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THE END OF THE BEGINNING
Ray Bradbury
He stopped the lawn mower in the middie of the yard, because he felt that the sun at just that moment had gone down and the stars come out. The fresh-cut grass that had showered his face and body died soft!y away. Yes, the stars were there, faint at first, but brightening in the clear desert sky. He heard the porch screen door tap shut and felt his wife watching him as he watched the night.
"Almost time," she said.
He nodded; he did not have to check his watch. In the passing moments he felt very old, then very young, very cold, then very warm, now this, now that. Suddenly he was miles away. He was his own son talking steadily, moving briskly to cover his pounding heart and the resurgent panics as he felt himself slip into fresh uniform, check food supplies, oxygen flasks, pressure helmet, space-suiting, and turn as every man on earth tonight turned, to gaze at the swiftly filling sky.
Then, quickly, he was back, once more the father of the son, hands gripped to the lawn-mower handle. His wife called, "Come sit on the porch."
"I've got to keep busy!"
She came down the steps and across the lawn. "Don't worry about Robert; he'll be all right."
"But it's all so new," he heard himself say. "It's never been done before. Think of it - a manned rocket going up tonight to build the first space station. Good lord, it can't be done, it doesn't exist, there's no rocket, no proving ground, no take-off time, no technicians. For that matter, I don't even have a son named Bob. The whole thing's too much for me!"
"Then what are you doing out here, staring?"
He shook his head. "Well, late this morning, walking to the office, I heard someone laugh out loud. It shocked me, so I froze in the middle of the street. It was me, laughing! Why? Because finally I really knew what Bob was going to do tonight; at last I believed it. Holy is a word I never use, but that's how I felt stranded in all that traffic. Then, middle of the afternoon I caught myself humming. You know the song. 'A wheel in a wheel. Way in the middle of the air.' I laughed again. The space station, of course, I thought. The big wheel with hollow spokes where Bob'll live six or eight months, then get along to the moon. Walking home, I remembered more of the song. 'Little wheel run by faith, Big wheel run by the grace of God.' I wanted to jump, yell, and flame-out myself!"
His wife touched his arm. "If we stay out here, let's at least be comfortable."
They placed two wicker rockers in the center of the lawn and sat quietly as the stars dissolved out of darkness in pale crushings of rock salt strewn from horizon

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to horizon.
"Why," said his wife, at last, "it's like waiting for the fireworks at Sisley Field every year."
"Bigger crowd tonight . . ."
"I keep thinking - a billion people watching the sky right now, their mouths all open at the same time."

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They waited, feeling the earth move under their chairs.
"What time is it now?"
"Eleven minutes to eight."
"You're always right; there must be a clock in your head."
"I can't be wrong tonight. I'll be able to tell you one second before they blast off. Look! The ten-minute warning!"
On the western sky they saw four crimson flares open out, float shimmering down the wind above the desert, then sink silently to the extinguishing earth.
In the new darkness the husband and wife did not rock in their chairs.
After a while he said, "Eight minutes." A pause. "Seven minutes." What seemed a much longer pause. "Six . . ."
His wife, her head back, studied the stars immediately above her and murmured, "Why?" She closed her eyes. "Why the rockets, why tonight? Why all this? I'd like to know."
He examined her face, pale in the vast powdering light of the Milky Way. He felt the stirring of an answer, but let his wife continue.
"I mean it's not that old thing again, is it, when people asked why men climbed Mt. Everest and they said, 'Because it's there'? I never understood. That was no answer to me."
Five minutes, he thought. Time ticking . . . his wrist watch . . . a wheel in a wheel . . . little wheel run by . . . big wheel run by . . . way in the middle of . . . four minutes! . . . The men snug in the rocket by now, the hive, the control board flickering with light.
His lips moved.
"All I know is it's really the end of the beginning. The Stone Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age; from now on we'll lump all those together under one big name for when we walked on Earth and heard the birds at morning and cried with envy. Maybe we'll call it the Earth Age, or maybe the Age of Gravity. Millions of years we fought gravity. When we were amoebas and fish we struggled to get out of the sea without gravity crushing us. Once safe on the shore we fought to stand upright without gravity breaking our new invention, the spine, tried to walk without stumbling, run without falling. A billion years Gravity kept us home, mocked us with wind and clouds, cabbage moths and locusts. That's what's so god-awful big about tonight . . . it's the end of old man Gravity and the age we'll remember him by, for once and all. I don't know where they'll divide the ages, at the Persians, who dreamt of flying carpets, or the Chinese, who all unknowing celebrated birthdays and New Years with strung ladyfingers and high skyrockets, or some minute, some incredible second the next hour. But we're in at the end of a billion years trying, the end of something long and to us humans, anyway, honorable."
Three minutes . . . two minutes fifty-nine seconds . . . two minutes fifty-eight

seconds . . .
"But," said his wife, "I still don't know why."
Two minutes, he thought. Ready? Ready? Ready? The far radio voice calling. Ready! Ready! Ready! The quick, faint replies from the humming rocket. Check! Check! Check!
Tonight, he thought, even if we fail with this first, we'll send a second and a

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third ship and move on out to all the planets and later, all the stars. We'll just keep going until the big words like immortal and forever take on meaning. Big words, yes, that's what we want. Continuity. Since our tongues first moved in our mouths we've asked, What does it all mean? No other question made sense, with death breathing down our necks. But just let us settle in on ten thousand worlds spinning around ten thousand alien suns and the question will fade away. Man will be endless and infinite, even as space is endless and infinite. Man will go on, as space goes on, forever. Individuals will die as always, but our history will reach as far as we'll ever need to see into the future, and with the knowledge of our survival for all time to come, we'll know security and thus the answer we've always searched for. Gifted with life, the least we can do is preserve and pass on the gift to infinity. That's a goal worth shooting for.

The wicker chairs whispered ever so softly on the grass.

One minute.

"One minute," he said aloud.

"Oh!" His wife moved suddenly to seize his hands. "I hope that Bob . . ."

"He'll be all right!"

"Oh, God, take care . . ."

Thirty seconds.

"Watch now."

Fifteen, ten, five . . .

"Watch!"

Four, three, two, one.

"There! There! Oh, there, there!"

They both cried out. They both stood. The chairs toppled back, fell flat on the lawn. The man and his wife swayed, their hands struggled to find each other, grip, hold. They saw the brightening color in the sky and, ten seconds later, the great uprising comet burn the air, put out the stars, and rush away in fire flight to become another star in the returning profusion of the Milky Way. The man and wife held each other as if they had stumbled on the rim of an incredible cliff that faced an abyss so deep and dark there seemed no end to it. Staring up, they heard themselves sobbing and crying. Only after a long time were they able to speak.

"It got away, it did, didn't it?"

"Yes . . ."

"It's all right, isn't it?"

"Yes . . . yes . . ."

"It didn't fall back . . .?"

"No, no, it's all right, Bob's all right, it's all right."

They stood away from each other at last.

He touched his face with his hand and looked at his wet fingers. "I'll be damned," he said, "I'll be damned."

They waited another five and then ten minutes until the darkness in their heads, the retina, ached with a million specks of fiery salt. Then they had to close their eyes.

"Well," she said, "now let's go in."

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He could not move. Only his hand reached a long way out by itself to find the lawn-mower handle. He saw what his hand had done and said, "There's just a little more to do . . ."
"But you can't see."
"Well enough," he said. "I must finish this. Then we'll sit on the porch awhile before we turn in."
He helped her put the chairs on the porch and sat her down and then walked back out to put his hands on the guide bar of the lawn mower. The lawn mower. A wheel in a wheel. A simple machine which you held in your bands, which you sent on ahead with a rush and a clatter while you walked behind with your quiet philosophy. Racket, followed by warm silence. Whirling wheel, then soft footfall of thought.
I'm a billion years old, he told himself; I'm one minute old. I'm one inch, no, ten thousand miles, tall. I look down and can't see my feet they're so far off and gone away below.
He moved the lawn mower. The grass showering up fell softly around him; he relished and savored it and felt that he was all mankind bathing at last in the fresh waters of the fountain of youth.
Thus bathed, he remembered the song again about the wheels and the faith and the grace of God being way up there in the middle of the sky where that single star, among a million motionless stars, dared to move and keep on moving.
Then he finished cutting the grass.

Bradbury, Ray - Feverdream.txt
FEVER DREAM
Ray Bradbury
They put him between fresh, clean, laundered sheets and there was always a newly squeezed glass of thick orange juice on the table under the dim pink lamp. All Charles had to do was call and Morn or Dad would stick their heads into his room to see how sick he was. The acoustics of the room were fine; you could hear the toilet gargling its porcelain throat of mornings, you could hear rain tap the roof or sly rnice run in the secret walls or the canary singing in its cage downstairs. If you were very alert, sickness wasn't too bad.
He was thirteen, Charles was. It was mid-September, with the land beginning to burn with antumn. He lay in the bed for three days before the terror overcame him.
His hand began to change. His right hand. He looked at it and it was hot and sweating there on the counterpane alone. It fluttered, it moved a bit. Then it lay there, changing color.
That afternoon the doctor came again and tapped his thin chest like a little drurn.
"How are you?" asked the doctor, smiling. "I know, don't tell me: 'My cold is fine, Doctor, but I feel awful!' Ha!" He laughed at his own oft-repeated joke.
Charles lay there and for him that terrible and ancient jest was becoming a reality. The joke fixed itself in his mind. His mind touched and drew away from it in a pale terror. The doctor did not know how cruel he was with his jokes! "Doctor," whispered Charles, lying flat and colorless. "My hand, it doesn't belong to me any more. This

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morning it changed into something else. I want you to change it back, Doctor, Doctor!"
The doctor showed his teeth and patted his hand. "It looks fine to me, son. You just had a little fever dream."
"But it changed, Doctor, oh, Doctor," cried Charles, pitifully holding up his pale wild hand. "It did! "
The doctor winked. "I'll give you a pink pill for that." He popped a tablet onto Charles' tongue. "Swallow!"
"Will it make my hand change back and become me, again?"
"Yes, yes."
The house was silent when the doctor drove off down the road in his car under the quiet, blue September sky. A clock ticked far below in the kitchen world. Charles lay looking at his hand.
It did not change back. It was still something else.

The wind blew outside. Leaves fell against the cool window.
At four o'clock his other hand changed. It seemed almost to become a fever. It pulsed and shifted, cell by cell. It beat like a warm heart. The fingernails turned blue and then red. It took about an hour for it to change and when it was finished, it looked just like any ordinary hand. But it was not ordinary. It no longer was him any more. He lay in a fascinated horror and then fell into an exhausted sleep.
Mother brought the soup up at six. He wouldn't touch it "I haven't any hands," he said, eyes shut.
"Your hands are perfectly good," said Mother.
"No," he wailed. "My hands are gone. I feel like I have stumps. Oh, Mama, Mama, hold me, hold me, I'm scared!"
She had to feed him herself.
"Mama," he said, "get the doctor, please, again. I'm so sick."
"The doctor'll be here tonight at eight," she said, and went out.
At seven, with night dark and close around the house, Charles was sitting up in bed when he felt the thing happening to first one leg and then the other. "Mama! Come quick!" he screamed.
But when Mama came the thing was no longer happening.
When she went downstairs, he simply lay without fighting as his legs beat and beat, grew warm, red-hot, and the room filled with the warmth of his feverish change. The glow crept up from his toes to his ankles and then to his knees.
"May I come in?" The doctor smiled in the doorway. "Doctor!" cried Charles. "Hurry, take off my blankets!"
The doctor lifted the blankets tolerantly. "There you are. Whole and healthy. Sweating, though. A little fever. I told you not to move around, bad boy." He pinched the moist pink cheek. "Did the pills help? Did your hand change back?"
"No, no, now it's my other hand and my legs!"
"Well, well, I'll have to give you three more pills, one for each limb, eh, my little peach?" laughed the doctor.
"Will they help me? Please, please. What've I got? "
"A mild case of scarlet fever, complicated by a slight cold."

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"Is it a germ that lives and has more little germs in me?"
"Yes."
"Are you sure it's scarlet fever? You haven't taken any tests!"
"I guess I know a certain fever when I see one," said the doctor, checking the boy's pulse with cool authority.
Charles lay there, not speaking until the doctor was crisply packing his black kit.
Then in the silent room, the boy's voice made a small, weak pattern, his eyes alight

with remembrance. "I read a book once. About petrified trees, wood turning to stone. About how trees fell and rotted and minerals got in and built up and they look just like trees, but they're not, they're stone." He stopped. In the quiet warm room his breathing sounded.
"Well?" asked the doctor.
"I've been thinking," said Charles after a time. "Do germs ever get big? I mean, in biology class they told us about one-celled animals, amoebas and things, and how millions of years ago they got together until there was a bunch and they made the first body. And more and more cells got together and got bigger and then finally maybe there was a fish and finally here we are, and all we are is a bunch of cells that decided to get together, to help each other out. Isn't that right?" Charles wet his feverish lips.
"What's all this about?" The doctor bent over him.
"I've got to tell you this. Doctor, oh, I've got to!" he cried. "What would happen, oh just pretend, please pretend, that just like in the old days, a lot of microbes got together and wanted to make a bunch, and reproduced and made more-"
His white hands were on his chest now, crawling toward his throat.
"And they decided to take over a person!" cried Charles.
"Take over a person?"
"Yes, become a person. Me, my hands, my feet! What if a disease somehow knew how to kill a person and yet live after him?"
He screamed.
The hands were on his neck.
The doctor moved forward, shouting.
At nine o'clock the doctor was escorted out to his car by the mother and father, who handed him his bag. They conversed in the cool night wind for a few minutes. "Just be sure his hands are kept strapped to his legs," said the doctor. "I don't want him hurting himself."
"Will he be all right, Doctor?" The mother held to his arm a moment.
He patted her shoulder. "Haven't I been your family physician for thirty years? It's the fever. He imagines things."
"But those bruises on his throat, he almost choked himself."
"Just you keep him strapped; he'll be all right in the morning."
The car moved off down the dark September road.
At three in the morning, Charles was still awake in his small black room. The bed was damp under his head and his back. He was very warm. Now he no longer had any arms or legs, and his body was beginning to change. He did not move on the bed, but looked at the vast blank ceiling space with insane concentration. For a while he had

screamed and thrashed, but now he was weak and hoarse from it, and his mother had gotten up a number of times to soothe his brow with a wet towel. Now be was silent, his hands strapped to his legs.
He felt the walls of his body change, the organs shift, the lungs catch fire like burning bellows of pink alcohol. The room was lighted up as with the flickerings of a hearth.
Now he had no body. It was all gone. It was under him, but it was filled with a vast pulse of some burning, lethargic drug. It was as if a guillotine had neatly lopped off his head, and his head lay shining on a midnight pillow while the body, below, still alive, belonged to somebody else. The disease had eaten his body and from the eating had reproduced itself in feverish duplicate.
There were the little hand hairs and the fingernails and the scars and the toenails and the tiny mole on his right hip, all done again in perfect fashion.
I am dead, he thought. I've been killed, and yet I live. My body is dead, it is all disease and nobody will know. I will walk around and it will not be me, it will be something else. It will be something all bad, all evil, so big and so evil it's hard to understand or think about. Something that will buy shoes and drink water and get married some day maybe and do more evil in the worid than has ever been done.
Now the warmth was stealing up his neck, into his cheeks, like a hot wine. His lips burned, his eyelids, like leaves, caught fire. His nostrils breathed out blue flame, faintly, faintly.
This will be all, he thought. It'll take my head and my brain and fix each eye and every tooth and all the marks in my brain, and every hair and every wrinkle in my ears, and there'll be nothing left of me.
He felt his brain fill with a boiling mercury. He felt his left eye clench in upon itself and, like a snail, withdraw, shift. He was blind in his left eye. It no longer belonged to him. It was enemy territory. His tongue was gone, cut out. His left cheek was numbed, lost. His left ear stopped hearing. It belonged to someone else now. This thing that was being born, this mineral thing replacing the wooden log, this disease replacing healthy animal cell.
He tried to scream and he was able to scream loud and high and sharply in the room, just as his brain flooded down, his right eye and right ear were cut out, he was blind and deaf, all fire, all terror, all panic, all death.
His scream stopped before his mother ran through the door to his side.
It was a good, clear morning, with a brisk wind that helped carry the doctor up the path before the house. In the window above, the boy stood, fully dressed. He did not wave when the doctor waved and called, "What's this? Up? My God!"
The doctor almost ran upstairs. He came gasping into the bedroom.
"What are you doing out of bed?" he demanded of the boy. He tapped his thin chest, took his pulse and temperature. "Absolutely amazing! Normal. Normal, by God!"
"I shall never be sick again in my life," declared the boy, quietly, standing there, looking out the wide window. "Never."
"I hope not. Why, you're looking fine, Charles."
"Doctor?"

