret Stone had asked.

"No, I think that's all of them for right now," Mary V. said. So Margaret sang the bristly song to the halting of the flood of them:

"The harpies came from Illinois.
Hi! Ho!
They'd give a Gadarene a pause.
Hi! Ho!
They rend the Duff with loving claws.
They eat him up with eager jaws.
(They really have such pretty maws.)
Hi! Ho!
I'm telling it just like it waws.
There ought to be some penal laws.
Perhaps they all will die of yaws.
Hi! Ho! The gollie wol!"

Why had anybody ever taught Margaret Stone that Gadarene Swine Song?

Yes, there was a little bit of action on the New Orleans front even.

Mary Virginia. Salvation Sally. Margaret Stone. Well, what about Mary V. and Salvation and Margaret? Oh, nothing, it was just that they were such pleasant and wonderful ladies. One would have to think of them intensely and often. And Patriarchs usually come to wifely harbors several times in their long lives.

What was this? Seven women, some of them less reluctant than others. Does that mean there is a pick of seven different futures?

You try to get this clotted future to come out of the jug, and it will not budge at all. And then maybe it will break loose with a cascade of stuff you never even guessed about.

Book Five

"You, Melchisedech the odd-ski,
Stand not fearful like a clod-ski,

Follow Noah and Zabodski."
[Bascom Bagby. Letters After I Am Dead.]

1

Duffey came on a painted sign one morning. It read "The Future Begins Right Here. Follow the Arrows." But there were seven arrows pointing in seven different directions. And there was a landscape or townscape, very well done, painted beneath each arrow. Deeply mystified, Duffey examined the sign. It had a beautiful and dampish look to it, and he touched it.

"Oh, it's still wet. You got some on you. I'm sorry," said an adolescent girl. "I was supposed to watch, but I didn't notice you."

Then there were several nice girls there. They said that they had painted the sign for both an advertisement and a prop in a school play and had set it there to dry. They said that the sign was a sort of 'in'-play or 'in'-people reference and did not have any profound implications.

"I painted the scenes under the arrows," one of the girls said. "I'm a painter." These were very pretty girls and they attended Ursuline Academy.

But Duffey knew that they were wrong. He knew that the sign did have very profound implications. The future really did begin here, for him, for the world. Most of his life he had lived in the present, and now there would be no more present for him. The future, parting and branching off in the different directions, would be tricky.

"There is something obdurate and absolute about this sign of yours," Melchisedech told the girls. "It means either the end of myself in this mortal coil, or it means the end of time itself."

"Yes it does," one of the girls said. "That's what the play is all about. It's about this old man who comes to the end of his skein, and somehow the fate of the world is tied to his fate, or he believes that it is. Say, do you want to play the part of the old man. His name is Melchisedech. That's a name from the Bible. We've been wondering who would be good to play it."

"I will play it," said Melchisedech Duffey. "I am Melchisedech."

"You will be perfect," said a girl. "I am Therese Doucet the casting director."

"I have here a copy of the script that you may take," said another girl. "I am Cleo Mahoney the playwright. Do you suppose that you could learn your part within a week?"

"I can learn any part within thirty seconds," Melchisedech said and he took the script. He read it for more than thirty seconds, maybe for five minutes, and he seemed sometimes amused and sometimes terrified.

"This is written with rare prophetic gift," he said. "It is prescient, it is almost omniscient. All right, I have it all learned. When is the performance."

"Nobody could learn it that fast," Cleo said. "You are joshing us. Let us hear you give the great speech at the beginning of act three."

"All right," Melchisedech said, and he gave it in a fine ringing voice:

"I tell you that I'm sort of split in two.
My friend, Za-bot, Oh tell me what to do.
What, gone away and left me in my stew?
A sinkless craft is very well for you,
But I'm the man who cannot have an end,
So Scripture says, that will not break or bend.
And yet it's sure that I have lost my way,
And seven roads do beckon me this day.
How may I follow all? How may I stay?
I cannot have an end though time shall end.
Oh Kephos of the blooming nose on you,

Advise me where I ought to turn or trend.
You turn away and make a joke or two.
Oh hack me up in seven pieces, friend,
And seven roads I'll follow to their end,
But these are riddle roads that do extend
Beyond. Ah, welladay and welladoo."

People in the street had stopped to listen, and now some of them applauded. New Orleans people will applaud anything.

"This is about Melchisedech of the Old Testament," Cleo Mahoney explained then. "He is the one man who cannot have an ending. 'Sine Patre, neque Finem', 'Without Father and without End', the Bible says about him. But what will happen to him when it is time for him to end, or when it is time for the world to end? That is the plot. I picture him hesitating before seven different roads, and then I give a sort of vision of each of those seven roads. Have you any talents? Can you do anything between the acts." "I can play my banjo," said Melchisedech.

"But would a banjo be fitting for a Patriarch?"

"Well, I could play my flute then. It is a medieval recorder-flute and it would not be at all out of the way for a Patriarch to play it. And I have been fooling around with Hebrew melodies lately. Hebrew melodies are 'in', as you must know."

"That will be wonderful," the girls said, "and you will be wonderful in the part. It is one week from tonight in our auditorium. We will keep you apprised of the details."

Knowing the play to be prescient of his own condition, Duffey went to see Kephos of the blooming nose. Kephos is stone, of course, which is Stein. And he explained the whole situation, and the fortuitous little play that was an echo of that situation, to spacious Absalom Stein.

"I know about the play, of course," Stein said. "I've had to subscribe to twelve tickets to it. My daughter Rebeka is in it, you know. She goes to Ursuline. And what is a little Jew girl going there for? 'To get a more narrow education,' my wife said (it was her idea). Her education has been getting entirely too broad and I've been worried about that.' It is easy to say that an ultra-broad education never hurt anybody, but it has hurt me here and there, I believe. Oh, the play bites you to the quick, does it Melky? You do have a problem. The worst of your problems is that people who can never end may end by being tedious."

"You turn away and make a joke or two," the great speech in the play had said about this Kephos, and so it was.

Duffey went to see Zabotski who was likely the Za-bot in the play.

"Zabotski, I have a problem!" Duffey roared as he went into Zabotski's always open place. But his roar echoed back to him from the empty vastness of Zabotski's old quarters. Zabotski came there very infrequently now.

Oh yes he lives in that unsinkable house on the lake," Duffey reminded himself. "Should I follow him there in his folly, as Bagby suggests in his latest letter?"

What had Zabotski been up to. Or what had Somebody been up to through him?

"Of all the good and illuminated persons who were in the world at that time, it was only to Zabotski that God spoke a particular message."

Probably the best account of the Zabotski Folly or the Zabotski Happening is to be found in 'House and Home Happenings Magazine'.

House and Home Happening has for a long time intended to do a piece on the fabulous and outrageous house of Zabotski (he says that his first name is none of our business) and his wife Waldo, which house is located on Pristine Cove of Lake Borgne. This house has been much talked about for its mysterious history, for the many children and strange animals that are there, for its great size and its flabbergasiing design, for its ambient of rapidity ('top speed without hurry'), and for the graciousness of its host and hostess.

But several reporters who have gone on this assignment have failed to fulfill it properly. Even the pictures that they have brought back (of one six-hundredth of a second exposure and even faster) have been blurred on what were supposed to be still lifes, as though there were some sort of movement there that was too fast for the cameras. But that is nothing to the way the reporters themselves were blurred when they came back. One of them, gone for only three hours from the magazine office, grew a forty-seven inch lodg beard in the interval. His only explanation was that the time seemed like much more than three hours to him.