"Yes, Charles?"
"Can I go to school now? " asked Charles.
"Tomorrow will be time enough. You sound positively eager."
"I am. I like school. All the kids. I want to play with them and wrestle with them, and spit on them and play with the girls' pigtails and shake the teacher's hand, and rub my hands on all the cloaks in the cloakroom, and I want to grow up and travel and shake hands with people all over the world, and be married and have lots of children, and go to libraries and handle books and - all of that I want to!" said the boy, looking off into the September morning. "What's the name you called me?"
"What?" The doctor puzzled. "I called you nothing but Charles."
"It's better than no name at all, I guess." The boy shrugged.
"I'm glad you want to go back to school," said the doctor.
"I really anticipate it," smiled the boy. "Thank you for your help, Doctor. Shake hands."
"Glad to."
They shook hands gravely, and the clear wind blew through the open window. They shook hands for almost a minute, the boy smiling up at the old man and thanking him. Then, laughing, the boy raced the doctor downstairs and out to his car. His mother and father followed for the happy farewell.
"Fit as a fiddle!" said the doctor. "Incredible!"
"And strong," said the father. "He got out of his straps himself during the night. Didn't you, Charles?"
"Did I?" said the boy.
"You did! How?"
"Oh," the boy said, "that was a long time ago."
"A long time ago!"
They all laughed, and while they were laughing, the quiet boy moved his bare foot on the sidewalk and merely touched, brushed against a number of red ants that was scurrying about on the sidewalk. Secretly, his eyes shining, while his parents chatted with the old man, he saw the ants hesitate, quiver, and lie still on the cement. He sensed they were cold now.
"Good-by!"
The doctor drove away, waving.
The boy walked ahead of his parents. As he walked he looked away toward the town and began to hum "School Days" under his breath.
"It's good to have him well again," said the father.
"Listen to him. He's so looking forward to school!"
The boy turned quietly. He gave each of his parents a crushing hug. He kissed them both several times.
Then without a word he bounded up the steps into the house.

In the parlor, before the others entered, he quickly opened the bird cage, thrust his hand in, and petted the yellow canary, once.
Then he shut the cage door, stood back, and waited.

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THE MARRIAGE MENDER
Ray Bradbury
In the sun the headboard was like a fountain, tossing up plumes of clear light. It was carved with lions and gargoyles and bearded goats. It was an awe-inspiring object even at midnight, as Antonio sat on the bed and unlaced his shoes and put his large calloused hand out to touch its shimmering harp. Then he rolled over into this fabulous machine for dreaming, and he lay breathing heavily, his eyes beginning to close.
"Every night," his wife's voice said, "we sleep in the mouth of a calliope."
Her complaint shocked him. He lay a long while before daring to reach up his hard-tipped fingers to stroke the cold metal of the intricate headboard, the threads of this lyre that had sung many wild and beautiful songs down the years.
"This is no calliope," he said.
"It cries like one," Maria said. "A billion people on this world tonight have beds. Why, I ask the saints, not us?"
"This," said Antonio gently, "is a bed." He plucked a little tune on the imitation brass harp behind his head. To his ears it was "Santa Lucia."
"This bed has humps like a herd of camels was under it."
"Now, Mama," Antonio said. He called her Mama when she was mad, though they had no children. "You were never this way," he went on, "until five months ago when Mrs. Brancozzi downstairs bought her new bed."
Maria said wistfully, "Mrs. Brancozzi's bed. It's like snow. It's all flat and white and smooth."
"I don't want any damn snow, all flat and white and smooth! These springs - feel them!" he cried angrily. "They know me. They recognize that this hour of night I lie thus, at two o'clock, so! Three o'clock this way, four o'clock that. We are like a tumbling act, we've worked together for years and know all the holds and fails."
Maria sighed, and said, "Sometimes I dream we're in the taffy machine at Bartole's candy store."
"This bed," he announced to the darkness, "served our family before Garibaldi! From this wellspring alone came precincts of honest voters, a squad of clean-saluting Army men, two confectioners, a barber, four second leads for Il Trovatore and Rigoletto, and two geniuses so complex they never could decide what to do in their lifetime! Not to forget enough beautiful women to provide ballrooms with their finest decoration. A cornucopia of plenty, this bed! A veritable harvesting machine!"

"We have been married two years," she said with dreadful control over her voice. "Where are our second leads for Rigoletto, our geniuses, our ballroom decorations?"
"Patience, Mama."
"Don't call me Mama! While this bed is busy favoring you all night, never once has it done for me. Not even so much as a baby girl! "

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He sat up. "You've let these women in this tenement ruin you with their dollar-down, dollar-a-week talk. Has Mrs. Brancozzi children? Her and her new bed that she's had for five months?"
"No! But soon! Mrs. Brancozzi says . . . and her bed, so beautiful."
He slammed himself down and yanked the covers over him. The bed screamed like all the Furies rushing through the night sky, fading away toward the dawn.
The moon changed the shape of the window pattern on the floor. Antonio awoke. Maria was not beside him.
He got up and went to peer through the half-open door of the bathroom. His wife stood at the mirror looking at her tired face.
"I don't feel well," she said.
"We argued." He put out his hand to pat her. "I'm sorry. We'll think it over. About the bed, I mean. We'll see how the money goes. And if you're not well tomorrow, see the doctor, eh? Now, come back to bed."
At noon the next day, Antonio walked from the lumberyard to a window where stood fine new beds with their covers invitingly turned back.
"I," he whispered to himself, "am a beast."
He checked his watch. Maria, at this time, would be going to the doctor's. She had been like cold milk this morning; he had told her to go. He walked on to the candy-store window and watched the taffy machine folding and threading and pulling. Does taffy scream? he wondered. Perhaps, but so high we cannot hear it. He laughed. Then, in the stretched taffy, he saw Maria. Frowning, he turned and walked back to the furniture store. No. Yes. No. Yes! He pressed his nose to the icy window. Bed, he thought, you in there, new bed, do you know me? Will you be kind to my back, nights?
He took out his wallet slowly, and peered at the money. He sighed, gazed for a long time at that flat marbletop, that unfamiliar enemy, that new bed. Then, shoulders sagging, he walked into the store, his money held loosely in his hand.
"Maria!" He ran up the steps two at a time. It was nine o'clock at night and he had managed to beg off in the middle of his overtime at the lumberyard to rush home. He rushed through the open doorway, smiling.
The apartment was empty.
"Ah," he said disappointedly. He laid the receipt for the new bed on top of the bureau where Maria might see it when she entered. On those few evenings when he worked late she visited with any one of several neighbors downstairs.

I'll go find her, he thought, and stopped. No. I want to tell her alone. I'll wait.
He sat on the bed. "Old bed," he said, "good-by to you. I am very sorry." He patted the brass lions nervously. He paced the floor. Come on, Maria. He imagined her smile.
He listened for her quick running on the stair, but he heard only a slow, measured tread. He thought: That's not my Maria, slow like that, no.
The doorknob turned.
"Maria!"
"You're early!" She smiled happily at him. Did she guess? Was it written on his face? "I've been downstairs," she cried, "telling everyone!"

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"Telling everyone?"
"The doctor! I saw the doctor!"
"The doctor?" He looked bewildered. "And?"
"And, Papa, and-"
"Do you mean - Papa?"
"Papa, Papa, Papa, Papa!"
"Oh," he said, gently, "you walked so carefully on the stairs."
He took hold of her, but not too tight, and he kissed her cheeks, and he shut his eyes, and he yelled. Then he had to wake a few neighbors and tell them, shake them, tell them again. There had to be a little wine and a careful waltz around, an embracing, a trembling, a kissing of brow, eyelids, nose, lips, temples, ears, hair, chin - and then it was past midnight.
"A miracle," he sighed.
They were alone in their room again, the air warm from the people who had been here a minute before, laughing, talking. But now they were alone again.
Turning out the light, he saw the receipt on the bureau. Stunned, he tried to decide in what subtle and delicious way to break this additional news to her.
Maria sat upon her side of the bed in the dark, hypnotized with wonder. She moved her hands as if her body was a strange doll, taken apart, and now to be put back together again, limb by limb, her motions as slow as if she lived beneath a warm sea at midnight. Now, at last, careful not to break herself, she lay back upon the pillow.
"Maria, I have something to tell you."
"Yes?" she said faintly.
"Now that you are as you are." He squeezed her hand. "You deserve the comfort, the rest, the beauty of a new bed."
She did not cry out happily or turn to him or seize him. Her silence was a thinking silence.
He was forced to continue. "This bed is nothing but a pipe organ, a calliope."
"It is a bed," she said.

"A herd of camels sleep under it."
"No," she said quietly, "from it will come precincts of honest voters, captains enough for three armies, two ballerinas, a famous lawyer, a very tall policeman, and seven basso profundos, altos, and sopranos."
He squinted across the dimly lighted room at the receipt upon the bureau. He touched the worn mattress under him. The springs moved softly to recognize each limb, each tired muscle, each aching bone.
He sighed. "I never argue with you, little one."
"Mama," she said.
"Mama," he said.
And then as he closed his eyes and drew the covers to his chest and lay in the darkness by the great fountain, in the sight of a jury of fierce metal lions and amber goat and smiling gargoyles, he listened. And he heard it. It was very far away at first, very tentative, but it came clearer as he listened.
Softly, her arm back over her head, Maria's finger tips began to tap a little dance

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on the gleaming harp strings, on the shimmering brass pipes of the ancient bed. The music was - yes, of course: "Santa Lucia!" His lips moved to it in a warm whisper. Santa Lucia! Santa Lucia.
It was very beautiful.

A MEDICINE FOR MELANCHOLY
(or: THE SOVEREIGN REMEDY REVEALED!)
Ray Bradbury
"Send for some leeches; bleed her," said Doctor Gimp.
"She has no blood left!" cried Mrs. Wilkes. "Oh, Doctor, what ails our Camillia?"
"She's not right."
"Yes, yes?"
"She's poorly." The good doctor scowled.
"Go on, go on!"
"She's a fluttering candle flame, no doubt."
"Ah, Doctor Gimp," protested Mr. Wilkes. "You but tell us as you go out what we told you when you came in!"
"No, more! Give her these pills at dawn, high noon, and sunset. A sovereign remedy!"
"Damn, she's stuffed with sovereign remedies now!"
"Tut-tut! That's a shilling as I pass downstairs, sir."
"Go down and send the Devil up!" Mr. Wilkes shoved a coin in the good doctor's hand. Whereupon the physician, wheezing, taking snuff, sneezing, stamped down into the swarming streets of London on a sloppy morn in the spring of 1762.
Mr. and Mrs. Wilkes turned to the bed where their sweet Camillia lay pale, thin, yes, but far from unlovely, with large wet lilac eyes, her hair a creek of gold upon her pillow.
"Oh," she almost wept. "What's to become of me? Since the start of spring, three weeks, I've been a ghost in my mirror; I frighten me. To think I'll die without seeing my twentieth birthday."
"Child," said the mother. "Where do you hurt?"
"My arms. My legs. My bosom. My head. How many doctors - six? - have turned me like a beef on a spit. No more. Please, let me pass away untouched."
"What a ghastly, what a mysterious illness," said the mother. "Oh, do something, Mr. Wilkes!"
"What?" asked Mr. Wilkes angrily. "She won't have the physician, the apothecary, or the priest! - and Amen to that! - they've wrung me dry! Shall I run in the street then and bring the Dustman up?"

"Yes," said a voice.
"What!" All three turned to stare.
They had quite forgotten her younger brother, Jamie, who stood picking his teeth at a far window, gazing serenely down into the drizzle and the loud rumbling of the

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town.
"Four hundred years ago," he said serenely, "it was tried, it worked. Don't bring the Dustman up, no, no. But let us hoist Camillia, cot and all, maneuver her downstairs, and set her up outside our door."
"Why? What for?"
"In a single hour" - Jamie's eyes jumped, counting - "a thousand folk rush by our gate. In one day, twenty thousand people run, hobble, or ride by. Each might eye my swooning sister, each count her teeth, pull her ear lobes, and all, all, mind you, would have a sovereign remedy to offer! One of them would just have to be right!"
"Ah," said Mr. Wilkes, stunned.
"Father!" said Jamie breathlessly. "Have you ever known one single man who didn't think he personally wrote Materia Medica? This green ointment for sour throat, that ox-salve for miasma or bloat? Right now, ten thousand self-appointed apothecaries sneak off down there, their wisdom lost to us!"
"Jamie boy, you're incredible!"
"Cease!" said Mrs. Wilkes. "No daughter of mine will be put on display in this or any street-"
"Fie, woman!" said Mr. Wilkes. "Camillia melts like snow and you hesitate to move her from this hot room? Come, Jamie, lift the bed!"
"Camillia?" Mrs. Wilkes turned to her daughter.
"I may as well die in the open," said Camlila, "where a cool breeze might stir my locks as I . . ."
"Bosh!" said the father. "You'll not die. Jamie, heave! Ha! There! Out of the way, wife! Up, boy, higher!"
"Oh," cried Camillia faindy. "I fly, I fly . . . !"
Quite suddenly a blue sky opened over London. The population, surprised by the weather, hurried out into the streets, panicking for something to see, to do, to buy. Blind men sang, dogs jigged, clowns shuffled and tumbled, children chalked games and threw balls as if it were carnival time.
Down into all this, tottering, their veins bursting from their brows, Jamie and Mr. Wilkes carried Camillia like a lady Pope sailing high in her sedan-chair cot, eyes clenched shut, praying.
"Careful!" screamed Mrs. Wilkes. "Ah, she's dead! No. There. Put her down. Easy . . ."
And at last the bed was tilted against the house front so that the River of Humanity surging by could see Camillia, a large pale Bartolemy Doll put out like a prize in the sun.