Stymied for a while, we have now decided to make this a two-part feature on the Zabotski house which is a house that has a 'myth of origin'. This 'myth of origin' falls into the context of what is called a 'shaggy people Yale'. We have prevailed upon a sometimes associate of Zabotski, one Melchisedech Duffey, to put the rather slippery facts of origin into a sort of sequence. We publish it herewith, and we hope to have the actual description of the house in our next issue. We do not designate the Zabotski house, as we have designated so many others, as our 'House of the Month'. Rather we designate it as our 'House of the Uncertain Interval'.

There were a few smart flies (this is Melchisedech Duffey writing) who knew it when the molasses they were caught in solidified into amber. But most of the flies, though they knew that something was wrong, didn't have any idea what was happening.

Zabotski went away and came back a lot. There is no doubt that we missed him during those intervals when he was gone. This account is about the time that he went away in an outlandish, giant contraption that he had built in his own back yard.

This was the time, continuing now apparently unbroken into the future, when Zabotski went to live in a large and ungainly house on Lake Borgne, when he lived there with his wife The Widow Waldo, and with many ungainly children and animals.

And before that, he had lived on Dumaine Street in a building between those of myself Melchisedech Duffey and that of Homer Hoose.

If we are to study origins, we will just study the origin of that huge house, and its movement from one location to another.

The 'Better Life League' had recognized Zabotski to be an 'Entrance Person'. But Zabotski hadn't recognized the 'Better Life League' to be very much of anything. There were many of these non-mutual arrangements between Zabotski and the exocosmos. The 'League' was correct in his though: Zabotski was an 'Entrance Person', a strong and peculiar one.

Zabotski was a quarrelsome man of the 'Who, me?' variety. He simply refused to believe some of the stories that he heard about himself as a starter of quarrels.

"I know better," he'd say. "I'm not like that at all. I am gentleness incognate. Anyone who says that I am quarrelsome had ought to be stomped into a slough and left to drown in his own lies. I wouldn't hurt a fly, surely not a fly caught in molasses. There is no way that I could demean or harm any other being, or even think of harming one."

So then, Zabotski was not a quarrelsome man. But he got on peoples' nerves for his constant swift pace in everything, but sometimes he was gone

for a day or two and gave people a rest from him. At such times, he said that he went to the Pristine World to attend to his affairs there.

And yet his neighbors, by total consensus, found him quarrelsome and offensive. Could every one those neighbors be absolutely mistaken on a matter of fact like that?

Yes, they could be and they were. Those neighbors could all be mistaken about almost everything. Possibly the people in your own neighborhood could not all be mistaken on so many things, but those in Zabotski's neighborhood could be.

So there had seemed to be a quarrel, or at least a skirr of sharp words, between Zabotski and his neighbor Bryan Blackstone who lived on the other side of Homer Hoose, properly two doors from Zabotski; but due to the natural curvature of that block, the properties of Zabotski and Blackstone abutted in back.

"Do not raise the edge of your immortal voice against me, Bryan," Zabotski had warned during one of those lulls in what seemed to be a quarrel, "I'll build whatever I want to build. But you are mortal, as is your edged voice; and you will wither and die. The wither will be apparent on you tomorrow and you will be dead within five days." Zabotski was a heavy kidder and this was all kidding, but Blackstone had never understood him.

"Oh Witch-Doctor Zabotski, I defy you," Bryan had exploded. "You cannot cause my death. I'm stronger than you are."

"Why should anyone call me a Witch-Doctor?" Zabotski asked in puzzlement, "And whyever or however should I cause a death? It is time, that will eat you up and cause your death, Bryan."

"Not in five days it won't," Blackstone barked. "I will live to tromp on your grave, Zabotski." And Blackstone tromped into his house.

"I wonder why all my neighbors are so touchy," Zabotski mused out loud. "In the Pristine World, they are free and easy and not touchy at all."

Blackstone stuck his head out of his door again.

"And get rid of that monstrosity you're building," he howled, "or I'll have the law on you."

"I'll build whatever I want to build on my own place," Zabotski maintained. "And if it does intrude a few meters onto the lots of my neighbors, why that is all fair give and take."

"Do you fancy yourself a Christ, Zabotski?" myself Melchisedech Duffey asked this sometimes associate of mine in exasperation. "Do you believe that you can curse that man-tree of a Bryan Blackstone and that he will wither and die within five days? Blackstone is no fig tree, and you are no Christ."

"Blackstone is more like the American Fig, the Sycamore Tree," Zabotski said. "It's a tall and mottled tree, but it has grubby and trashy fruit. Ah, I'll just send that Sycamore tree of Blackstone's ahead of him to wait for his arrival. When he comes to the blessed shore, he will be bewildered if there is not something grubby and trashy to greet him. He will believe that he came unforgiven into an aalien place if there is not some second-rate thing there that he can relate to. Mottled Tree, wither and die! By tomorrow let the life be gone out of you and you hang dead on your own branches!"

It may be that the Sycamore tree wilted in hat very instant. One couldn't see it do though.

"Do you really believe that you can command a tree and that it will die?" I, Melchisedech Duffey asked him. "And do you really believe that you can command a man to die and he will die?"

"Of course I can command a tree to die and it will die," Zabotski said. "The meanest man is lord over the tallest tree. This lordship is given to all of us, but not all know how to exercise it. And of course I can not command a man to die. That would be against nature itself and also against

my own nature. And even if it were possible for me to command a man to die, that would be of no effect. Duffey, you ask silly questions sometimes."

"We will see whether the Sycamore tree is dead tomorrow," I said.

"What could there be to see?" Zabotski asked. "Of course it will be dead, and possibly it will have disappeared."

"Whatever it is that you're building, Zabotski, it's an eye-sore so far," I told him. "And it does intrude onto other peoples' land."

"Ah, not too much," Zabotski said. "Blackstone is the only one who gets really mad about it. Homer Hoose hasn't looked out of his back window for a long time and he doesn't even know that my contraption is being built there. You surely don't care that it intrudes over your land, do? And the people at the 'Golden Children's Home and Haven Orphanage' behind me there don't care about it. The youngest of those people like it. They like to play in it."

A grubby and trashy fruit of Bryan Blackstone sidled up to Zabotski and to myself Melchisedech Duffey. It was Bryan's little son Baxter. He was nicknamed 'Bandicoot' by the other little boys in the block.

"Please don't kill my father, Mr. Zabotski," little Bandicoot Blackstone begged. "He doesn't mean to be a blow-top any more than you mean to be one. But he is good to us at home and we can't get along without him. Maybe I won't even get to start to school next year if you kill my father. Maybe I'll have to go to work in the mines."

"Why, Bandicoot," Zabotski said, "there is no way that I could ever kill your father or any other person. I simply am not made that way. And they don't hire five year old boys to work in the mines nowadays."

"Then we'll starve," Bandicoot moaned. "But you said that the wither would be on my father by tomorrow and that he would be dead within five days."

"Yes, that's true enough, Bandicoot. Then you'll be the man of the family. That should be a proud and happy time for you."

"Please don't kill my father, Mr. Zabotski," Bandicoot begged again. Then he went away crying.

"I wonder why that little boy is crying?" Zabotski asked in real puzzlement. Zabotski is a little bit insensate sometimes.

This Zabotski was an odd one in that he sometimes went away for a day or two. No, that's not the way to explain his tricky case. Sometimes he went away for a year or more, but he was always back in a day or two. There, that is the best way the case can be put into words. I have private knowledge on this case, but I cannot explain it more fully than that.

Zabotski believed that, just as the great stars bend the light that shines past them, so he bent the Time that flowed past him. He had no doubt that he was a great star among men. Zabotski and his associate myself Melchisedech Duffey studied the problem of Time a lot, though I discounted the influence that Zabotski might have on objective time.