"Fetch a quill, ink, paper, lad," said the father. "I'll make notes as to symptoms spoken of and remedies offered this day. Tonight we'll average them out. Now-"
Bijt already a man in the passing crowd had fixed Camillia with a sharp eye.
"She's sick!" he said.
"Ah," said Mr. Wilkes, gleefully. "It begins. The quill, boy. There. Go on, sir!"
"She's not well." The man scowled. "She does poorly."
"Does poorly-" Mr. Wilkes wrote, then froze. "Sir?" He looked up suspiciously. "Are you a physician?"

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"I am, sir."
"I thought I knew the words! Jamie, take my cane, drive him off! Go, sir, be gone!"
But the man hastened off, cursing, mightily exasperated.
"She's not well, she does poorly . . . pah!" mimicked Mr. Wilkes, but stopped. For now a woman, tall and gaunt as a specter fresh risen from the tomb, was pointing a finger at Camillia Wilkes.
"Vapors," she intoned.
"Vapors," wrote Mr. Wilkes, pleased.
"Lung-flux," chanted the woman.
"Lung-flux!" Mr. Wilkes wrote, beaming. "Now, that's more like it!"
"A medicine for melancholy is needed," said the woman palely. "Be there mummy ground to medicine in your house? The best mummies are: Egyptian, Arabian, Hirasphatos, Libyan, all of great use in magnetic disorders. Ask for me, the Gypsy, at the Flodden Road. I sell stone parsley, male frankincense-"
"Flodden Road, stone parsey - slower, woman!"
"Opobalsam, pontic valerian-"
"Wait, woman! Opobalsam, yes! Jamie, stop her!"
But the woman, naming medicines, glided on.
A girl, no more than seventeen, walked up now and stared at Camillia Wilkes.
"She-"
"One moment!" Mr. Wilkes scribbled feverishly. "-magnetic disorders - pontic valerian - drat! Well, young girl, now. What do you see in my daughter's face? You fix her with your gaze, you hardly breathe. So?"
"She-" The strange girl searched deep into Camillia's eyes, flushed, and stammered. "She suffers from . . . from . . ."
"Spit it out!"
"She . . . she . . . oh!"
And the girl, with a last look of deepest sympathy, darted off through the crowd.
"Silly girl!"

"No, Papa," murmured Camillia, eyes wide. "Not silly. She saw. She knew. Oh, Jamie, run fetch her, make her tell!"
"No, she offered nothing! Whereas, the Gypsy, see her list!"
"I know it, Papa." Camillia, paler, shut her eyes.
Someone cleared his throat.
A butcher, his apron a scarlet battleground, stood bristling his fierce mustaches there.
"I have seen cows with this look," he said. "I have saved them with brandy and three new eggs. In winter I have saved myself with the same elixir-"
"My daughter is no cow, sir!" Mr. Wilkes threw down his quill. "Nor is she a butcher, nor is it January! Step back, sir, others wait!"
And indeed, now a vast crowd clamored, drawn by the others, aching to advise their favorite swig, recommend some country site where it rained less and shone more sun than in all England or your South of France. Old men and women, especial doctors as all the aged are, clashed by each other in bristles of canes, in phalanxes of crutches and hobble sticks.

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"Back!" cried Mrs. Wilkes, alarmed. "They'll crush my daughter like a spring berry!"
"Stand off!" Jamie seized canes and crutches and threw them over the mob, which turned on itself to go seek their missing members.
"Father, I fail, I fail," gasped Camillia.
"Father!" cried Jamie. "There's but one way to stop this riot! Charge them! Make them pay to give us their mind on this ailment!"
"Jamie, you are my son! Quick, boy, paint a sign! Listen, people! Tuppence! Queue up please, a line! Tuppence to speak your piece! Get your money out, yes! That's it. You, sir. You, madame. And you, sir. Now, my quill! Begin!"
The mob boiled in like a dark sea.
Camlia opened one eye and swooned again.
Sundown, the streets almost empty, only a few strollers now. Camillia moth-fluttered her eyelids at a famiiar clinking jingle.
"Three hundred and ninety-nine, four hundred pennies!" Mr. Wilkes counted the last money into a bag held by his grinning son. "There!"
"It will buy me a fine black funeral coach," said the pale girl.
"Hush! Did you imagine, family, so many people, two hundred, would pay to give us their opinion?"
"Yes," said Mrs. Wilkes. "Wives, husbands, children, are deaf to each other. So people gladly pay to have someone listen. Poor things, each today thought he and he alone knew quinsy, dropsy, glanders, could tell the slaver from the hives. So tonight we are rich and two hundred people are happy, having unloaded their full medical kit at our door."
"Gods, instead of quelling the riot, we had to drive them off snapping like pups."

"Read us the list, Father," said Jamie, "of two hundred remedies. Which one is true?"
"I care not," whispered Carillia, sighing. "It grows dark. My stomach is queasy from listening to the names! May I be taken upstairs?"
"Yes, dear. Jamie, lift!"
"Please," said a voice.
Half-bent, the men looked up.
There stood a Dustman of no particular size or shape, his face masked with soot from which shone water-blue eyes and a white slot of an ivory smile. Dust sifted from his sleeves and his pants as he moved, as he talked quietly, nodding.
"I couldn't get through the mob earlier," he said, holding his dirty cap in his hands. "Now, going home, here I am. Must I pay?"
"No, Dustman, you need not," said Camillia gently.
"Hold on-" protested Mr. Wilkes.
But Camillia gave him a soft look and he grew silent.
"Thank you, ma'am." The Dustman's smile flashed like warm sunlight in the growing dusk. "I have but one advice."
He gazed at Camillia. She gazed at him.
"Be this Saint Bosco's Eve, sir, ma 'am?"
"Who knows? Not me, sir!" said Mr. Wilkes.
"I think it is Saint Bosco's Eve, sir. Also, it is the night of the Full Moon. So,"

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said the Dustman humbly, unable to take his eyes from the lovely haunted girl, "you must leave your daughter out in the light of that rising moon."
"Out under the moon!" said Mrs. Wilkes.
"Doesn't that make the lunatic?" asked Jamie.
"Beg pardon, sir." The Dustman bowed. "But the full moon soothes all sick animal, be they human or plain field beast. There is a serenity of color, a quietude of touch, a sweet sculpturing of mind and body in full moonlight."
"It may rain-" said the mother uneasily.
"I swear," said the Dustman quickly. "My sister suffered this same swooning paleness. We set her like a potted lily out one spring night with the moon. She lives today in Sussex, the soul of reconstituted health!"
"Reconstituted! Moonlight! And will cost us not one penny of the four hundred we collected this day, Mother, Jamie, Camillia."
"No!" said Mrs. Wilkes. "I won't have it!"
"Mother," said Camillia.
She looked earnestly at the Dustman.
From his grimed face the Dustman gazed back, his smile like a little scimitar in the dark.

"Mother," said Camillia. "I feel it. The moon will cure me, it will, it will . . ."
The mother sighed. "This is not my day, nor night. Let me kiss you for the last time, then. There."
And the mother went upstairs.
Now the Dustman backed off, bowing courteously to all.
"All night, now, remember, beneath the moon, not the slightest disturbance until dawn. Sleep well, young lady. Dream, and dream the best. Good night."
Soot was lost in soot; the man was gone.
Mr. Wilkes and Jamie kissed Camillia's brow.
"Father, Jamie," she said. "Don't worry."
And she was left alone to stare off where at a great distance she thought she saw a smile hung by itself in the dark blink off and on, then go round a corner, vanishing.
She waited for the rising of the moon.
Night in London, the voices growing drowsier in the inns, the slamming of doors, drunken farewells, clocks chiming. Camillia saw a cat like a woman stroll by in her furs, saw a woman like a cat stroll by, both wise, both Egyptian, both smelling of spice. Every quarter hour or so a voice drifted down from above:
"You all right, child?"
"Yes, Father."
"Camillia?"
"Mother, Jamie, I'm fine."
And at last. "Good night."
"Good night."
The last lights out. London asleep.
The moon rose.
And the higher the moon, the larger grew Camillia's eyes as she watched the alleys,

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the courts, the streets, until at last, at midnight, the moon moved over her to show her like a marble figure atop an ancient tomb.
A motion in darkness.
Camillia pricked her ears.
A faint melody sprang out on the air.
A man stood in the shadows of the court.
Camillia gasped.

The man stepped forth into moonlight, carrying a lute which he strummed softly. He was a man well-dressed, whose face was handsome and, now anyway, solemn.
"A troubadour," said Camillia aloud.
The man, his finger on his lips, moved slowly forward and soon stood by her cot.
"What are you doing out so late?" asked the girl, unafraid but not knowing why.
"A friend sent me to make you well." He touched the lute strings. They hummed sweetly. He was indeed handsome there in the silver light.
"That cannot be," she said, "for it was told me, the moon is my cure."
"And so it will be, maiden."
"What songs do you sing?"
"Songs of spring nights, aches and ailments without name. Shall I name your fever, maiden?"
"If you know it, yes."
"First, the symptoms: raging temperatures, sudden cold, heart fast then slow, storms of temper, then sweet calms, drunkenness from having sipped only well water, dizziness from being touched only thus-"
He touched her wrist, saw her melt toward delicious oblivion, drew back.
"Depressions, elations," he went on. "Dreams-"
"Stop!" she cried, enthralled. "You know me to the letter. Now, name my ailment!"
"I will." He pressed his lips to the palm of her hand so she quaked suddenly. "The name of the ailment is Camillia Wilkes."
"How strange." She shivered, her eyes glinting lilac fires. "Am I then my own affliction? How sick I make myself! Even now, feel my heart!"
"I feel it, so."
"My limbs, they burn with summer heat!"
"Yes. They scorch my fingers."
"But now, the night wind, see how I shudder, cold! I die, I swear it, I die!"
"I will not let you," he said quietly.
"Are you a doctor, then?"
"No, just your plain, your ordinary physician, like another who guessed your trouble this day. The girl who would have named it but ran off in the crowd."
"Yes, I saw in her eyes she knew what had seized me. But, now, my teeth chatter. And no extra blanket!"
"Give room, please. There. Let me see: two arms, two legs, head and body. I'm all here!"
"What, sir!"
"To warm you from the night, of course."

"How like a hearth! Oh, sir, sir, do I know you? Your name?"
Swiftly above her, his head shadowed hers. From it his merry clear-water eyes glowed as did his white ivory slot of a smile.
"Why, Bosco, of course," he said.
"Is there not a saint by that name?"
"Given an hour, you will call me so, yes."
His head bent closer. Thus sooted in shadow, she cried with joyous recognition to welcome her Dustman back.
"The world spins! I pass away! The cure, sweet Doctor, or all is lost!"
"The cure," he said. "And the cure is this . . ."
Somewhere, cats sang. A shoe, shot from a window, tipped them off a fence. Then all was silence and the moon . . .
"Shh . . ."
Dawn. Tiptoeing downstairs, Mr. and Mrs. Wilkes peered into their courtyard.
"Frozen stone dead from the terrible night, I know it!"
"No, wife, look! Alive! Roses in her cheeks! No, more! Peaches, persimmons! She glows all rosy-milky! Sweet Camillia, alive and well, made whole again!"
They bent by the slumbering girl.
"She smiles, she dreams; what's that she says?"
"The sovereign," sighed the girl, "remedy."
"What, what?"
The girl smiled again, a white smile, in her sleep.
"A medicine," she murmured, "for melancholy."
She opened her eyes.
"Oh, Mother, Father!"
"Daughter! Child! Come upstairs!"
"No." She took their hands, tenderly. "Mother? Father?"
"Yes?"
"No one will see. The sun but rises. Please. Dance with me."
They did not want to dance.
But, celebrating they knew not what, they did.

The sign on the wall seemed to quaver under a film of sliding warm water, Eckels felt his eyelids blink over his stare, and the sign burned in this momentary darkness:

TIME SAFARI, INC.
SAFARIS TO ANY YEAR IN THE PAST.
YOU NAME THE ANIMAL.
WE TAKE YOU THERE.
YOU SHOOT IT.

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A warm phlegm gathered in Eckels' throat; he swallowed and pushed it down. The muscles around his mouth formed a smile as he put his hand slowly out upon the air, and in that hand waved a check for ten thousand dollars to the man behind the desk.

"Does this safari guarantee I come back alive?"

"We guarantee nothing," said the official, "except the dinosaurs." He turned. "This is Mr. Travis, your Safari Guide in the Past. He'll tell you what and where to shoot. If he says no shooting, no shooting. If you disobey instructions, there's a stiff penalty of another ten thousand dollars, plus possible government action, on your return."

Eckels glanced across the vast office at a mass and tangle, a snaking and humming of wires and steel boxes, at an aurora that flickered now orange, now silver, now blue. There was a sound like a gigantic bonfire burning all of Time, all the years and all the parchment calendars, all the hours piled high and set aflame.

A touch of the hand and this burning would, on the instant, beautifully reverse itself. Eckels remembered the wording in the advertisements to the letter. Out of chars and ashes, out of dust and coals, like golden salamanders, the old years, the green years, might leap; roses sweeten the air, white hair turn Irish-black, wrinkles vanish; all, everything fly back to seed, flee death, rush down to their beginnings, suns rise in western skies and set in glorious easts, moons eat themselves opposite to the custom, all and everything cupping one in another like Chinese boxes, rabbits in hats, all and everything returning to the fresh death, the seed death, the green death, to the time before the beginning. A touch of a hand might do it, the merest touch of a hand.

"Hell and damn," Eckels breathed, the light of the Machine on his thin face. "A real Time Machine." He shook his head. "Makes you think. If the election had gone badly yesterday, I might be here now running away from the results. Thank God Keith won. He'll make a fine President of the United States."

"Yes," said the man behind the desk. "Were lucky. If Deutscher had gotten in, we'd have the worst kind of dictatorship. There's an anti-everything man for you, a militarist, anti-Christ, anti-human, anti-intellectual. People called us up, you know, joking but not joking. Said if Deutscher became President they wanted to go live in 1492. Of course it's not our business to conduct Escapes, but to form Safaris. Anyway, Keith's President now. All you got to

worry about is"
"Shooting my dinosaur," Eckels finished it for him.
"A Tyrannosaurus Rex. The Thunder Lizard, the damnedest monster in history. Sign this release. Anything happens to you, we're not responsible. Those dinosaurs are hungry."
Eckels flushed angrily. "Trying to scare me!"
"Frankly, yes. We don't want anyone going who'll panic at the first shot. Six Safari leaders were killed last year, and a dozen hunters. We're here to give you the damnedest thrill a real hunter ever asked for. Travelling you back sixty million years to bag the biggest damned game in all Time. Your personal check's still there. Tear it up."
Mr. Eckels looked at the check for a long time. His fingers twitched.
"Good luck," said the man behind the desk. "Mr. Travis, he's all yours."
They moved silently across the room, taking their guns with them, toward the Machine, toward the silver metal and the roaring light.
First a day and then a night and then a day and then a night, then it was day-night-day-night-day. A week, a month, a year, a decade! A.D. 2055. A.D. zoic). 1999! 1957! Gone! The Machine roared.
They put on their oxygen helmets and tested the intercoms.
Eckels swayed on the padded seat, his face pale, his jaws stiff. He felt the trembling in his arms and he looked down and found his hands tight on the new rifle. There were four other men in the Machine. Travis, the Safari Leader, his assistant, Lesperance, and two other hunters, Billings and Kramer. They sat looking at each other, and the years blazed around them.
"Can these guns get a dinosaur cold?" Eckels felt his mouth saying.
"If you hit them right," said Travis on the helmet radio. "Some dinosaurs have two brains, one in the head, another far down the spinal column. We stay away from those. That's stretching luck. Put your first two shots into the eyes, if you can, blind them, and go back into the brain."
The Machine howled. Time was a film run backward. Suns fled and ten million moons fled after them. "Good God," said Eckels. "Every hunter that ever lived would envy us today. This makes Africa seem like Illinois."
The Machine slowed; its scream fell to a murmur. The Machine stopped.
The sun stopped in the sky.
The fog that had enveloped the Machine blew away and they were in an old time, a very old time indeed, three

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hunters and two Safari Heads with their blue metal guns across their knees.
"Christ isn't born yet," said Travis. "Moses has not gone to the mountain to talk with God. The Pyramids are still in the earth, waiting to be cut out and put up. Remember that, Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon, Hitler, none of them exists."
The men nodded.
"That" Mr. Travis pointed" is the jungle of sixty million two thousand and fifty-five years before President Keith."
He indicated a metal path that struck off into green wilderness, over steaming swamp, among giant ferns and palms.
"And that," he said, "is the Path, laid by Time Safari for your use. It floats six inches above the earth. Doesn't touch so much as one grass blade, flower, or tree. It's an anti-gravity metal. Its purpose is to keep you from touching this world of the past in any way. Stay on the Path. Don't go off it. I repeat. Don't go off. For any reason! If you fall off, there's a penalty. And don't shoot any animal we don't okay."
"Why?" asked Eckels.
They sat in the ancient wilderness. Far birds' cries blew on a wind, and the smell of tar and an old salt sea, moist grasses, and flowers the colour of blood.
"We don't want to change the Future. We don't belong here in the Past. The government doesn't like us here. We have to pay big graft to keep our franchise. A Time Machine is damn finicky business. Not knowing it, we might kill an important animal, a small bird, a roach, a flower even, thus destroying an important link in a growing species."
"That's not clear," said Eckels.
"All right," Travis continued, "say we accidentally kill one mouse here. That means all the future families of this one particular mouse are destroyed, right?"
"Right."
"And all the families of the families of that one mouse! With a stamp of your foot, you annihilate first one, then a dozen, then a thousand, a million, a billion possible mice"
"So they're dead," said Eckels. "So what?"
"So what?" Travis snorted quietly. "Well, what about the foxes that'll need those mice to survive? For want of ten mice, a fox dies. For want of ten foxes, a lion starves. For want of a lion, all manner of insects, vultures, infinite billions of life forms are thrown into chaos and destruction. Eventually it all boils down to this: fifty-nine million years later, a cave man, one of a dozen on the entire world, goes hunting wild boar or saber-tooth tiger for food. But you,

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friend, have stepped on all the tigers in that region. By stepping on one single mouse. So the cave man starves. And the cave man, please note, is not just any expendable man, no I He is an entire future nation. From his loins would have sprung ten sons. From their loins one hundred sons, and thus onward to a civilisation. Destroy this one man, and you destroy a race, a people, an entire history of life. It is comparable to slaying some of Adam's grandchildren. The stomp of your foot, on one mouse, could start an earthquake, the effects of which could shake our earth and destinies down through Time, to their very foundations. With the death of that one cave man, a billion others yet unborn are throttled in the womb. Perhaps Rome never rises on its seven hills. Perhaps Europe is forever a dark forest, and only Asia waxes healthy and teeming. Step on a mouse and you crush the Pyramids. Step on a mouse and you leave your print, like a Grand Canyon, across Eternity. Queen Elizabeth might never be born, Washington might not cross the Delaware, there might never be a United States at all. So be careful. Stay on the Path, Never step off!"

"I see," said Eckels. "Then it wouldn't pay for us even to touch the grass?"

"Correct. Crushing certain plants could add up infinitesimally. A little error here would multiply in sixty million years, all out of proportion. Of course maybe our theory is wrong. Maybe Time can't be changed by us. Or maybe it can be changed only in little subtle ways. A dead mouse here makes an insect imbalance there, a population disproportion later, a bad harvest further on, a depression, mass starvation, and, finally, a change in social temperament in far-flung countries. Something much more subtle, like that. Perhaps only a soft breath, a whisper, a hair, pollen on the air, such a slight, slight change that unless you looked close you wouldn't see it. Who knows? Who really can say he knows? We don't know. We're guessing. But until we do know for certain whether our messing around in Time can make a big roar or a little rustle in history, we're being damned careful. This Machine, this Path, your clothing and bodies, were sterilised, as you know, before the journey. We wear these oxygen helmets so we can't introduce our bacteria into an ancient atmosphere."

"How do we know which animals to shoot?"

"They're marked with red paint," said Travis. "Today, before our journey, we sent Lesperance here back with the Machine. He came to this particular era and followed certain animals."

"Studying them?"

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"Right," said Lesperance. "I track them through their entire existence, noting which of them lives longest. Very few. How many times they mate. Not often. Life's short. When I find one that's going to die when a tree falls on him, or one that drowns in a tar pit, I note the exact hour, minute, and second. I shoot a paint bomb. It leaves a red patch on his hide. We can't miss it. Then I correlate our arrival in the Past so that we meet -the Monster not more than two minutes before he would have died anyway. This way, we kill only animals with no future, that are never going to mate again. You see how careful we are?"

"But if you came back this morning in Time," said Eckels eagerly, "you must've bumped into us, our Safari] How did it turn out? Was it successful? Did all of us get through-alive?"

Travis and Lesperance gave each other a look.

"That'd be a paradox," said the latter. "Time doesn't permit that sort of mess a man meeting himself. When such occasions threaten, Time steps aside. Like an airplane hitting an air pocket. You felt the Machine jump just before we stopped? That was us passing ourselves on the way back to the Future. We saw nothing. There's no way of telling if this expedition was a success, if we got our monster, or whether all of us meaning you, Mr. Eckels, got out alive."

Eckels smiled palely.

"Cut that," said Travis sharply. "Everyone on his feet!"

They were ready to leave the Machine.

The jungle was high and the jungle was broad and the jungle was the entire world forever and forever. Sounds like music and sounds like flying tents filled the sky, and those were pterodactyls soaring with cavernous grey wings, gigantic bats out of a delirium and a night fever. Eckels, balanced on the narrow Path, aimed his rifle playfully.

"Stop that!" said Travis. "Don't even aim for fun, damn it! If your gun should go off"

Eckels flushed. "Where's our Tyrannosaurus?"

Lesperance checked his wrist watch. "Up ahead. Well bisect his trail in sixty seconds. Look for the red paint, for Christ's sake. Don't shoot till we give the word. Stay on the Path. Stay on the path

They moved forward in the wind of morning.

"Strange," murmured Eckels. "Up ahead, sixty million years, Election Day over. Keith made President. Everyone celebrating. And here we are, a million years lost, and they don't exist. The things we worried about for months, a life-time, not even born or thought about yet."

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"Safety catches off, everyone!" ordered Travis. "You, first shot, Eckels. Second, Billings. Third, Kramer."
"I've hunted tiger, wild boar, buffalo, elephant, but Jesus, this is it," said Eckels. "I'm shaking like a kid."
"Ah," said Travis.
Everyone stopped.
Travis raised his hand. "Ahead," he whispered. "In the mist. There he is. There's His Royal Majesty now."
The jungle was wide and full of twitterings, rustlings, murmurs, and sighs.
Suddenly it all ceased, as if someone had shut a door.
Silence.
A sound of thunder.
Out of the mist, one hundred yards away, came Tyrannosaurus Rex.
"Jesus God," whispered Eckels.
"Shit"
It came on great oiled, resilient, striding legs. It lowered thirty feet above half of the trees, a great evil god, folding its delicate watchmaker's claws close to its oily reptilian chest. Each lower leg was a piston, a thousand pounds of white bone, sunk in thick ropes of muscle, sheathed over in a gleam of pebbled skin like the mail of a terrible warrior, Each thigh was a ton of meat, ivory, and steel mesh. And from the great breathing cage of the upper body those two delicate arms dangled out front, arms with hands which might pick up and examine men like toys, while the snake neck coiled. And the head itself, a ton of sculptured stone, lifted easily upon the sky. Its mouth gaped, exposing a fence of teeth like daggers. Its eyes rolled, ostrich eggs, empty of all expression save hunger. It closed its mouth in a death grin. It ran, its pelvic bones crushing aside trees and bushes, its taloned feet clawing damp earth, leaving prints six inches deep wherever it settled its weight. It ran with a gliding ballet step, far too poised and balanced for its ten tons. It moved into a sunlit arena warily, its beautiful reptile hands feeling the air.
"My God!" Eckels twitched his mouth. "It could reach up and grab the moon."
"Shit" Travis jerked angrily. "He hasn't seen us yet."
"It can't be killed." Eckels pronounced this verdict quietly, as if there could be no argument. He had weighed the evidence and this was his considered opinion. The rifle in his hands seemed a cap gun. "We were fools to come. This is impossible."
"Shut up!" hissed Travis.
"Nightmare."

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"Turn around," commanded Travis. "Walk quietly to the Machine. We'll remit one-half your fee."
"I didn't realise it would be this big," said Eckels. "I miscalculated, that's all. And now I want out."
"It sees us!"
"There's the red paint on its chest!"
The Thunder Lizard raised itself. Its armoured flesh glittered like a thousand green coins. The coins, crusted with slime, steamed. In the slime, tiny insects wriggled, so that the entire body seemed to twitch and undulate, even while the monster itself did not move. It exhaled. The stink of raw flesh blew down the wilderness.
"Get me out of here," said Eckels. "It was never like this before, I was always sure I'd come through alive, I had good guides, good safaris, and safety. This time, I figured wrong. I've met my match and admit it. This is too much for me to get hold of."
"Don't run," said Lesperance. "Turn around. Hide in the Machine."
"Yes." Eckels seemed to be numb. He looked at his feet as if trying to make them move. He gave a grunt of helplessness.
"Eckels"
He took a few steps, blinking, shuffling.
"Not that way!"
The Monster, at the first motion, lunged forward with a terrible scream. It covered one hundred yards in four seconds. The rifles jerked up and blazed fire. A windstorm from the beast's mouth engulfed them in the stench of slime and old blood. The Monster roared, teeth glittering with sun.
Eckels, not looking back, walked blindly to the edge of the Path, his gun limp in his arms, stepped off the Path, and walked, not knowing it, in the jungle. His feet sank into green moss. His legs moved him, and he felt alone and remote from the events behind.
The rifles cracked again. Their sound was lost in shriek and lizard thunder. The great lever of the reptile's tail swung up, lashed sideways. Trees exploded in clouds of leaf and branch. The Monster twitched its jeweller's hands down to fondle at the men, to twist them in half, to crush them like berries, to cram them into its teeth and its screaming throat. Its boulder-stone eyes levelled with the men.
They saw themselves mirrored. They fired at the metallic eyelids and the blazing black iris.
Like a stone idol, like a mountain avalanche,
Tyrannosaurs fell. Thundering, it clutched trees, pulled them with

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it. It wrenched and tore the metal Path, The men flung themselves back and away. The body hit, ten tons of cold flesh and stone. The guns fired. The Monster lashed its armoured tail, twitched its snake jaws, and lay still. A fount of blood spurted from its throat. Somewhere inside, a sac of fluids burst. Sickening gushes drenched the hunters. They stood, red and glistening.

The thunder faded.

The jungle was silent. After the avalanche, a green peace. After the nightmare, morning.

Billings and Kramer sat on the pathway and threw up.

Travis and Lesperance stood with smoking rifles, cursing steadily.

In the Time Machine, on his face, Eckels lay shivering. He had found his way back to the Path, climbed into the Machine.

Travis came walking, glanced at Eckels, took cotton gauze from a metal box, and returned to the others, who were sitting on the Path.

"Clean up."

They wiped the blood from their helmets. They began to curse too. The Monster lay, a hill of solid flesh. Within, you could hear the sighs and murmurs as the furthest chambers of it died, the organs malfunctioning, liquids running a final instant from pocket to sac to spleen, everything shutting off, closing up forever. It was like standing by a wrecked locomotive or a steam shovel at quitting time, all valves being released or levered tight. Bones cracked; the tonnage of its own flesh, off balance, dead weight, snapped the delicate forearms, caught underneath. The meat settled, quivering.

Another cracking sound. Overhead, a gigantic tree branch broke from its heavy mooring, fell. It crashed upon the dead beast with finality.

"There." Lesperance checked his watch. "Right on time. That's the giant tree that was scheduled to fall and kill this animal originally." He glanced at the two hunters. "You want the trophy picture?"

"What?"

"We can't take a trophy back to the Future. The body has to stay right here where it would have died originally, so the insects, birds, and bacteria can get at it, as they were intended to. Everything in balance. The body stays. But we can take a picture of you standing near it."

The two men tried to think, but gave up, shaking their heads.

They let themselves be led along the metal Path. They

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sank wearily into the Machine cushions. They gazed back at the ruined Monster, the stagnating mound, where already strange reptilian birds and golden insects were busy at the steaming armour.

A sound on the floor of the Time Machine stiffened them. Eckels sat there, shivering.

"I'm sorry," he said at last.

"Get up!" cried Travis.

Eckels got up.

"Go out on that Path alone," said Travis. He had his rifle pointed. "You're not coming back in the Machine. We're leaving you here!"

Lesperance seized Travis' arm. "Wait"

"Stay out of this!" Travis shook his hand away. "This son of a bitch nearly killed us. But it isn't that so much. Hell, no. It's his shoes Look at them! He ran off the Path. My God, that ruins us I Christ knows how much we'll forfeit. Tens of thousands of dollars of insurance We guarantee no one leaves the Path. He left it. Oh, the damn fool! Ill have to report to the government. They might revoke our license to travel. God knows what he's done to Time, to History!"

"Take it easy, all he did was kick up some dirt."

"How do we know?" cried Travis. "We don't know anything! It's all a damn mystery! Get out there, Eckels!"

Eckels fumbled his shirt. "Ill pay anything. A hundred thousand dollars!"

Travis glared at Eckels' chequebook and spat. "Go out there. The Monster's next to the Path. Stick your arms up to your elbows in his mouth. Then you can come back with us."