"Looking back on it, we see all history through a distorting medium," I said to Zabotski that evening as we worked on a sort of project that we had been busy on. "Someone has placed this opaque and hamperng medium as an impediment about us so that seeing we might not understand and hearing we might not hear. It is as if we see everything through a most mysterious time-speed-distortion medium, and as if we ourselves were immersed in that medium. Really, there should be some way of analyzing that substance that we are imbedded in, What is it?"

"It's molasses," Zabotski said.

"Our past is all so close to us, and it all seems so artificially very far away," I continued. "I can reach out and grasp a firm hand and find that it is only slightly more hairy than my own. But I lift up my eyes and see that it is a million years away. Are my hand and my mind mistaken, or are my eyes and the evidence mistaken? What is that rock-drawing that you have there Zabotski, and what is the writing on it?"

"Your eyes and the evidence are mistaken, Duffey," Zabotski stated. "This rock-drawing and its writing may be the oldest 'how-to-build-it' instruction booklet in the world. This is the clearest copy I've ever had of it, and I've been able to obtain several. I believe that it is the instruction booklet on how to build either a big barn or a big castle. In any case, there will be something very special and ordained about it. Well, I will have to build it to see what it is supposed to be. There's no other way. It's the same thing that I've been working on in my back yard for some time. I believe that the language of the instruction booklet is Hazh-Khazh."

"But Hazh-Khazh has never been deciphered, Zabotski," I reminded him.

"I know, that's what slows me down. I have to decipher it as I go along. It sure is going to be a big contraption when I get it finished."

"Have you considered that you may have the scale wrong and that you may be building it either ten times or a hundred times too large in every dimension?" I asked him.

"Sure I've considered that," he said. "But I've already started on this scale and I can't very well be mixing scales. There is nothing that says that a model must be smaller than the thing it represents. Mine may be a hundred times bigger in every measurement."

(Editor's Note: This might seem like strange and rambling stuff to appear in 'House and Home Happening Magazine' which is mostly a pop-architectural publication. But there is not any other way to obtain the history of this most interesting structure, the Zabotski House. Back to Melchisedech Duffey.)

Zabotski and I got along pretty well. And Zabotski disappeared at frequent intervals, and thus he did not become really unbearable.

"In all things we have been going forward rapidly and still more rapidly," I said to Zabotski once as I studied his charts and schematics. "I know in my heart and in my intuition that we have covered a very great distance in a very short time. But when I look back, I see that I am deceived either at first or at last. I see that we have been moving at such a very slow pace that yesterday is a million years ago. It's as if the whole continuum was made out of --"

"It's molasses," said Zabotski. "It's all made out of molasses."

I poured over various charts and projections and schemata as the sun went down and the stars came out at their observatory window. And Zabotski was building a model of a model of something out of sycamore wood. He did not know yet what it would be that he was building. He measured and calculated and sawed and whittled and fitted and assembled. This model of a model, as described in the old stone pictures and writings, had begun to take shape both here indoors in small and outdoors in large. But the meaning and purpose and name of the construction had not yet left out at Zabotski, nor at myself.

"Molasses is a lot like amber," Zabotski said. "It flows so slowly that sometimes it seems to be solid. Creatures can be imprisoned in it and apparently be held motionless in it. They must deceive themselves as to their own time scale, for if they do not deceive themselves they will be dead. The name of the thing that is bothering you is the fly-in-the-amber, Melchisedech. But it has been determined that amber does flow very, very slowly. And I believe that anything imprisoned in it lives very slowly also, but still lives."

"Yes, the fly-in-the-amber, and also the unfilled-bathtub-paradox, Zabotski," I said. "I calculate that if the water has been running at the rate it is supposed to be running, and for the time that it is supposed to have been running, then the bathtub should have been filled sixteen thousand times. But it hasn't been filled even once. The bottom of the tub has just barely been covered now. Things can not have been going on at the orthodox pace for the orthodox time."

"No, they have been going on at a much faster pace," Zabotski said, "but they have been going on for hardly any time at all. Literally it all began yesterday, late yesterday."

"Tomorrow, as you know, we are to be visited by a group of fundamentalers," I told him. "I wonder how those ancient fossils of people have survived for so long. What an ignoble senility they show!"

"But no, they aren't old, Duffey," Zabotski said. "They are always the youngest people in the world. They are younger than we are. No, that's wrong. They are not younger than I am. But they are younger than you and the rest of the people are, even if they have hold of the right idea backwards. Try this on your intuitions, Duffey: the Fundamentalers are not flies in molasses or amber as you are; they are flies in free air. Believe that they should be swatted like flies if you wish, but recognize that they move in the free air and you do not. I grant you that they are tedious people, but we must admit that they are half correct in their ideas. Fair's fair."

"You are saying that the Fundamentalers may be correct on their time scale, Zabotski? You are a curly-tongued needier, friend."

"That too, Duffey. But yes, of course they are correct in their time scale, when it is adjusted to the concept of the Pristine World. Ah, here is my life and my love, the Widow Waldo! Fly with me to a better place, Widow Waldo!"

"I had a letter and a call from the State Inspector of Eleemosynary Insitutions today," the Widow Waldo said. "You have got to get that big shack of yours off of the grounds of the 'Golden Childrens Home and Haven Orphanage'. Maybe the state can't make you remove the part that is on your own lot. So far, they are leaving that to the pressure or the indignation of your neighbors and fellow citizens, and that pressure is rising. But you have got to get rid of that part that intrudes on the Orphanage grounds."

"Don't give it another thought Widow Waldo," Zabotski said cheerfully. "It will not be taken care of."

"You are saying that it will not be taken care of?"

"It will not be, Widow: it will not be removed until it is completed, whatever it is and whenever that will be. So don't give it another thought. Fly with me to a better place, Widow Waldo."

"I told you that I would not go unless some of the children go also," the Widow said. She was stuck on Zabotski in spite of him being an ugly and loud-mouthed old man.

"Six of them then," Zabotski said. "That's how many went in the suggested scenario that accompanied the how-to-build-it kit. And they were somewhat older than yours; they were three married couples. There is something messy about whole bunches of small children on a water trip all cooped up."

"Messy or not, there will be whole bunches of them," thewiddw Waldo insisted. "You haven't understood all the prototypes of your contraption. Sure it's a ship, sure it's a castle, sure it's an anti-time machine. But it's also a shoe."

"You mean like the one the old woman lived in?"

"Yes, Zabotski, yes," the Widow Waldo said. "You catch on slow."

"W.W., what are all those funny looking animals I've been seeing on the orphanage grounds today?" I, Melchisedech Duffey asked her.

"Oh, they're just green-clay animals, but some of them are a little too much in a hurry. The children got them ready a way early, but a lot of them fall apart after they run around for a little while. They're starting to assemble better ones now though." Widow Waldo cooked us supper sometimes when we worked at night on the plans and the constructions. Widow Waldo had once been a famous beauty, She had even been Miss America. Then she had married, really it was a sort of stunt that the promoters dreamed up, Waldo Waldorf who was Mr. Body Beautiful of the West North Central States, including Illinois. But this husband Waldo was killed by a jealous rival. After that, Widow Waldo devoted herself to the service of orphans.

She was still beautiful, but her beauty was now more subdued than it had been several decades ago when she was Miss America.

Well, it's next morning. And there's something that we can check out. Is the Sycamore tree dead? Zabotski had said "Mottled tree, wither and die! By tomorrow the life will be gone out of you and you will hang dead on your own branches." Well, had it happened or not? It should be easy enough to tell whether the Sycamore tree was dead or not. What was the difficulty?

The difficulty was that the sycamore tree wasn't there.

"Bandicoot!" I, Melchisedech Duffey called to that little Blackstone boy. "Didn't there used to be a sycamore tree right about there? What happened to it?"

"How did you happen to remember about that sycamore tree, Mr. Duffey?" Bandicoot Blackstone asked. "Yes, it died. And we cut it down so it wouldn't fall on someone. How did you remember it? That was a long time ago, when I was a little boy."