"That's unreasonable!"

"The Monsters dead, you yellow bastard. The bullets! The bullets can't be left behind. They don't belong in the Past; they might change something. Here's my knife. Dig them out!"

The jungle was alive again, full of the old tremorings and bird cries. Eckels turned slowly to regard that primeval garbage dump, that hill of nightmares and terror. After a long time, like a sleepwalker, he shuffled out along the Path. He returned, shuddering, five minutes later, his arms soaked and red to the elbows. He held out his hands. Each held a number of steel bullets. Then he fell. He lay where he fell, not moving.

"You didn't have to make him do that," said Lesperance.

"Didn't I? It's too early to tell." Travis nudged the still body. "He'll live. Next time he won't go hunting game like this. Okay." He jerked his thumb wearily at Lesperance.

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"Switch on. Let's go home."
1492. 1776. 1812.
They cleaned their hands and faces. They changed their caking shirts and pants. Eckels was up and around again, not speaking. Travis glared at him for a full ten minutes.
"Don't look at me," cried Eckels. "I haven't done anything."
"Who can tell?"
"Just ran off the Path, that's all, a little mud on my shoes what do you want me to get down and pray?"
"We might need it. I'm warning you, Eckels, I might kill you yet. I've got my gun ready."
"I'm innocent. I've done nothing]"
1999. 2000. 2055.
The Machine stopped.
"Get out," said Travis.
The room was there as they had left it. But not the same as they had left it. The same man sat behind the same desk. But the same man did not quite sit behind the same desk.
Travis looked around swiftly. "Everything okay here?" he snapped.
"Fine. Welcome home!"
Travis did not relax. He seemed to be looking at the very atoms of the air itself, at the way the sun poured through the one high window.
"Okay, Eckels, get out. Don't ever come back."
Eckels could not move.
"You heard me," said Travis. "What're you staring at?"
Eckels stood smelling of the air, and there was a thing to the air, a chemical taint so subtle, so slight, that only a faint cry of his subliminal senses warned him it was there. The colours, white, grey, blue, orange, in the wall, in the furniture, in the sky beyond the window, were . . . were . . .
And there was a feel. His flesh twitched. His hands twitched. He stood drinking the oddness with the pores of his body. Somewhere, someone must have been screaming one of those whistles that only a dog can hear. His body screamed silence in return. Beyond this room, beyond this wall, beyond this man who was not quite the same man seated at this desk that was not quite the same desk . . . lay an entire world of streets and people. What sort of world it was now, there was no telling. He could feel them moving there, beyond the walls, almost, like so many chess pieces blown in a dry wind. . . .
But the immediate thing was the sign painted on the office wall, the same sign he had read earlier today on first entering.
Somehow, the sign had changed:

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TYME SEFARI INC.
SEFARIS TU ANY YEEH EN THE PAST.
YU NAIM THE ANIMALL.
WEE TAEK YOU THAIR.
YU SHOOT ITT.
Eckels felt himself fall into a chair. He fumbled crazily at the thick slime on his boots. He held up a clod of dirt, trembling. "No, it can't be. Not a little thing like that. No!" Embedded in the mud, glistening green and gold and black, was a butterfly, very beautiful, and very dead.
"Not a little thing like that! Not a butterfly!" cried Eckels.
It fell to the floor, an exquisite thing, a small thing that could upset balances and knock down a line of small dominoes and then big dominoes and then gigantic dominoes, all down the years across Time. Eckels' mind whirled. It couldn't change things. Killing one butterfly couldn't be that important! Could it?
His face was cold. His mouth trembled, asking: "Who won the presidential election yesterday?"
The man behind the desk laughed. "You joking? You know damn well. Deutscher, of course! Who else? Not that damn weakling Keith. We got an iron man now, a man with guts, by God!" The official stopped. "What's wrong?"
Eckels moaned. He dropped to his knees. He scrabbled at the golden butterfly with shaking fingers. "Can't we," he pleaded to the world, to himself, to the officials, to the Machine, "can't we take it back, can't we make it alive again? Can't we start over? Can't we"
He did not move. Eyes shut, he waited, shivering. He heard Travis breathe loud in the room; he heard Travis shift his rifle, click the safety catch, and raise the weapon.
There was a sound of thunder.

Bradbury, Ray - The October Game.txt
Ray Bradbury. The October GameOcenite etot tekstNe chital10987654321Ray Bradbury. The October Game
He put the gun back into the bureau drawer and shut the drawer. No, not that way. Louise wouldn't suffer. It was very important that this thing have, above all duration. Duration through imagination. How to prolong the suffering? How, first of all, to bring it about? Well.
The man standing before the bedroom mirror carefully fitted his cuff-links together. He paused long enough to hear the children run by swiftly on the street below, outside this warm two-storey house, like

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so many grey mice the children, like so many leaves.
By the sound of the children you knew the calendar day. By their screams you knew what evening it was. You knew it was very late in the year. October. The last day of October, with white bone masks and cut pumpkins and the smell of dropped candle wax.
No. Things hadn't been right for some time. October didn't help any. If anything it made things worse. He adjusted his black bow-tie. If this were spring, he nodded slowly, quietly, emotionlessly, at his image in the mirror, then there might be a chance. But tonight all the world was burning down into ruin. There was no green spring, none of the freshness, none of the promise.
There was a soft running in the hall. "That's Marion", he told himself. "My'little one". All eight quiet years of her. Never a word. Just her luminous grey eyes and her wondering little mouth. His daughter had been in and out all evening, trying on various masks, asking him which was most terrifying, most horrible. They had both finally decided on the skeleton mask. It was 'just awful!' It would 'scare the beans' from people!
Again he caught the long look of thought and deliberation he gave himself in the mirror. He had never liked October. Ever since he first lay in the autumn leaves before his granmother's house many years ago and heard the wind and sway the empty trees. It has made him cry, without a reason. And a little of that sadness returned each year to him. It always went away with spring. But, it was different tonight. There was a feeling of autumn coming to last a million years. There would be no spring.
He had been crying quietly all evening. It did not show, not a vesitge of it, on his face. It was all hidden somewhere and it wouldn't stop.
The rich syrupy smell of sweets filled the bustling house. Louise had laid out apples in new skins of toffee; there were vast bowls of punch fresh-mixed, stringed apples in each door, scooped, vented pumpkins peering triangularly from each cold window. There was a water tub in the centre of the living room, waiting, with a sack of apples nearby, for dunking to begin. All that was needed was the catalyst, the impouring of children, to start the apples bobbing, the srtinged apples to penduluming in the crowded doors, the sweets to vanish, the halls to echo with fright or delight, it was all the same.
Now, the house was silent with preparation. And just a little more than that.
Louise had managed to be in every other room save the room he was in today. It was her very fine way of intimating, Oh look Mich, see how busy I am! So busy that when you walk into a room I'm in there's always something I need to do in another room! Just see how I dash about!
For a while he had played a little game with her, a nasty childish game. When she was in the kitchen then he came to the kitchen

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saying, 'I need a glass of water.' After a moment, he standing, drinking water, she like a crystal witch over the caramel brew bubbling like a prehistoric mudpot on the stove, she said, 'Oh, I must light the pumpkins!' and she rushed to the living room to make the pumpkins smile with light. He came after, smiling, 'I must get my pipe.' 'Oh, the cider!' she had cried, running to the dining room.

'I'll check the cider,' he had said. But when he tried following she ran to the bathroom and locked the door.

He stood outside the bathroom door, laughing strangely and senselessly, his pipe gone cold in his mouth, and then, tired of the game, but stubborn, he waited another five minutes. There was not a sound from the bath. And lest she enjoy in any way knowing that he waited outside, irritated, he suddenly jerked about and walked upstairs, whistling merrily.

At the top of the stairs he had waited. Finally he had heard the bathroom door unlatch and she had come out and life below-stairs and resumed, as life in a jungle must resume once a terror has passed on away and the antelope return to their spring.

Now, as he finished his bow-tie and put his dark coat there was a mouse-rustle in the hall. Marion appeared in the door, all skeletons in her disguise.

'How do I look, Papa?'

'Fine!'

From under the mask, blonde hair showed. From the skull sockets small blue eyes smiled. He sighed. Marion and Louise, the two silent denouncers of his virility, his dark power. What alchemy had there been in Louise that took the dark of a dark man and bleached the dark brown eyes and black hair and washed and bleached the ingrown baby all during the period before birth until the child was born, Marion, blonde, blue-eyed, ruddy-cheeked? Sometimes he suspected that Louise had conceived the child as an idea, completely asexual, an immaculate conception of contemptuous mind and cell. As a firm rebuke to him she had produced a child in her own image, and, to top it, she had somehow fixed the doctor so he shook his head and said, 'Sorry, Mr Wilder, your wife will never have another child. This is the last one.'

'And I wanted a boy,' Mich had said eight years ago.

He almost bent to take hold of Marion now, in her skull mask. He felt an inexplicable rush of pity for her, because she had never had a father's love, only the crushing, holding love of a loveless mother.

But most of all he pitied himself, that somehow he had not made the most of a bad birth, enjoyed his daughter for herself, regardless of her not being dark and a son and like himself. Somewhere he had missed out. Other things being equal, he would have loved the child. But Louise hadn't wanted a child, anyway, in the first place. She had been frightened of the idea of birth. He had forced the child on her, and

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from that night, all through the year until the agony of the birth itself, Louise had lived in another part of the house. She had expected to die with the forced child. It had been very easy for Louise to hate this husband who so wanted a son that he gave his only wife over to the mortuary.

But - Louise had lived. And in truimph! Her eyes, the day he came to the hospital, were cold. I'm alive they said. And I have a blonde daughter! Just look! And when he had put out a hand to touch, the mother had turned away to conspire with her new pink daughter-child - away from that dark forcing murderer. It had all been so beautifully ironic. His selfishness deserved it.

But now it was October again. There had been other Octobers and when he thought of the long winter he had been filled with horror year after year to think of the endless months mortared into the house by an insane fall of snow, trapped with a woman and child, neither of whom loved him, for months on end. During the eight years there had been respites. In spring and summer you got out, walked, picknicked; these were desperate solutions to the desperate problem of a hated man.

But, in winter, the hikes and picnics and escapes fell away with leaves. Life, like a tree, stood empty, the fruit picked, the sap run to earth. Yes, you invited people in, but people were hard to get in winter with blizzards and all. Once he had been clever enough to save for a Florida trip. They had gone south. He had walked in the open.

But now, the eighth winter coming, he knew things were finally at

an end. He simply could not wear this one through. There was an acid walled off in him that slowly had eaten through tissue and bone over the years, and now, tonight, it would reach the wild explosive in him and all would be over!

There was a mad ringing of the bell below. In the hall, Louise went to see. Marion, without a word, ran down to greet the first arrivals. There were shouts and hilarity.

He walked to the top of the stairs.

Louise was below, taking cloaks. She was tall and slender and blonde to the point of whiteness, laughing down upon the new children.

He hesitated. What was all this? The years? The boredom of living? Where had it gone wrong? Certainly not with the birth of the child alone. But it had been a symbol of all their tensions, he imagined. His jealousies and his business failures and all the rotten rest of it. Why didn't he just turn, pack a suitcase, and leave? No. Not without hurting Louise as much as she had hurt him. It was simple as that. Divorce wouldn't hurt her at all. It would simply be an end to numb indecision. If he thought divorce would give her pleasure in any way he would stay married the rest of his life to her, for damned spite. No he must hurt her. Figure some way, perhaps, to take Marion

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away from her, legally. Yes. That was it. That would hurt most of all. To take Marion.
'Hello down there!' He descended the stairs beaming.
Louise didn't look up.
'Hi, Mr Wilder!'
The children shouted, waved, as he came down.
By ten o'clock the doorbell had stopped ringing, the apples were bitten from stringed doors, the pink faces were wiped dry from the apple bobbling, napkins were smeared with toffee and punch, and he, the husband, with pleasant efficiency had taken over. He took the party right out of Louise's hands. He ran about talking to the twenty children and the twelve parents who had come and were happy with the special spiked cider he had fixed them. He supervised pin the tail on the donkey, spin the bottle, musical chairs, and all the rest, amid fits of shouting laughter. Then, in the triangular-eyed pumpkin shine, all house lights out, he cried, 'Hush! Follow me!' tiptoeing towards the cellar.
The parents, on the outer periphery of the costumed riot, commented to each other, nodding at the clever husband, speaking to the lucky wife. How well he got on with children, they said.
The children, crowded after the husband, squealing.
'The cellar!' he cried. 'The tomb of the witch!'
More squealing. He made a mock shiver. 'Abandon hope all ye who enter here!'
The parents chuckled.
One by one the children slid down a slide which Mich had fixed up from lengths of table-section, into the dark cellar. He hissed and shouted ghastly utterances after them. A wonderful wailing filled dark pumpkin-lighted house. Everybody talked at once. Everybody but Marion. She had gone through all the party with a minimum of sound or talk; it was all inside her, all the excitement and joy. What a little troll, he thought. With a shut mouth and shiny eyes she had watched her own party, like so many serpentines thrown before her.
Now, the parents. With laughing reluctance they slid down the short incline, uproarious, while little Marion stood by, always wanting to see it all, to be last. Louise went down without help. He moved to aid her, but she was gone even before he bent.
The upper house was empty and silent in the candle-shine. Marion stood by the slide. 'Here we go,' he said, and picked her up.
They sat in a vast circle in the cellar. Warmth came from the distant bulk of the furnace. The chairs stood in a long line along each wall, twenty squealing children, twelve rustling relatives, alternatively spaced, with Louise down at the far end, Mich up at this end, near the stairs. He peered but saw nothing. They had all grouped

to their chairs, catch-as-you-can in the blackness. The entire

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programme from here on was to be enacted in the dark, he as Mr Interlocutor. There was a child scampering, a smell of damp cement, and the sound of the wind out in the October stars.
'Now!' cried the husband in the dark cellar. 'Quiet!'
Everybody settled.
The room was black black. Not a light, not a shine, not a glint of an eye.
A scraping of crockery, a metal rattle.
'The witch is dead,' intoned the husband.
'Eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee,' said the children.
'The witch is dead, she has been killed, and here is the knife she was killed with.' He handed over the knife. It was passed from hand to hand, down and around the circle, with chuckles and little odd cries and comments from the adults.
'The witch is dead, and this is her head,' whispered the husband, and handed an item to the nearest person.
'Oh, I know how this game is played,' some child cried, happily, in the dark. 'He gets some old chicken innards from the icebox and hands them around and says, "These are her innards!" And he makes a clay head and passes it for her head, and passes a soup bone for her arm. And he takes a marble and says, "This is her eye!" And he takes some corn and says, "This is her teeth!" And he takes a sack of plum pudding and gives that and says, "This is her stomach!&" I know how this is played!'
'Hush, you'll spoil everything,' some girl said.
'The witch came to harm, and this is her arm,' said Mich.
'Eeeeeeeeeee!'
The items were passed and passed, like hot potatoes, around the cirle. Some children screamed, wouldn't touch them. Some ran from their chairs to stand in the centre of the cellar until the grisly items had passed.
'Aw, it's only chicken insides,' scoffed a boy. 'Come back, Helen!'
Shot from hand to hand, with small scream after scream, the items went down, down, to be followed by another and another.
'The witch cut apart, and this is her heart,' said the husband.
Six or seven items moving at once through the laughing, trembling dark.
Louise spoke up. 'Marion, don't be afraid; it's only play."
Marion didn't say anything.
'Marion?, asked Louise. 'Are you afraid?'
Marion didn't speak.
'She's all right,' said the husband. 'She's not afraid.'
On and on the passing, the screams, the hilarity.
The autumn wind sighed about the house. And he, the husband stood at the head of the dark cellar, intoning the words, handing out the items.
'Marion?' asked Louise again, from far across the cellar.