"Oh yes. And how is your father today, Bandicoot?"

"I think he feels seedy. He says he's got the withers. It's the middle age eating him up, he says."

"Oh yes. And where are you going now, Bandicoot?" I asked.

"Oh, to school."

"Ah then, you are starting to school."

"Yes, I'm starting to high school today," Bandicoot said. "It's almost as if the best part of my life were behind me."

Well, a few years had slipped by there. That happens to me sometimes, to Zabotski also. The morning sun cast a shadow of Zabotski's contraption. It was larger, much, much larger than it used to be. It was giant.

Some people from the 'Moral Sanctions Committee for the Removal of Eye-Sores and Abominations' came up to Zabotski as he stood adoring the morning sun with his eyes and with his extended arms.

"Mr. Zabotski," said an embattled lady of that committee, "that eye-sore of yours is still there and you have built it even bigger. It is eight years since we reminded you that it was an abomination, and you solemnly swore that you would do something about it on the morrow."

"No, ma'am," Zabotski said. "I solemnly swore that I would not do anything about it on the morrow. I believe that people misunderstand me because they do not listen to me closely. And it has now been eight years. It was only yesterday that you reminded me that it was an abomination. Do you not remember that it was only yesterday that we talked on this?"

This simple answer seemed to throw the Moral Sanction Committee into some sort of confusion. Yes, they did remember that it was only yesterday that they had talked to Zabotski about the distasteful subject. But they also remembered that it had been eight years. Could it have been both?

"Of course it could have been both," Zabotski assured them. "In the context of Pristine History it was only yesterday. In some trashier context that you may have been dabbling with it may have been eight years. I do wish that people would not indulge in such contexts as have become common. They waste time. They waste it a thousandfold."

"It is still an eye-sore and an abomination," one of the Moral Sanction men said. "What do you intend to do with the monstrosity?" "Until I figure out what it is that I'm building, I simply haven't any idea what I will do with it," Zabotski said. "If it had wheels, I might roll it to Pristine World, but I can find no wheels on the plans."

"If Pristine World is so swift and so superior, why do you come back here every time?" I, Melchisedech asked my associate Zabotski.

"Ah, I believe that I'm imperfectly accelerated for Pristine World as yet," the Zab said. "I have to come back to catch my breath. And sometimes I just come back to this stuck-in-molasses world to rest and to

see my friends. I believe that, ever since I was a child, I have had this present dream of living on a grubby and slow-moving and molasses-filled world. Myself, I seem to fall between the two worlds. Old Molasses here is much more fascinating as a dream than as a reality though."

The Fundamentalers came about noon that day. Zabotski and myself Melchisedech Duffey met with them at a big table under the trees. It was not known why the Fundamentalers wanted to exchange views with Zabotski and myself. Both of us were students of history and paradox, that's true. And the Fundamentalers were avid about history. But there may not have been much resemblance between the several sorts of history that now came under discussion.

"Mr. Zabotski and Mr. Duffey," said a member of the Pattenite faction of the Fundamentalers, "we have here publications by both of you in the realm of history, but (slippery, slippery!) we are not sure that you are dealing straight in your history. Are you?"

"I never pretended to deal history straight" Zabotski said. "I am an artist and a prophet before I am an historian. I believe that history is an involuted epicycloid and not a straight line at all. But I do deal with history as honestly as I am able to do it." "And so do I, Fundamentalers," I, Melchisedech said. "But I am not so sure about yourselves. I believe that you often supply arbitrary answers when there are no real answers available."

"We would not have any answers if they were not given to us from above," the Pattenite man said. "I have here, Mr. Zabotski, a copy of your 'Pristine History of the World'. I find that its chronology is almost identical with our own: the probably instantaneous creation of first life between 20,000 and 10,000 B.C.; the 'sixth-day' creation of land, animals and man between 10,000 and 2,800 B.C.; the Floodtide Catastrophies, the instantaneous rising of the Alpine-Himalayan System, and the flotation of Noah's barge (which you do not quite call by that name) all about 2,800 B.C.; the re-population of the planet and the development of new zoological variations from 2,800 to 1,450 B.C.; then the times of the Ancient Empires, of Exodus, and then the Redemption followed by the Diaspora, of Rome's Fall and of the Medieval Period, of the Modern and Western Interludes, right up to our present year of 2,000 A.D."

"Why not up to our present year of 200,000 A.D.?" Zabotski asked. "I believe that is as likely a number for our present time as is 2,000 A.D. The multitudinous happenings, they have been happening quite a lot lately. Yes, there is some agreement between our chronologies, but it is probably accidental."

"There are no accidents," said a Fundamentalers of the Hatch school. All is foreordained."

"I believe that nothing is foreordained," Zabotski said, "but I believe that accidents are the closest of all phenomena to being preordained."

"Widow Waldo, why are you hanging lace curtains in my contraption?" Zabotski called this latter quest on loudly and across a good space to his monstrous and unnamed and unmanned and unfinished contraption.

"Because it needs them, that's why," Widow Waldo called back. "It's drab otherwise. Lace curtains are always meshes of sunshine, until they become very dirty."

"But my contraption hasn't any windows, so far anyhow," Zabotski called. "And I'm not even sure it's the type of construction that could have windows. Widow, it isn't a house. It's a machine of some kind."

"It will have lace curtains whether it has any windows or not," the Widow answered. "I will paint windows on the inside walls if it comes to that. I like things nice and homey."

"My good people, this is the way it is:" Zabotski spoke again to the Fundamentalers. "I have written my Pristine History of the World to fill a

gap. I travel much in the Pristine World, and I know it a little bit. I may even have come from there originally. I'm a little bit vague on my own origin. There are no duplications in the Pristine World, and there are no non-valid persons or situations. So I eliminated all duplicated or non-valid persons or situations from my thinking and from my history, and by that trick, I came up with my Pristine History. This makes it very much shorter than conventional histories which do sometimes list duplicate and non-valid things. The two worlds, the Pristine World, and the Everyday-or-Molasses World occupy the same space, but they do not occupy it in the same way. It is consequently difficult to explain one of them to the other.

"For analogy, let us consider a football game which generally uses three hours of clock time to cover one hour of whistle time. Let us take the films of that one hour of whistle time and select the time (about twelve minutes) when the ball is actually in play. Let us then omit the time when nothing much is happening even though the ball is in play, and let us also omit a few worthless and completely repetitious plays. We can then get it down to about three minutes of hectic action. Please note that this would not merely be the highlights of the game; it could be the complete essence of the game. Well, the Pristine World is like that: it is the real and essential world. It does exist. Nothing is left out of it except the duplicated and the non-valid but very much is added to it. The Pristine World, in fact, is so intuitively imbued and indwelt that I can live overflowing years of it in the same space that is taken up by a day or two in the Molasses World. The Pristine World can travel in a thousand years where it took the Molassas World a million. We have got to throw in our lot with that faster and more valid world.

"That the chronology of the Pristine World somewhat resembles your own chronologies is no more than a humble coincidence. Possibly we do have the same time scale, but we do not arrive at it by the same way."

"We don't know how you arrived at it," said one of the Fundamentalers of the Rev. Patrick O'ConneFl following. "We came in through the front door."

"And I came in through the walls," Zabotski said.

The Widow Waldo carried loaded pots and hampers over and served good dinners to the Fundamentalers and to Zabotski and to myself Melchisedech.

"No, no, it's no trouble at all," she protested to the protesting Fundamentalers. "There is plenty of everything, All I have to do is take it out of the mouths of the poor orphans. We have so many poor orphans that there is almost no limit to the amount of food that I can take out of their mouths."

(The golden roof of the 'Golden Childrens Home and Haven Orphanage' gleamed in the sun. It had been built and endowed several decades before by a bloated plutocrat named Harry Goldchild.)