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Everybody was talking.
'Marion?' called Louise.
Everybody quieted.
'Marion, answer me, are you afraid?'
Marion didn't answer.
The husband stood there, at the bottom of the cellar steps.
Louise called 'Marion, are you there?'
No answer. The room was silent.
'Where's Marion?' called Louise.
'She was here', said a boy.
'Maybe she's upstairs.'
'Marion!'
No answer. It was quiet.
Louise cried out, 'Marion, Marion!'
'Turn on the lights,' said one of the adults.

The items stopped passing. The children and adults sat with the witch's items in their hands.
'No.' Louise gasped. There was a scraping of her chair, wildly, in the dark. 'No. Don't turn on the lights, oh, God, God, God, don't turn them on, please, don't turn on the lights, don't!.Louise was shrieking now. The entire cellar froze with the scream.
Nobody moved.
Everyone sat in the dark cellar, suspended in the suddenly frozen task of this October game; the wind blew outside, banging the house, the smell of pumpkins and apples filled the room with the smell of the objects in their fingers while one boy cried, 'I'll go upstairs and look!' and he ran upstairs hopefully and out around the house, four times around the house, calling, 'Marion, Marion, Marion!' over and over and at last coming slowly down the stairs into the waiting breathing cellar and saying to the darkenss, 'I can't find her.'
Then ..... some idiot turned on the lights.
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THE BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMSRay Bradbury: The Foghorn
ELECTRONIC VERSION 1.0 (Apr 05 00). If you find and correct errors in the text, please update the version number by 0.1 and redistribute.
OUT there in the cold water, far from land, we waited every night for the coming of the fog, and it came, and we oiled the brass machinery and lit the fog light up in the stone tower. Feeling like two birds in the grey sky, McDunn and I sent the light touching out, red, then white, then red again, to eye the lonely

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ships. And if they did not see our light, then there was always our Voice, the great deep cry of our Fog Horn shuddering through the rags of mist to startle the gulls away like decks of scattered cards and make the waves turn high and foam.

"It's a lonely life, but you're used to it now, aren't you?" asked McDunn.

"Yes," I said. "You're a good talker, thank the Lord."

"Well, it's your turn on land tomorrow," he said, smiling, "to dance the ladies and drink gin."

"What do you think McDunn, when I leave you out here alone?"

"On the mysteries of the sea." McDunn lit his pipe. It was a quarter past seven of a cold November evening, the heat on, the light switching its tail in two hundred directions, the Fog Horn bumbling in the high throat of the tower. There wasn't a town for a hundred miles down the coast, just a road, which came lonely through dead country to the sea, with few cars on it, a stretch of two miles of cold water out to our rock, and rare few ships.

"The mysteries of the sea," said McDunn thoughtfully. "You know, the ocean's the biggest damned snowflake ever? It rolls and swells a thousand shapes and colours, no two alike. Strange. One night, years ago, I was here alone, when all of the fish of the sea surfaced out there. Something made them swim in and lie in the bay, sort of trembling and staring up at the tower light going red, white, red, white across them so I could see their funny eyes. I turned cold. They were like a big peacock's tail, moving out there until midnight. Then, without so much as a sound, they slipped away, the million of them was gone. I kind of think maybe, in some sort of way, they came all those miles to worship. Strange. But think how the tower must look to them, standing seventy feet above the water, the God-light flashing out from it, and the tower declaring itself with a monster voice. They never came back, those fish, but don't you think for a while they thought they were in the Presence?"

I shivered. I looked out at the long grey lawn of the sea stretching away into nothing and nowhere.

"Oh, the sea's full." McDunn puffed his pipe nervously, blinking. He had been nervous all day and hadn't said why. "For all our engines and so called submarines, it'll be ten thousand centuries before we set foot on the real bottom of the sunken lands, in the fairy kingdoms there, and know real terror. Think of it, it's still the year 300,000 Before Christ down under there. While we've paraded around with trumpets, lopping off each other's countries and heads, they have been living beneath the sea twelve miles deep and cold in a time as old as the beard of a comet."

"Yes, it's an old world."

"Come on. I got something special I been saving up to tell you."

We ascended the eighty steps, talking and taking our time. At the top, McDunn switched off the room lights so there'd be no reflection in the plate glass. The great eye of the light was humming, turning easily in its oiled socket. The Fog Horn was blowing steadily, once every fifteen seconds.

"Sounds like an animal, don't it?" McDunn nodded to himself. "A big lonely animal crying in the night. Sitting here on the edge of ten billion years calling out to the Deeps, I'm here, I'm here, I'm here. And the Deeps do answer,

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yes, they do. You been here now for three months, Johnny, so I better prepare you. About this time of year," he said, studying the murk and fog, "something comes to visit the lighthouse."
"The swarms of fish like you said?"
"No, this is something else. I've put off telling you because you might think I'm daft. But tonight's the latest I can put it off, for if my calendar's marked right from last year, tonight's the night it comes. I won t go into detail,

you'll have to see it yourself. Just sit down there. If you want, tomorrow you can pack your duffel and take the motorboat into land and get your car parked there at the dinghy pier on the cape and drive on back to some little inland town and keep your lights burning nights. I won't question or blame you. It's happened three years now, and this is the only time anyone's been here with me to verify it. You wait and watch."
Half an hour passed with only a few whispers between us. When we grew tired waiting, McDunn began describing some of his ideas to me. He had some theories about the Fog Horn itself.
"One day many years ago a man walked along and stood in the sound of the ocean on a cold sunless shore and said, 'We need a voice to call across the water, to warn ships; I'll make one. I'll make a voice like all of time and all of the fog that ever was; I'll make a voice that is like an empty bed beside you all night long, and like an empty house when you open the door, and like trees in autumn with no leaves. A sound like the birds flying south, crying, and a sound like November wind and the sea on the hard, cold shore. I'll make a sound that's so alone that no one can miss it, that whoever hears it will weep in their souls, and hearths will seem warmer, and being inside will seem better to all who hear it in the distant towns. I'll make me a sound and an apparatus and they'll call it a Fog Horn and whoever hears it will know the sadness of eternity and the briefness of life.'"
The Fog Horn blew.
"I made up that story," said McDunn quietly, "to try to explain why this thing keeps coming back to the lighthouse every year. The Fog Horn calls, I think, it comes. . ."
"But-" I said.
"Sssst!" said McDunn. "There!" He nodded out to the Deeps.
Something was swimming towards the lighthouse tower.
It was a cold night, as I have said; the high tower was cold, the light coming and going, and the Fog Horn calling and calling through the ravelling mist. You couldn't see far and you couldn't see plain, but there was the deep sea moving on its way about the night earth, flat and quiet, the colour of grey mud, and here were the two of us alone in the high tower, and there, far out at first, was a ripple, followed by a wave, a rising, a bubble, a bit of froth. And then, from the surface of the cold sea came a head, a large head, dark-coloured, with immense eyes, and then a neck. And then--not a body--but more neck and more! The head rose a full forty feet above the water on a slender and beautiful dark neck. Only then did the body, like a little island of black coral and shells and

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crayfish, drip up from the subterranean. There was a flicker of tail. In all, from head to tip of tail, I estimated the monster at ninety or a hundred feet.
I don't know what I said. I said something.
"Steady, boy, steady," whispered McDunn.
"It's impossible!" I said.
"No, Johnny, we're impossible. It's like it always was ten million years ago. It hasn't changed. It's us and the land that've changed, become impossible. Us!"
It swam slowly and with a great dark majesty out in the icy waters, far away. The fog came and went about it, momentarily erasing its shape. One of the monster eyes caught and held and flashed back our immense light, red, white, red, white, like a disc held high and sending a message in primaeval code. It was as silent as the fog through which it swam.
"It's a dinosaur of some sort--" I crouched down, holding to the stair rail.
"Yes, one of the tribe."
"But they died out!"
"No, only hid away in the Deeps. Deep, deep down in the deepest Deeps. Isn't that a word now, Johnny, a real word, it says so much: the Deeps. There's all the coldness and darkness and deepness in the world in a word like that."
"What'll we do?"
"Do? We got our job, we can't leave. Besides, we're safer here than in any boat trying to get to land. That thing's as big as a destroyer and almost as swift."
"But here, why does it come here?"
The next moment I had my answer.
The Fog Horn blew.
And the monster answered.
A cry came across a million years of water and mist. A cry so anguished and

alone that it shuddered in my head and my body. The monster cried out at the tower. The Fog Horn blew. The monster roared again. The Fog Horn blew. The monster opened its great toothed mouth and the sound that came from it was the sound of the Fog Horn itself. Lonely and vast and far away. The sound of isolation, a viewless sea, a cold night, apartness. That was the sound.
"Now," whispered McDunn, "do you know why it comes here?"
I nodded.
"All year long, Johnny, that poor monster there lying far out, a thousand miles at sea, and twenty miles deep maybe, biding its time, perhaps it’s a million years old, this one creature. Think of it, waiting a million years; could you wait that long? Maybe it's the last of its kind. I sort of think that's true.
Anyway, here come men on land and build this lighthouse, five years ago. And set up their Fog Horn and sound it and sound it out towards the place where you bury yourself in sleep and sea memories of a world where there were thousands like yourself, but now you're alone, all alone in a world not made for you, a world where you have to hide."
"But the sound of the Fog Horn comes and goes, comes and goes, and you stir from the muddy bottom of the Deeps, and your eyes open like the lenses of two-foot cameras and you move, slow, slow, for you have the ocean sea on your shoulders,

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heavy. But that Fog Horn comes through a thousand miles of water, faint and familiar, and the furnace in your belly stokes up, and you begin to rise, slow, slow. You feed yourself on great slakes of cod and minnow, on rivers of jellyfish, and you rise slow through the autumn months, through September when the fogs started, through October with more fog and the horn still calling you on, and then, late in November, after pressurizing yourself day by day, a few feet higher every hour, you are near the surface and still alive, You've got to go slow; if you surfaced all at once you'd explode. So it takes you all of three months to surface, and then a number of days to swim through the cold waters to the lighthouse. And there you are, out there, in the night, Johnny, the biggest damn monster in creation. And here's the lighthouse calling to you, with a long neck like your neck sticking way up out of the water, and a body like your body, and, most important of all, a voice like your voice. Do you understand now, Johnny, do you understand?"

The Fog Horn blew.

The monster answered.

I saw it all, I knew it all--the million years of waiting alone, for someone to come back who never came back. The million years of isolation at the bottom of the sea, the insanity of time there, while the skies cleared of reptile-birds, the swamps dried on the continental lands, the sloths and sabre-tooths had their day and sank in tar pits, and men ran like white ants upon the hills.

The Fog Horn blew.

"Last year," said McDunn, "that creature swam round and round, round and round, all night. Not coming too near, puzzled, I'd say. Afraid, maybe. And a bit angry after coming all this way. But the next day, unexpectedly, the fog lifted, the sun came out fresh, the sky was as blue as a painting. And the monster swam off away from the heat and the silence and didn't come back. I suppose it's been brooding on it for a year now, thinking it over from every which way."

The monster was only a hundred yards off now, it and the Fog Horn crying at each other. As the lights hit them, the monster's eyes were fire and ice, fire and ice.

"That's life for you," said McDunn. "Someone always waiting for someone who never comes home. Always someone loving some thing more than that thing loves them. And after a while you want to destroy whatever that thing is, so it can't hurt you no more."

The monster was rushing at the lighthouse.

The Fog Horn blew.

"Let's see what happens," said McDunn.

He switched the Fog Horn off.

The ensuing minute of silence was so intense that we could hear our hearts pounding in the glassed area of the tower, could hear the slow greased turn of the light.

The monster stopped and froze. Its great lantern eyes blinked. Its mouth gaped. It gave a sort of rumble, like a volcano. It twitched its head this way and that, as if to seek the sounds now dwindled off into the fog. It peered at the

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lighthouse. It rumbled again. Then its eyes caught fire. It reared up, threshed the water, and rushed at the tower, its eyes filled with angry torment.

"McDunn!" I cried. "Switch on the horn!"

McDunn fumbled with the switch. But even as he flicked it on, the monster was rearing up. I had a glimpse of its gigantic paws, fish-skin glittering in webs between the finger-like projections, clawing at the tower. The huge eye on the right side of its anguished head glittered before me like a cauldron into which I might drop, screaming. The tower shook. The Fog Horn cried; the monster cried. It seized the tower and gnashed at the glass, which shattered in upon us.

McDunn seized my arm. "Downstairs!"

The tower rocked, trembled, and started to give. The Fog Horn and the monster roared. We stumbled and half fell down the stairs. "Quick!"

We reached the bottom as the tower buckled down towards us. We ducked under the stairs into the small stone cellar. There were a thousand concussions as the rocks rained down; the Fog Horn stopped abruptly. The monster crashed upon the tower. The tower fell. We knelt together, McDunn and I, holding tight, while our world exploded.

Then it was over, and there was nothing but darkness and the wash of the sea on the raw stones.

That and the other sound.

"Listen," said McDunn quietly. "Listen."

We waited a moment. And then I began to hear it. First a great vacuumed sucking of air, and then the lament, the bewilderment, the loneliness of the great monster, folded over and upon us, above us, so that the sickening reek of its body filled the air, a stone's thickness away from our cellar. The monster gasped and cried. The tower was gone. The light was gone. The thing that had called to it across a million years was gone. And the monster was opening its mouth and sending out great sounds. The sounds of a Fog Horn, again and again. And ships far at sea, not finding the light, not seeing anything, but passing and hearing late that night, must've thought: There it is, the lonely sound, the Lonesome Bay horn. All's well. We've rounded the cape.

And so it went for the rest of that night.

The sun was hot and yellow the next afternoon when the rescuers came out to dig us from our stoned-under cellar.

"It fell apart, is all," said Mr. McDunn gravely. "We had a few bad knocks from the waves and it just crumbled." He pinched my arm.

There was nothing to see. The ocean was calm, the sky blue. The only thing was a great algaic stink from the green matter that covered the fallen tower stones and the shore rocks. Flies buzzed about. The ocean washed empty on the shore.

The next year they built a new lighthouse, but by that time I had a job in the little town and a wife and a good small warm house that glowed yellow on autumn nights, the doors locked, the chimney puffing smoke. As for McDunn, he was master of the new lighthouse, built to his own specifications out of steel-reinforced concrete. "Just in case," he said.

The new lighthouse was ready in November. I drove down alone one evening late and parked my car and looked across the grey waters and listened to the new horn sounding, once, twice, three, four times a minute far out there, by itself.

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The monster?
It never came back.
"It's gone away," said McDunne "It's gone back to the Deeps. It's learned you can't love anything too much in this world. It's gone into the deepest Deeps to wait another million years. Ah, the poor thing! Waiting out there, and waiting out there, while man comes and goes on this pitiful little planet. waiting and waiting."
I sat in my car, listening. I couldn't see the lighthouse or the light standing out in Lonesome Bay. I could only hear the Horn, the Horn, the Horn. It sounded like the monster calling.
I sat there wishing there was something I could say.

Bradbury, Ray - The Pendulum.txt
PENDULUM
by Ray Bradbury and Henry Hasse
Prisoner of Time was he, outlawed from Life and Death alike the strange, brooding creature who watched the ages roll by and waited half fearfully for--eternity?
"I THINK," shrilled Erjas, "that this is our most intriguing discovery on any of the worlds we have yet visited!"
His wide, green-shimmering wings fluttered, his beady bird eyes flashed excitement. His several companions bobbed their heads in agreement, the greenish-gold down on their slender necks ruffling softly. They were perched on what had once been a moving sidewalk but was now only a twisted ribbon of wreckage overlooking the vast expanse of a ruined city.
"Yes," Erjas continued, "it's baffling, fantastic! It--it has no reason for being." He pointed unnecessarily to the object of their attention, resting on the high stone plaza a short distance away. "Look at it! Just a huge tubular pendulum hanging from that towering framework! And the machinery, the coggery which must have once sent it swinging . . . I flew up there a while ago to examine it, but it's hopelessly corroded."
"But the head of the pendulum!" another of the bird creatures said awedly. "A hollow chamber--transparent, glassite--and that awful thing staring out of it...."
Pressed close to the inner side of the pendulum head was a single human skeleton. The whitened skull seemed to stare out over the desolate, crumbling city as though regarding with amusement the heaps of powdery masonry and the bare steel girders that drooped to the ground, giving the effect of huge spiders poised to spring.
"It's enough to make one shudder--the way that thing grins! Almost as though--"
"The grin means nothing!" Erjas interrupted annoyedly. "That is only the skeletal remains of one of the mammal creatures who once, undoubtedly, inhabited this world." He shifted nervously from one spindly leg to the other, as he glanced again at the grinning skull. "And yet, it does seem to be

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almost--triumphant! And why are there no more of them around? Why is he the only one . . . and why is he encased in that fantastic pendulum head?"
"We shall soon know," another of the bird creatures trilled softly, glancing at their spaceship which rested amidst the ruins, a short distance away. "Orfleew is even now deciphering the strange writing in the book he salvaged from the pendulum head. We must not disturb him."
"How did he get the book? I see no opening in that transparent chamber."
"The long pendulum arm is hollow, apparently in order to vacuum out the cell. The book was crumbling with age when Orfleew got it out, but he saved most of it."
"I wish he would hurry! Why must he--"
"Shh! Give him time. Orfleew will decipher the writing; he has an amazing genius for alien languages."
"Yes. I remember the metal tablets on that tiny planet in the constellation--"
"Here he comes now!"
"He's finished already!"
"We shall soon know the story...."
The bird creatures fairly quivered as Orfleew appeared in the open doorway of their spaceship, carefully carrying a sheaf of yellowed pages. He waved to them, spread his wings and soared outward. A moment later he alighted beside his companions on their narrow perch.
"The language is simple," Orfleew told them, "and the story is a sad one. I will read it to you and then we must depart, for there is nothing we can do on this world."
They edged closer to him there on the metal strand, eagerly awaiting the first

words. The pendulum hung very straight and very still on a windless world, the transparent head only a few feet above the plaza floor. The grinning skull still peered out as though hugely amused or hugely satisfied. Orfleew took one more fleeting look at it . . . then he opened the crumbling notebook and began to read.
MY NAME John Layeville. I am known as "The Prisoner of Time." People, tourists from all over the world, come to look at me in my swinging pendulum. School children, on the electrically moving sidewalks surrounding the plaza, stare at me in childish awe. Scientists, studying me, stand out there and train their instruments on the swinging pendulum head. Oh, they could stop the swinging, they could release me--but now I know that will never happen. This all began as a punishment for me, but now I am an enigma to science. I seem to be immortal. It is ironic.
A punishment for me! Now, as through a mist, my memory spins back to the day when all this started. I remember I had found a way to bridge time gaps and travel into futurity. I remember the time device I built. No, it did not in any way resemble this pendulum--my device was merely a huge box-like affair of specially treated metal and glassite, with a series of electric rotors of my own design which set up conflicting, but orderly, fields of stress. I had tested it to perfection no less than three times, but none of the others in the Council of

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Scientists would believe me. They all laughed. And Leske laughed. Especially Leske, for he has always hated me.

I offered to demonstrate, to prove. I invited the Council to bring others--all the greatest minds in the scientific world. At last, anticipating an amusing evening at my expense, they agreed.

I shall never forget that evening when a hundred of the world's greatest scientists gathered in the main Council laboratory. But they had come to jeer, not to cheer. I did not care, as I stood on the platform beside my ponderous machine and listened to the amused murmur of voices. Nor did I care that miliions of other unbelieving eyes were watching by television, Leske having indulged in a campaign of mockery against the possibility of time travel. I did not care, because I knew that in a few minutes Leske's campaign would be turned into victory for me. I would set my rotors humming, I would pull the control switch--and my machine would flash away into a time dimension and back again, as I had already seen it do three times. Later we would send a man out in the machine.

The moment arrived. But fate had decreed it was to be my moment of doom. Something went wrong, even now I do not know what or why. Perhaps the television concentration in the room affected the stress of the time-fields my rotors set up. The last thing I remember seeing, as I reached out and touched the main control switch, were the neat rows of smiling white faces of the important men seated in the laboratory. My hand came down on the switch....

Even now I shudder, remembering the vast mind-numbing horror of that moment. A terrific sheet of electrical flame, greenish and writhing and alien, leaped across the laboratory from wall to wall, blasting into ashes everything in its path!

Before millions of television witnesses I had slain the world's greatest scientists!

No, not all. Leske and myself and a few others who were behind the machine escaped with severe burns. I was least injured of all, which seemed to increase the fury of the populace against me. I was swept to a hasty trial, faced jeering throngs who called out for my death.

"Destroy the time machine," was the watchword, "and destroy this murderer with it!"

Murderer! I had only sought to help humanity. In vain I tried to explain the accident, but popular resentment is a thing not to be reasoned with.

One day, weeks later, I was taken from my secret prison and hurried, under heavy guard, to the hospital room where Leske lay. He raised himself on one arm and his smouldering eyes looked at me. That's all I could see of him, just his eyes; the rest of him was swathed in bandages. For a moment he just looked; and if

ever I saw insanity, but a cunning insanity, in a man's eyes, it was then,

For about ten seconds he looked, then with a great effort he pointed a bulging, bandaged arm at me.

"No, do not destroy him," he mumbled to the authorities gathered around. "Destroy his machine, yes, but save the parts. I have a better plan, a fitting

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one, for this man who murdered the world's greatest scientists. "
I remembered Leske's old hatred of me, and I shuddered.
IN THE weeks that followed, one of my guards told me with a sort of malicious pleasure of my time device being dismantled, and secret things being done with it. Leske was directing the operations from his bed.
At last came the day when I was led forth and saw the huge pendulum for the first time. As I looked at it there, fantastic and formidible, I realized as never before the extent of Leske's insane revenge. And the populace seemed equally vengeful, equally cruel, like the ancient Romans on a gladiatorial holiday. In a sudden panic of terror, I shrieked and tried to leap away.
That only amused the people who crowded the electrical sidewalks around the plaza. They laughed and shrieked derisively.
My guards thrust me into the glass pendulum head and I lay there quivering, realizing the irony of my fate. This pendulum had been built from the precious metal and glassite of my own time device! It was intended as a monument to my slaughtering! I was being put on exhibition for life within my own executioning device! The crowd roared thunderous approval, damning me.
Then a little click and a whirring above me, and my glass prison began to move. It increased in speed. The arc of the pendulum's swing lengthened. I remember how I pounded at the glass, futilely screaming, and how my hands bled. I remember the rows of faces becoming blurred white blobs before me....
I did not become insane, as I had thought at first I would. I did not mind it so much; that first night. I couldn't sleep but it wasn't uncomfortable. The lights of the city were comets with tails that pelted from right to left like foaming fireworks. But as the night wore on I felt a gnawing in my stomach that grew worse until I became very sick. The next day was the same and I couldn't eat anything. In the days that followed they never stopped the pendulum, not once. They slid my food down the hollow pendulum stem in little round parcels that plunked at my feet. The first time I attempted eating I was unsuccessful; it wouldn't stay down. In desperation I hammered against the cold glass with my fists until they bled again, and I cried hoarsely, but heard nothing but my own weak words muffled in my ears.
After an infinitude of misery, I began to eat and even sleep while traveling back and forth this way . . . they had allowed me small glass loops on the floor with which I fastened myself down at night and slept a soundless slumber, without sliding. I even began to take an interest in the world outside, watching it tip one way and another, back and forth and up and down, dizzily before my eyes until they ached. The monotonous movements never changed. So huge was the pendulum that it shadowed one hundred feet or more with every majestic sweep of its gleaming shape, hanging from the metal intestines of the machine overhead. I estimated that it took four or five seconds for it to traverse the arc.
On and on like this--for how long would it be? I dared not think of it....
DAY by day I began to concentrate on the gaping, curiosity-etched faces outside--faces that spoke soundless words, laughing and pointing at me, the prisoner of time, traveling forever nowhere. Then after a time--was it weeks or months or years?--the town people ceased to come and it was only tourists who came to stare....

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Once a day the attendants sent down my food, once a day they sent down a tube to vacuum out the cell. The days and nights ran together in my memory until time came to mean very little to me....

IT WAS not until I knew, inevitably, that I was doomed forever to this swinging chamber, that the thought occurred to me to leave a written record. Then the idea obsessed me and I could think of nothing else.

I had noticed that once a day an attendant climbed into the whirring coggery overhead in order to drop my food down the tube. I began to tap code signals along the tube, a request for writing materials. For days, weeks, months, my

signals remained unanswered. I became infuriated--and more persistent.

Then, at long last, the day when not only my packet of food came down the tube, but with it a heavy notebook, and writing materials! I suppose the attendant above became weary at last of my tappings! I was in a perfect ecstasy of joy at this slight luxury.

I have spent the last few days in recounting my story, without any undue elaboration. I am weary now of writing, but I shall continue from time to time--in the present tense instead of the past.

My pendulum still swings in its unvarying arc. I am sure it has been not months, but years! I am accustomed to it now. I think if the pendulum were to stop suddenly, I should go mad at the motionless existence!

(Later): There is unusual activity on the electrically moving sidewalks surrounding me. Men are coming, scientists, and setting up peculiar looking instruments with which to study me at a distance. I think I know the reason. I guessed it some time ago. I have not recorded the years, but I suspect that I have already outlived Leske and all the others! I know my cheeks have developed a short beard which suddenly ceased growing, and I feel a curious, tingling vitality. I feel that I shall outlive them all! I cannot account for it, nor can they out there, those scientists who now examine me so scrupulously. And they dare not stop my pendulum, my little world, for fear of the effect it may have on me!

(Still later): These men, these puny scientists, have dropped a microphone down the tube to me! They have actually remembered that I was once a great scientist, encased here cruelly. In vain they have sought the reason for my longevity; now they want me to converse with them, giving my symptoms and reactions and suggestions! They are perplexed, but hopeful, desiring the secret of eternal life to which they feel I can give them a clue. I have already been here two hundred years, they tell me; they are the fifth generation.

At first I said not a word, paying no attention to the microphone. I merely listened to their babblings and pleadings until I weared of it. Then I grasped the microphone and looked up and saw their tense, eager faces, awaiting my words.

"One does not easily forgive such an injustice as this," I shouted. "And I do not believe I shall be ready to until five more generations."

Then I laughed. Oh, how I laughed.

"He's insane!" I heard one of them say: "The secret of immortality may lie

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somehow with him, but I feel we shall never learn it; and we dare not stop the pendulum--that might break the timefield, or whatever it is that's holding him in thrall...."

(MUCH LATER): It has been a longer time than I care to think, since I wrote those last words. Years . . . I know not how many. I have almost forgotten how to hold a pencil in my fingers to write.

Many things have transpired, many changes have come in the crazy world out there.

Once I saw wave after wave of planes, so many that they darkened the sky, far out in the direction of the ocean, moving toward the city; and a host of planes arising from here, going out to meet them; and a brief, but lurid and devastating battle in which planes fell like leaves in the wind; and some planes triumphantly returning, I know not which ones...

But all that was very long ago, and it matters not to me. My daily parcels of food continue to come down the pendulem stem; I suspect that it has become a sort of ritual, and the inhabitants of the city, whoever they are now, have long since forgotten the legend of why I was encased here. My little world continues to swing in its arc, and I continue to observe the puny little creatures out there who blunder through their brief span of life.

Already I have outlived generations! Now I want to outlive the very last one of them! I shall!

. . . Another thing, too, I have noticed. The attendants who daily drop the parcels of food for me, and vacuum out the cell, are robots! Square, clumsy, ponderous and four-limbed things--unmistakably metal robots, only vaguely human in shape.

. . . I begin to see more and more of these clumsy robots about the city. Oh, yes, humans too--but they only come on sight-seeing tours and pleasure jaunts now; they live, for the most part, in luxury high among the towering buildings. Only the robots occupy the lower level now, doing all the menial and mechanical tasks necessary to the operation of the city. This, I suppose, is progress as these self centered beings have willed it.

. . . robots are becoming more complicated, more human in shape and movements . . . and more numerous . . . uncanny ... I have a premonition....

(Later): It has come! I knew it! Vast, surging activity out there . . . the humans, soft from an aeon of luxury and idleness, could not even escape . . . those who tried, in their rocket planes, were brought down by the pale, rosy electronic beams of the robots . . . others of the humans, more daring or desperate, tried to sweep low over the central robot base and drop thermite bombs--but the robots had erected an electronic barrier which hurled the bombs back among the planes, causing inestimable havoc....

The revolt was brief, but inevitably successful. I suspect that all human life except mine has been swept from the earth. I begin to see, now, how cunningly the robots devised it.

The humans had gone forward recklessly and blindly to achieve their Utopia; they had designed their robots with more and more intricacy, more and more finesse,

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until the great day when they were able to leave the entire operation of the city to the robots--under the guidance perhaps of one or two humans. But somewhere, somehow, one of those robots was imbued with a spark of intelligence; it began to think, slowly but precisely; it began to add unto itself, perhaps secretly; until finally it had evolved itself into a terribly efficient unit of inspired intelligence, a central mechanical Brain which planned this revolt.