"Do you believe that the true ark is still to be found in the high mountains of Armenia, half buried in the snow and ice, and guarded by angels?" A Cummings-clan member of the Fundamentalers asked Zabotski and myself Melchisedech Duffey. "To us, this is a test of faith."

"So that's what those things are!" Zabotski explained. "I've gazed at the things without even being able to guess what they are. Yes, now that you turn my mind to consider the subject, I believe that the ark is to be found there in the original and in at least twenty copies. It must have been the most popular build-it-yourself kit of that era. And yes, of course I believe that it is guarded by angels. When things get too inaccessible to be guarded by humans any longer, then angelic guards always take over. Yes, it is there, in High Armenia, but we don't know for sure where High Armenia is to be found."

"But of course we know," said the Cummings-clan member. "We have three expeditions there now."

"But of course you do not know where it is," Zabotski explained to

them. "The divided country that is now known as Armenia, the mountain that is now known as Ararat, they were neither of them known by those names before the fourth century of our era. A king of that country then decided to call his country, which had been named Haik, by the biblical name of Armenia. Armenia merely means a mountainous place. Like Montana, which means exactly the same thing, the name was then applied to a definite area: but it was not so originally. And that king decided to call the mountain which had been named Aghri Dagh by the biblical name of Ararat (which means simply 'Mountain'. But there is nothing to indicate that the king was making correct identification. Or that he was not making them. Likely, he was merely trying to establish a bright history for his poor mountain country."

"We know these things," said the Cummings-clan member, "but there is something to indicate that he was making correct identifications. The Hand of God stood in the sky above him and a large assembly of the King's followers and pointed down on the mountain and land to identify them. This is to be found in the King's own words."

"By your own chronology mountains weren't there before the flood," Zabotski said. "They would have to have risen up under the ark. I have evidence that this is exactly what did happen."

"As to the Ark or arks that have been sticking out of the snow on some of the peaks of this Ararat," said myself Melchisedech, "they are remnants of great wooden structures, but it is unlikely that they were water-craft of any kind. I believe that they were great wooden castles. There is a genuine tradition of a dozen or more great wooden castles existing on those crags before the cyclic climate turned colder and buried them in quasi-perpetual snow."

"And would angels be guarding old wooden castles that were not the Ark?" a person asked.

"Yes they would," Zabotski stated. "When anything becomes remote from the eyes of men, then angels take over. I don't know why there was ever any confusion on that point."

"Mr. Zabotski," asked a Hatch follower of the Fundamentalers, "what did you mean a while ago when you said 'Why not up to the present year of 200,000 AD?' Was that a joke?"

"It was a riddle, which is a form of a joke, yes. Why do you say that this is 2,000 A.D.? Why not say that it is 1,000 A.D.? By any count, we very plainly do not know where we are right now. This might very well be 500 A.D. or 600 A.D. We haven't clear evidence for a larger number of valid years than that. I think of one possible exclusion, one period of one thousand years that might have been written into history by a young boy in the year 1348, at the depth of the 'Black Death' plague. About the only people left alive then were children and very young people, and some of them continued the chronicles. There is an even chance that the whole notion of a thousand-year-long 'dark ages' was no more than the delirious dream of a vivid boy in that dismal crisis time of sickness. There isn't any very strong independent evidence of any such period of 'dark ages'.

"You find it strange that a young and sick boy might have been writing our history then. Tell me, can you find out who is writing our history now?"

"Mr. Zabotski," one of them said, "there are dark rumors that you sometimes go away for two or five or a dozen or even more years at one time. Do you?"

"Yes I do, friend," Zabotski said. "What is amiss with that? Many persons travel for various lengths of time."

"And there are further dark rumors that you always come back from your years-long journeys in a day or two or possibly three. Do you?"

"Yes I do, friend. What is wrong that? Many persons return again and again to a place that is familiar to them."

"And you are really gone such a number of years? And you are really back in such a number of days? And you do not find anything strange about

that?"

"Oh but I do!" Zabotski howled. "I find it all strange and wonderful! I wouldn't trade places with anyone in this respect. Hardly anyone else has this sort of mobility."

"Mr. Duffey," another Pattenite said to me, "you in your own works sometimes seem to doubt part of the evidence that has been dragged out of the Olduvai Gorge of Africa, evidence that puts human existence into terms of millions of years. You seem to doubt some of this evidence a little bit. But you don't doubt it nearly enough."

"How do you doubt it? What is enough?" I, Melchisedech asked him.

"Have you not noticed that all the evidence for the extreme antiquity of man has been taken from one long rift fault in the earth, and most of it from that tumbled portion of the fault named the Olduvai Gorge of Africa?"

"I have noticed this, yes," I said.

"Do you not know that the sequence of strata is nullified by a rift fault? Do you not know that the whole idea of in situ evidence is meaningless in such a formation where the situs, the location, is jumbled?"

"That is a little bit extreme, but not much?" I said.

"And have you not noticed that all the significant 'discoveries' have been made by persons of just four families, the Brooms, the Darts, the Oakleys, and the Leakys, a benighted and ingrown feudal group? Have you not noticed that they are all vouched for by each other, but not really by anyone else ever?"

"From my childhood I have noticed all this, yes," I said.

"Do you not know that all South African science is justly held in contempt by all thinking persons as being trivial and provincial and inept?"

"Sure, except -- "

"Except in this one case," the Pattenite pursued, "the 'evidence' for the extreme antiquity of man. And all of this 'evidence' is found where normal evidence will not apply, and all of it is found by a group of mind-already-made-up duffers. This 'evidence' is used by the infidelity crowd to prove what they want to be proved. But they do know better than to put that 'evidence' to a test. It is too distant for them to test, they excuse. But it is really 'behind God's back' stuff. It is 'bottom of the world' stuff."

"We call it 'behind the barn' evidence," I, Melchisedech told him, "and we know that it is grotesque. These things are giddy frauds. Nevertheless, there is, in other places and discovered by other people, fairly reasonable evidence for an antiquity of man beyond what you will allow, though far short of the African-Extravaganza claims. Actually the African Extravaganza is a sort of pop-rock hymn (rock hymn, fossil rock, get it?) sung to the real antiquity of man. Hymns are not expected to contain accurate evidence."

"Of the many great wooden structures sticking out of the Ararat snow, one is valid," an Ark-advocate said. "Some of us have been inside the structure."

"So have I," Zabotski said, "but I didn't tumble to what I was inside when I was there."

"Things have been brought back out of that Ark to prove its authenticity," the Ark-advocate said.

"I know it," said Zabotski. "I brought this back from there." It was the rock drawings and writings that Zabotski had been using as a guide to building his own contraption.

"Whatis it, Mr. Zabotski?" one of the Fundamentalers asked.

"Oh, it's the instruction and maintenance manual," Zabotski said. "Every vehicle of every sort comes with an instruction manual. I took this one from your Ark."

"But you two are not with us in our teachings and beliefs," one of the Fundamentalers said after a while. "Whoever is not with us is against us."

"And whoever gathereth not with us splatterith," Zabotski said. The Fundamentalers left Zabotski and myself Melchisedech then.

"I don't know whether anything at all is to be gotten from them?" I doubted.

"Sure it is," Zabotski said. "I learned what it was that I was building. That's something that I learned from them. Duffey, you need a change to a faster pace and a look at real reality. Go to Pristine World. I will show you how to go. I will give you letters of introduction to it. You can go there for three or five years, and you can be back in two days. You're a scabby-necked chicken if you don't go."

"All right, I'll go," I said. I went to the Pristine World for three or five years. An I was back in two days.

The night before my return, the Orthodoxers burned a 'Clear Bright Flame of Science' on that tiny little front lawn of Zabotski. When the Orthodoxers burn a 'Flame', one can almost expect anything from a routine horse-whipping or tar-and-feathering to a genuine hanging and drawing and quartering.

Some of the children from the Golden Childrens Home and Haven Orphanage were carrying clumsily-made green clay animals into the Zabotski contraption when I, Melchisedch got back. The animals were kicking and moving weakly.

"If you would bake the green clay animals, it would toughen them and make them hold together better," I, Melchisedech called to them. "You're losing the legs and heads off half of them while you carry them."

"It would kill them to bake them," one of the children called back to me. "What's the matter with you anyhow?"

"Are they alive now?" I asked.

"They're green clay now," the children said. "We get them out of green clay eggs. And they can be breathed into. Whoever heard of breathing anything into a backe clay animal? What's the matter with you anyhow?"

After that, things happened rapidly, almost as rapidly as they do in the Pristine World.

"Fly with me to a better place, Widow Waldo!" Zabotski called as he often did.

"What do you think I'm fixing to do?" she asked. "I suppose we will be ready whenever you are."

"Dammit, Zabotski, are you finished with your part yet?" Widow Waldo called.

"All except bolting the boat whistle onto the boat and getting myself a pair of water goggles."

"I'll bolt the whistle on. And I'll get the goggles for you," the Widow Waldo said.

There had been a rhapsody of animals the night before Zabotski and the Widow Waldo (she was now Wife Waldo Zabotski, but Zab still called her Widow Waldo), and quite a few of the children, and an amazement (that is the only collective word that will do for it) of animals, left in the giant contraption.

Green clay animals you say they were? Do green clay animals hoot and bellow like that? But I suppose that all of them were reen clay animals up to the time of their hatching: Oh, the rhapsodic noises of many animals, roaring, runting, nikkering, neighing, whinneying, snorting, whickering, trumpeting, blaring, bawling, yowling, barking, growling, yapping, rumbling, bleating, lowing, gibbering, hissing, giggling, yammering, mewing, caterwauling, crunching, gnawing, wheening, oinking, hammering, squealing, tumping, hooting, stomping, baying, bugling, shouting, yodeling, gruffing,

snorting, and making a noise 'chok-chok-chok-kachoom'. There had been a great orchestration of animal noises, and of animal aromas also. But now, in the new dayling, the animals had settled down, except for a few still loading on. The contraption had the air of being animal-full and just about kid-full.

"We have a list of incredible charges against you, Zabotski," one of the Orthodoxers was saying as a bunch of them came up to Zab with dangerous faces and dangerous-looking weapons. "It is said that you refuse to accept the Orthodoxer time scale. It is said that you have been in the company of Fundamentalers, and that you have listened to fun being poked at the four reatest names in paleontology." The man making these serious charges wore a tadge that said 'Darwin or Death'.

"I'd hardly do that," Zabotski said. "I'm pretty touchy, and my own name would surely head the list of the four greatest. I don't like fun being poked at me."

"It is said that you have substituted false history for the established thing," another of them attacked. He wore a badge that read 'Herbert Spencer Forever'. "It is also said that you 'leave' this place every now and then by mysterious conveyance, that you take off down the road, and that you just disappear. We would like to see you do that. Take off down the street now if you wash. I bet I can put a rifle bullet into your head before you can do your disappearing trick. If not, nothing much lost If you come back again, we'll grab you again. "

"Mr. Zabotski," said a reasoning member of the Vigilante Orthodoxers, you don't really believe that the Orthodoxer account of origins is rot, do you? You are reported as saying that it is."

"Sure it is," Zabotski itill maintained. "Almost everything about the orthodoxers is rot. They average out lower than the Fundamentalers."

"You fink, you Fortean, you Fundamentaler," barked one of those guardians of pure science. He wore a badge that said "Huxley the Bulldog forever!" "Start walking! Yah, walk about three steps and we'll start shooting."

Zabotski started walking, but he threw darkness or clouds upon the Orthodoxers so that they couldn't see him or anything else for a little while. He went to his giant contraption and climbed to the top of it.

"Zabotski, you fool, there won't be a flood like the original flood," I, Melchisedech called up to him. I was in a mixture of frustration and laughter at him.

"Melchisedech, you fool, this will be the original flood," Zabotski called down. "The others were only for practice. And those big structures on Ararat are all discarded models. Mine is the thing itself. This is the original. Don't you know that legends always preceed the real happenings?"

"There's a cloudburst on ihe way," Bandicoot Blackstone hollored at us as he stuck his head out of his door. "Wow! What am I saying. It's not on the way. It's here! Look at that rain! Did you ever see it start so fast and so hard. All person in designated lower areas are supposed to go to higher ground. This is a designated lower area. Where's Zabotski going, Melchisedech?"

"Oh, he's going away for a couple of thousand years this time."

"That means that he might not be back for a couple of months."

"What happens if the water does rise and carry you away in your contraption?" I, Melchisedech called up to Zabotski.

"I'll float, that's what will happen," Zab called down through the downpour. "It sure is good to know that you'll float."

Zabotski pulled the water goggles down over his eyes, and he jerked on the boat whistle chain to sound the hooter. The Widow Waldo and the boatful of children and animals cheered. The contraption was afloat and into the swift stream.

"Zabotski, you fool, it'll never go under the Shoal Street Viaduct," I cried to him suddenly. "It's too big to go under it."

"Under or over it, or through it we'll go," Zabotski yowled, and he hooted the boat whistle again. "We can travel on water or air or space."

Zabotski came to his lot on Lake Borgne, and he is still afloat there, drifting on a little kedger anchor. He says he'll be ready when the real flood is ready, and that he and his are unsinkable. I wish that I, Melchisedech were unsinkable. These sure are rainy days for all this week now, since he floated out of here. (Editor's Note: That is the end of the 'myth of origin' part of the account of the fantastic Zabotski house. And that is the end of Melchisedech Duffey as far as H and H Magazine is concerned. That is the end of the 'shaggy people tale'. In an upcoming issue we will have a clear description of this interesting and charming and unsinkable and gigantic house on the coast of Lake Borgne where it opens into the Gulf of Mexico. We will have an account of the very many odd children and the many horribly strange animals that are there, and of the great size and flabbergasting design of the grotesque structure. We will have an account of the architecture that is at the same time primordial and futuristic. We will have an account of that incredible but gracious couple, Zabotski and Wife Waldo. We will have this if the rains let up a little bit and the barges can bring in paper again.)

"How many of the children are coming along?" Zabotski asked.

"As many as want to come, I suppose," the Widow said. There was still a lot of beauty in her even though it was several decades since she had been Miss America.

There was news that nineteen unarmed Fundamentalers had been killed in a shootout with Orthodoxer police. Such things were happening all the time.

"How is your father, Bandicoot?" Zabotski asked the president of the Bandicoot Enterprises Limited.

"Oh, he's dying," Bandicoot said. "He won't last the day. But he's had a long and full life. I always liked that fellow."

"Who has taken over his businesses?" Zabotski asked.

"I will remain as chairman of the various boards," Bandicoot said, "but my son John, as 'First Executive' will be pretty much running the shows."

"Five days, that's really all he lasted," Zabotski mumbled in wonder.

"Some of the green clay animals that the children are carrying into your contraption are pretty misshapen, Zabotski," I, Melchisedech said to him.

"Some of the animals presently in Molasses World are pretty misshapen too, Duffey," he said, "as if they were made by kids. They are at least as bad as these that are going into my contraption. These will be enough."

"Is it true that you have bought a lake frontage on Pristine Cove on Lake Borgne?" a newspaper reporter asked Zabotski.

"True enough," Zabotski said. "I got in on a 'First Introductory' offer that was only tendered to outstanding citizens. It cost a little more than I was led to believe though."

"And is it true that the mysterious giant contraption that you are building in your back yard is intended to be your palatial home on the lake?" the reporter asked further.

"How would I ever get it there?" Zabotski wondered.

"Is it true that you complained to the City Commission that it floods so badly here that a good rain would wash an ocean-going ship right down the channel in front of your house, the channel that is humorously called Dumaine Street?"

"That sounds about like something I might have said," Zabotski admitted. "The river is getting higher all the time, or the land lower. And it does rain more, in these last years, and months, and weeks, and days particularly."

"Well, will it do it?" the reporter persisted. "Will a good rain (there's a gusher supposed to be on the way) float your giant contraption and carry it all the way to Lake Borgne?"

"With a good rain, that's possible," Zabotski said. "And Lake Borgne is an open-mouthed lake. It goes right into the Gulf." But just where is the line of questioning leading?"

Book Six

You, Melchisedech, replevin.
Be you either lump or leaven.
Choose a road from one to seven.
Melchisedech, Ukalegon.'
[Cleo Mahoney. Seven Roads.]

1

Duffey had visited Zabotski and his wife Waldo several times in their great, floating boat palace (The Big Red Barn on Pristine Cove, as their watery neighbors called it.) After all, it was less than a dozen miles away from Duffey. But Duffey knew that he would not have time to build such a castled boat himself, nor should he share that great contraption on Pristine Cove with Zabotski and wife Waldo. They were already sharing it with very many children and animals. One patriarch to a castle was enough.

But it was consoling to know that a boatful of children would live into the imminent future, whether the rest of the world lived into it or not. Besides, Duffey already knew how he would die, and it wasn't by drowning.

Was the world really coming to its end? Probably it wasn't yet, but for Melchisedech Duffey it was. Duffey had already seen the end of time for himself. The symbol of it had been the seven-arrowed sign put there to dry by the girls from Ursuline Academy. But he wouldn't have needed the symbol to know that his ending was at hand. His ending, but he would not have any end. Scripture states so.

Well, he had seen the barrier blocking him off from a valid future in this world, and he had backed off from it. He could go into the future only on another trick, in the context of the Seven Lost Years. He could not go into the future on the normal track. And the seven alternate futures that were offered him. Dammit, there was something suspect about every one of them.

"Is there anything at all I can do about this?" Duffey asked himself. "Of course there is. I can worry about it. That's what one is supposed to do with problems."

And it happened that others were worrying about Melchisedech Duffey's problem also.

"Melchisedech has come to the end of his stick. This probably will not be his death. He has already seen his own ashes as momento of it. This may be that much worse thing, his disintegration. And if he loses his integrity, what boots him other things? He seems to be coming apart, to be unraveling into several strands. But Melchisedech is the man who does not have an ending. That must be meant of him in a special case, since none of us really ends, which is to say that we are all immortal in soul. But Melchisedech is splitting and flaking off. He can not go down seven simultaneous roads without that. The riddle of the Several futures may be too much for him. If he were younger, he could take them all in succession,

one by one. But now I think he's stuck. I'd help him and advise him if I knew how. Otherwise, all I can do is pray for him.

"What is this about Melchisedech being of a very great age, about all of us in our group being of a very great age. Some days, I believe that. Today I don't.

"Melchisedech Duffey is not the Melchisedech, though sometimes he believes that he is, and sometimes he lives and remembers episodes out of the life of the real Melchisedech. I believe that the case of it is that Melchisedech Duffey is merely in unusual accord with his patron saint Melchisedech the King of Salem, and so he shares some of the memories and experiences of that old king.

"Such is the case as I believe it today. But on many other days I believe that Melchisedech Duffey is indeed Melchisedech the King of Salem.

"The Devil-Released-From-Prison, who has made something of a stir in esoteric circles for these last several decades, is not the Devil himself. He is only one of the minor devils, a goof devil. I believe that he is a sort of decoy. It will seem, by those who mistake this decoy for the Royal Black Duck, that this vile lout is a parrot-brained inanity and is no real danger. And then the Devil Himself, put out of notice and out of mind, pursues his murderous and quiet work in all its clandestine horror.

"Such is the else of it as I believe it today. But on many other days I believe that the Devil-Released-From-Prison is the Devil Himself, that the great danger from him lies in his sinister silliness and his incomparable oafishness, in the strongest of all finite powers running amok in resolute lucidness and dedicated destruction.

[Absalom Stein. Notes in a Motley Notebook.]

"Duffey has gone to the very edge of time, for him, and then he is somehow drawn back. But we are in the same time-context with him. Though this is not necessarily the edge of time for the rest of us, yet we continue in the same time-fabric with Melchisedech Duffey. Has he unwittingly drawn us back from the edge with himself? This last year or so does seem very familiar to me, as though I had been through it several times before. Salvation Sally says that she has the same feeling about it."

[Margaret Stone. Lines Written in Margin of Perrone's Praelectiones Theologicae.]

"I have this fancy that Melchisedech Duffey is of an older recension than the 'current human'. There is not any authority Scripture or Revelations for the idea that God made many false starts in his creation. But there are legends about it. There are legends of the nine discarded worlds that God made before he made this world, the tenth. He discarded the nine because of their unacceptable defects. How they must have been when this world is the one finally accepted!

"But who says that it is? It may likewise be discarded, and an eleventh or twelfth or thirteenth world may still follow it.

"The nine discarded worlds are still animate and populated. What anthologies of errors and blunders, or outright errors and of less-than-perfections they must be! What paradoxes they must contain that will not quite jibe, what giant ideas and titanic jokes, what brilliant conceptions that failed their promises!

"Sometimes people from one of the nine worlds blunder into this world. There is always a monsterness about these people. They may be overflowing with flawed genius. I believe that one of these persons who has blundered into this world is Melchisedech Duffey. Sure he was a Boy King and a Boy Magician, but in another world, not in this one. Sure he is without father or mother. They didn't use them on his world. Sure he is without end. The continuity there was a circle, returning, returning, and never ending at all.

"Melchisedech, Melchisedech, what discarded zoo-world have you come

from? You do know that the Melchisedech paradox is now on collision course with this world, don't you? Who will pick up your pieces? You will be shattered into pieces, you know. Who will log all your voyages? You will voyage on the seven different winds, you know. If you weren't so damned indomitable about it all, one could almost feel sorry for you."

[Mary Virginia Schaeffer. Lines in Her Duffey Book.]

2

There are so many ghosts in that part of New Orleans that they have their own coffee shop, a place that is open for just an hour before dawn and an hour after. The ghosts come there to swap ghost anecdotes and also to try to purge themselves from the absolute horror of their trade. They do this by talking out those horrors with their fellow spirits.

You can see them slipping along in the very early morning, down Ste. Ann Street and Dumaine Street and St. Philip Street and Ursulines Avenue, up along Decatur Street where the French Market will not serve ghosts, up Chartres and Bourbon, out of Frenchman Street and Elysian Field Avenue, ghosts who have just finished their night's haunting.

In the Ghost Bar there is a large painting, done by Count Finnegan (did he paint it before or after he became a ghost?) showing, well the plain ghostliness of these customers. This is done in ghost violets and ghost grays, and it is really a convincing and moving picture.

That is a lie. All of it is a lie except the part about the Count Finnegan picture of the gathering ghosts. It really does hang in the ghost bar. Let the truth about that place now be told:

In New Orleans there was a little coffee shop that was run by a man named Anthony Ghost whose father had come over from the Netherlands. This establishment was called 'The Ghost Coffee Shop'. Dock workers and seamen used to come in here in the morning, people out of the Quarter, people just wandering around, night people who were very like ghosts. School kids also used to come in there on their way to school. Some of the day students at Ursuline Academy used to go to early mass at the Cathedral instead of at their own chapel, and then come into the Ghost Coffee Shop for breakfast.

Among these, for several days now, had been Crissie Cristoforo the famous painter, Therese Doucet the famous casting director, and Cleo Mahoney the famous playwright. And sometimes Rebeka Stein, who did not go to mass (she was a Jew) joined them there. Melchisedech Duffey had been coming into the Ghost Coffee Shop for thirty years, so one morning he talked with the girls about the play 'Seven Roads' that was to be presented the following evening at Ursulines Auditorium.

"The seven roads are really seven cruces of happenings, seven scenarios, or seven variant futures," Cleo Mahoney the playwright of 'Seven Roads' was saying. "There is not enough room in the play than to do other than to suggest them with short and trenchant flashes. Crissie Cristoforo, our great artist here, caught them superbly in that advertising sign 'The Future Begins Right Here', with its seven scenes, and the verses written athwart each of them. Unfortunately she used a water soluble paint, and the constant heavy rains this past week have almost destroyed it. Crissie is trying to reconstruct it in oils now, but it chides her."

"I saw the original when it was still wet," Melchisedech reminded her.

"So you did," Cleo said. "Now the case is that the patriarch Melchisedech cannot end, but neither can he continue on here in this world in the way that he has been doing. There are seven contingent futures waiting for him. Which ones he chooses, and the order he chooses them in, will be accidental. And I give you a million guesses as to what are the determinants to the futures he chooses."

"No, I cannot guess it, not in million guesses," Melchisedech said. "What are the determinants?"

"Pot holes," Cleo said, "pot holes in the streets and the sidewalks. Caught you flat-footed, didn't it, Mr. Duffey? There are seven special pot holes in the streets and sidewalks of this town. No two of them are in the same block or even in the same street. Each of them has a little valve or activator or switch in it. The Patriarch Melchisedech will stumble or turn his ankle in one of the pot holes. He will activate the valve or switch by that; and (in some cases, without even realizing the transition) he will be into one of the seven alternate scenes or futures."

"But what if I don't step in a pot hole?" Duffey asked.

"If there's a pot hole around, you'll step in it, Duff," Anthony Ghost the proprietor said.

"The fetish transformation activator, in dream context or in detached experience, is almost always a ridiculous and incongruous thing," Rebeka Stein said. "I believe that Cleo's unconscious is to be complimented for dredging up the pot holes as symbols. They are just randy enough to be fitting. Watch where you're walking these days, Duff, or you might stumble into the wrong hole."

This Rebeka Stein had known Melchisedech Duffey for all the fifteen years of her life.

"I have trouble naming the seven variant scenarios," Cleo Mahoney said. "They are really seven aspects of another world, not of this one. But essentially they are these:

"One". Perhaps this is best expressed by the verse that Crissie Cristofero here printed on the scene of that contingency:

'This is a else to crack your heart.

This is the day it falls apart.'

"It is a contingent world in which everything changes and is on the verge of collapsing. Rooms do not have walls, whisky does not have bottles, and people do not have skulls. There are no boundaries at all left in that world, no marks where one thing ends and another thing begins. It doesn't run together yet, but it is really to do so at any time. The Democles Sword, which now has no surface to separate its steel from the non-steel of its ambient, hangs directly over everything

"Two. And this is expressed by Crissie's verse:

'Here is compassion hoked and hammed.

A K.C. swap is a swip bedamned.'

"We do not know what this verse means, or what a K.C. swap is, and neither does Crissie. The essence of this contingency is a very bad trade, the dealing away of something of very high value for something that is worthless. It is the compulsive trading off of the worthy for the unworthy, and it diminishes the world by every such swap that is made.

"Three. This is the Crissie verse to it:

"This is The Count who meets countdown.

And a dead man wears the triple crown.'

"A man is elected to a very high office. He says that he will not serve in it. 'I am dead, that's the reason that I won't serve,' he says. "That is no reason at all, a powerful voice answers him. So the dead man is ordered out of his crypt and put into action. Then it is a helter-skelter runaround combined with a spy story. It is really "The World as Spy Story'. But the high office is as high as the World, and the World must be drawn into the involvement.

"Four. The Crissie verse has this one this way:

"Here is the fleece, and the golden gloat.

The 'Endless' ends, and the world's a boat.'

"I believe that Crissie Cristofero is a silbyl or a pythoness," Rebeka Stein interrupted. "She comes up with these prophetic couplets. They're good, but she doesn't have any idea at all what they mean. Is there any market for good prophetesses these days, Duff?"

"There is always a market for good prophetesses," Melchisedech said.

"I believe that this is the 'Ongoing Quest Adventure'," Cleo Mahoney said. "The Quest succeeds, and then it becomes addictive. It succeeds again and again, and the high persons become avid for that continuing golden success. Oh, it strews goodness all along its route, but still there is something a little bit poisonous about success going on and on and on. A revenge must be taken against such successful questers. Some of them die then, or they are killed. That is at least part of the revenge. But they have such momentum that they don't realize or admit that they're dead. Even when they are shown their bones and ashes they don't believe it. They withdraw a bit into the past from that point, and they are alive again, but the problem is still unsolved. This is about a world and a high group in it who are driven to shining excellence, excellence, excellence, and a broken record of it."

"I say 'On with it and on with it,'" Rebeka interposed. "There can't be too much of it. It isn't a broken record at all."

"Five," said Cleo, "and the Crissie verse here is:

'A shattered world, and an end of fuss.

A new folk comes, and it isn't us.'

"The world is turned inside out, and the world and its people are seen to be made out of a grotesque stuffing, trash and old paper and pieces of wood. This stuffing is weighed in the scales and found wanting. 'Wait, wait!' someone calls "you are only weighing the stuffing that leaked out of it. You're not weighing the thing itself.' 'What I have weighed, I have weighed,' the weigher says, 'and it weighs short'. Then the people are replaccd by finer non-people. We don't like it, but we are no longer there, so it doesn't matter. There is a slaughter scene in this one somewhere.

"Six. It happens that the Patriarch and his adversary are the only persons left in the world. All of the other people are held in abeyance somewhere. The Adversary presses the Patriarch to sign an agreement. They battle grotesquely somewhere, or maybe they Indian-wrestle.

"The Crissie verse has it like this:

'This is the duel, and the bill of cost.

Oh sign it not, or it all is lost.'

"There is something very, very wrong about that covenant that the Adversary is pressing the Patriarch to sign. If it is accepted, then we are all undone. Undone literally, destroyed, iinmade, negated, nullified forever.

"Seven. The Crissie verse gives this:

"The Melk is a bust, and a crown, and toff.

He had it all there, and he booted it off.'

"Everything is going right in this one, everything. In this one, we will all come iito our glory, immeasurable and eternal. The people of the Golden Fleece have won for us, and we have won for ourselves with our own high qualities. There is not one chance of our missing the beatific vision. Well, yes, there is one chance of our missing, but it's one chance in a hundred billion. We'll play with odds like that all day. There is not a cloud in the holy blue sky. Not a cloud, but there is something else. It is a rowdy looking bird coming in on loutish wings. And the rowdy bird trails, in its beak, a pennant on which are the words 'Whatever can go wrong will go wrong'. But it's only one chance in a hundred billion that we will miss. Then why do we suddenly go all clammy like this? That is the seventh and the last contingency.

"The only thing after this seventh scrappy vision and a short counter-ode by the chorus is your rousing curtain speech, Mr. Duffey. Oh, don't let it frustrate us! I hope it will be a success."

"Or a successful frustration," Melchisedech said.

"If Crissie only knew what her verses meant we would have an easier time of it," Rebeka Stein commented.

"Yes, it is like working with priceless but unset and odd-shaped stones," Cleo Mahoney complained. "It is a frustration. But the play itself

is a study of frustrations. Oh, I hope it will be good."

The play was presented the following evening. It was pretty good.