At least, so I pictured it. Only the robots are left now--but very intelligent robots. A group of them came yesterday and stood before my swinging pendulum and seemed to confer among themselves. They surely must recognize me as one of the humans, the last one left. Do they plan to destroy me too?

No. I must have become a legend, even among the robots. My pendulum still swings. They have now encased the operating mechanism beneath a protective glassite dome. They have erected a device whereby my daily parcel of food is dropped to me mechanically. They no longer come near me; they seem to have forgotten me.

This infuriates me! Well, I shall outlast them too! After all, they are but products of the human brain . . . I shall outlast everything even remotely human! I swear it!

(MUCH LATER): Is this the end? I have seen the end of the reign of the robots! Yesterday, just as the sun was crimsoning in the west, I perceived the hordes of things that came swarming out of space, expanding in the heavens . . . alien creatures fluttering down, great gelatinous masses of black that clustered thickly over everything....

I saw the robot rocket planes criss-crossing the sky on pillars of scarlet flame, blasting into the black masses with their electronic beams--but the alien things were unperturbed and unaffected! Closer and closer they pressed to earth, until the robot rockets began to dart helplessly for shelter.

To no avail. The silvery robot ships began crashing to earth in ghastly devastation, like drops of mercury splashing on tiles....

And the black gelatinous masses came ever closer, to spread over the earth, to crumble the city and corrode whatever metal was left exposed.

Except my pendulum. They came dripping darkly down over it, over the glassite dome which protects the whirring wheels and roaring bowels of the mechanism. The city has crumbled, the robots are destroyed, but my pendulum still moves, the only moving thing on this world now . . . and I know that fact puzzles these alien things and they will not be content until they have stopped it....

This all happened yesterday. I am lying very still now, watching them. Most of them are gathering out there over the ruins of the city, preparing to leave--except a few of the black quivering things that are still hanging to my pendulum, almost blotting out the sunlight; and a few more above, near the operating machinery, concentrating those same emanations by which they corroded the robots. They are determined to do a complete job here. I know that in a few

minutes they will begin to take effect, even through the glassite shield. I shall continue to write until my pendulum stops swinging. .... it is happening now. I can feel a peculiar grinding and grating in the coggery above. Soon my

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tiny glassite world will cease its relentless arc.
I feel now only a fierce elation flaming ithin me, for after all, this is my victory ! I have conquered over the men who planned this punishment for me, and over countless other generations, and over the final robots themselves! There is nothing more I desire except annihilation, and I am sure that will come automatically when my pendulum ceases, bringing me to a state of unendurable motionlessness....
It is coming now. Those black, gelatinous shapes above are drifting away to join their companions. The mechanism is grinding raucously. My arc is narrowing ... smaller ... smaller....
I feel ... so strange....
THE END

Rej Bredberi. Vel'd (original in english)Ocenite etot tekstNe chital10987654321Rej Bredberi. Vel'd (original in english)
Ray Bradbury. The Veldt
"George, I wish you'd look at the nursery."
"What's wrong with it?"
"I don't know."
"Well, then."
"I just want you to look at it, is all, or call a psychologist in to look at it."
"What would a psychologist want with a nursery?"
"You know very well what he'd want." His wife paused in the middle of the kitchen and watched the stove busy humming to itself, making supper for four.
"It's just that the nursery is different now than it was."
"All right, let's have a look."
They walked down the hall of their soundproofed Happylife Home, which had cost them thirty thousand dollars installed, this house which clothed and fed and rocked them to sleep and played and sang and was good to them.
Their approach sensitized a switch somewhere and the nursery light flicked on when they came within ten feet of it. Similarly, behind them, in the halls, lights went on and off as they left them behind, with a soft automaticity.

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"Well," said George Hadley.
They stood on the thatched floor of the nursery. It was forty feet across by forty feet long and thirty feet high; it had cost half again as much as the rest of the house. "But nothing's too good for our children," George had said.
The nursery was silent. It was empty as a jungle glade at hot high noon. The walls were blank and two dimensional. Now, as George and Lydia Hadley stood in the center of the room, the walls began to purr and recede into crystalline distance, it seemed, and presently an African veldt appeared, in three dimensions, on all sides, in color reproduced to the final pebble and bit of straw. The ceiling above them became a deep sky with a hot yellow sun.
George Hadley felt the perspiration start on his brow.
"Let's get out of this sun," he said. "This is a little too real. But I don't see anything wrong."
"Wait a moment, you'll see," said his wife.
Now the hidden odorophonics were beginning to blow a wind of odor at the two people in the middle of the baked veldtland. The hot straw smell of lion grass, the cool green smell of the hidden water hole, the great rusty smell of animals, the smell of dust like a red paprika in the hot air. And now the sounds: the thump of distant antelope feet on grassy sod, the papery rustling of vultures. A shadow passed through the sky. The shadow flickered on George Hadley's upturned, sweating face.
"Filthy creatures," he heard his wife say.
"The vultures."
"You see, there are the lions, far over, that way. Now they're on their way to the water hole. They've just been eating," said Lydia. "I don't know what."
"Some animal." George Hadley put his hand up to shield off the

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burning
light from his squinted eyes. "A zebra or a baby giraffe, maybe."
"Are you sure?" His wife sounded peculiarly tense.
"No, it's a little late to be sure," be said, amused. "Nothing
over
there I can see but cleaned bone, and the vultures dropping for
what's
left."
"Did you bear that scream?" she asked.
'No."
"About a minute ago?"
"Sorry, no."
The lions were coming. And again George Hadley was filled
with
admiration for the mechanical genius who had conceived this room. A
miracle
of efficiency selling for an absurdly low price. Every home should have
one.
Oh, occasionally they frightened you with their clinical accuracy,
they
startled you, gave you a twinge, but most of the time what fun for
everyone,
not only your own son and daughter, but for yourself when you felt
like a
quick jaunt to a foreign land, a quick change of scenery. Well, here it
was!
And here were the lions now, fifteen feet away, so real, so
feverishly
and startlingly real that you could feel the prickling fur on your hand,
and
your mouth was stuffed with the dusty upholstery smell of their
heated
pelts, and the yellow of them was in your eyes like the yellow of
an
exquisite French tapestry, the yellows of lions and summer grass, and
the
sound of the matted lion lungs exhaling on the silent noontide, and
the
smell of meat from the panting, dripping mouths.
The lions stood looking at George and Lydia Hadley with
terrible
green-yellow eyes.
"Watch out!" screamed Lydia.
The lions came running at them.
Lydia bolted and ran. Instinctively, George sprang after her.
Outside,
in the hall, with the door slammed he was laughing and she was crying,

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and
they both stood appalled at the other's reaction.
"George!"
"Lydia! Oh, my dear poor sweet Lydia!"
"They almost got us!"
"Walls, Lydia, remember; crystal walls, that's all they are. Oh, they
look real, I must admit - Africa in your parlor - but it's all dimensional,
superreactionary, supersensitive color film and mental tape film behind
glass screens. It's all odorophonics and sonics, Lydia. Here's my
handkerchief."
"I'm afraid." She came to him and put her body against him and cried
steadily. "Did you see? Did you feel? It's too real."
"Now, Lydia..."
"You've got to tell Wendy and Peter not to read any more on Africa."
"Of course - of course." He patted her.
"Promise?"
"Sure."
"And lock the nursery for a few days until I get my nerves settled."
"You know how difficult Peter is about that. When I punished him a
month ago by locking the nursery for even a few hours - the tantrum be
threw! And Wendy too. They live for the nursery."
"It's got to be locked, that's all there is to it."
"All right." Reluctantly he locked the huge door. "You've been working
too hard. You need a rest."
"I don't know - I don't know," she said, blowing her nose, sitting down
in a chair that immediately began to rock and comfort her. "Maybe I don't
have enough to do. Maybe I have time to think too much. Why don't we shut
the whole house off for a few days and take a vacation?"
"You mean you want to fry my eggs for me?"
"Yes." She nodded.
"And dam my socks?"
"Yes." A frantic, watery-eyed nodding.
"And sweep the house?"
"Yes, yes - oh, yes!"

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"But I thought that's why we bought this house, so we wouldn't have to
do anything?"
"That's just it. I feel like I don't belong here. The house is wife and
mother now, and nursemaid. Can I compete with an African veldt? Can I give a
bath and scrub the children as efficiently or quickly as the automatic scrub
bath can? I cannot. And it isn't just me. It's you. You've been awfully
nervous lately."
"I suppose I have been smoking too much."
"You look as if you didn't know what to do with yourself in this house,
either. You smoke a little more every morning and drink a little more every
afternoon and need a little more sedative every night. You're beginning to
feel unnecessary too."
"Am I?" He paused and tried to feel into himself to see what was really
there.
"Oh, George!" She looked beyond him, at the nursery door. "Those lions
can't get out of there, can they?"
He looked at the door and saw it tremble as if something had jumped
against it from the other side.
"Of course not," he said.
At dinner they ate alone, for Wendy and Peter were at a special plastic
carnival across town and bad televised home to say they'd be late, to go
ahead eating. So George Hadley, bemused, sat watching the dining-room table
produce warm dishes of food from its mechanical interior.
"We forgot the ketchup," he said.
"Sorry," said a small voice within the table, and ketchup appeared.
As for the nursery, thought George Hadley, it won't hurt for the
children to be locked out of it awhile. Too much of anything isn't good for
anyone. And it was clearly indicated that the children had been spending a
little too much time on Africa. That sun. He could feel it on his neck,

still, like a hot paw. And the lions. And the smell of blood. Remarkable how the nursery caught the telepathic emanations of the children's minds and created life to fill their every desire. The children thought lions, and there were lions. The children thought zebras, and there were zebras. Sun - sun. Giraffes - giraffes. Death and death.

That last. He chewed tastelessly on the meat that the table bad cut for him. Death thoughts. They were awfully young, Wendy and Peter, for death thoughts. Or, no, you were never too young, really. Long before you knew what death was you were wishing it on someone else. When you were two years old you were shooting people with cap pistols.

But this - the long, hot African veldt-the awful death in the jaws of a lion. And repeated again and again.

"Where are you going?"

He didn't answer Lydia. Preoccupied, be let the lights glow softly on ahead of him, extinguish behind him as he padded to the nursery door. He listened against it. Far away, a lion roared.

He unlocked the door and opened it. Just before he stepped inside, he heard a faraway scream. And then another roar from the lions, which subsided quickly.

He stepped into Africa. How many times in the last year had he opened this door and found Wonderland, Alice, the Mock Turtle, or Aladdin and his Magical Lamp, or Jack Pumpkinhead of Oz, or Dr. Doolittle, or the cow jumping over a very real-appearing moon-all the delightful contraptions of a make-believe world. How often had he seen Pegasus flying in the sky ceiling, or seen fountains of red fireworks, or heard angel voices singing. But now, is yellow hot Africa, this bake oven with murder in the heat. Perhaps Lydia was right. Perhaps they needed a little vacation from the fantasy which

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was
growing a bit too real for ten-year-old children. It was all
right to
exercise one's mind with gymnastic fantasies, but when the lively child
mind
settled on one pattern... ? It seemed that, at a distance, for the
past
month, he had heard lions roaring, and smelled their strong odor
seeping as
far away as his study door. But, being busy, he had paid it no
attention.
George Hadley stood on the African grassland alone. The lions
looked up
from their feeding, watching him. The only flaw to the illusion was the
open
door through which he could see his wife, far down the dark hall,
like a
framed picture, eating her dinner abstractedly.
"Go away," he said to the lions.
They did not go.
He knew the principle of the room exactly. You sent out your
thoughts.
Whatever you thought would appear. "Let's have Aladdin and his
lamp," he
snapped. The veldtland remained; the lions remained.
"Come on, room! I demand Aladin!" he said.
Nothing happened. The lions mumbled in their baked pelts.
"Aladin!"
He went back to dinner. "The fool room's out of order," he said.
"It
won't respond."
"Or--"
"Or what?"
"Or it can't respond," said Lydia, "because the children have
thought
about Africa and lions and killing so many days that the room's in a
rut."
"Could be."
"Or Peter's set it to remain that way."
"Set it?"
"He may have got into the machinery and fixed something."
"Peter doesn't know machinery."
"He's a wise one for ten. That I.Q. of his -"
"Nevertheless -"
"Hello, Mom. Hello, Dad."
The Hadleys turned. Wendy and Peter were coming in the front
door,

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cheeks like peppermint candy, eyes like bright blue agate marbles, a smell
of ozone on their jumpers from their trip in the helicopter.
"You're just in time for supper," said both parents.
"We're full of strawberry ice cream and hot dogs," said the children,
holding hands. "But we'll sit and watch."
"Yes, come tell us about the nursery," said George Hadley.
The brother and sister blinked at him and then at each other.
"Nursery?"
"All about Africa and everything," said the father with false
joviality.
"I don't understand," said Peter.
"Your mother and I were just traveling through Africa with rod and
reel; Tom Swift and his Electric Lion," said George Hadley.
"There's no Africa in the nursery," said Peter simply.
"Oh, come now, Peter. We know better."
"I don't remember any Africa," said Peter to Wendy. "Do you?"
"No."
"Run see and come tell."
She obeyed
"Wendy, come back here!" said George Hadley, but she was gone. The
house lights followed her like a flock of fireflies. Too late, he realized
he had forgotten to lock the nursery door after his last inspection.
"Wendy'll look and come tell us," said Peter.
"She doesn't have to tell me. I've seen it."
"I'm sure you're mistaken, Father."
"I'm not, Peter. Come along now."
But Wendy was back. "It's not Africa," she said breathlessly.
"We'll see about this," said George Hadley, and they all walked down
the hall together and opened the nursery door.
There was a green, lovely forest, a lovely river, a purple mountain,
high voices singing, and Rima, lovely and mysterious, lurking in the trees
with colorful flights of butterflies, like animated bouquets, lingering in
her long hair. The African veldtland was gone. The lions were gone. Only
Rima was here now, singing a song so beautiful that it brought tears to your

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eyes.
George Hadley looked in at the changed scene. "Go to bed," he said to
the children.
They opened their mouths.
"You heard me," he said.
They went off to the air closet, where a wind sucked them like brown
leaves up the flue to their slumber rooms.
George Hadley walked through the singing glade and picked up something
that lay in the comer near where the lions had been. He walked slowly back
to his wife.
"What is that?" she asked.
"An old wallet of mine," he said.
He showed it to her. The smell of hot grass was on it and the smell of
a lion. There were drops of saliva on it, it bad been chewed, and there were
blood smears on both sides.
He closed the nursery door and locked it, tight.
In the middle of the night he was still awake and he knew his wife was
awake. "Do you think Wendy changed it?" she said at last, in the dark room.
"Of course."
"Made it from a veldt into a forest and put Rima there instead of
lions?"
"Yes."
"Why?"
"I don't know. But it's staying locked until I find out."
"How did your wallet get there?"
"I don't know anything," he said, "except that I'm beginning to be
sorry we bought that room for the children. If children are neurotic at all,
a room like that -"
"It's supposed to help them work off their neuroses in a healthful
way."
"I'm starting to wonder." He stared at the ceiling.
"We've given the children everything they ever wanted. Is this our
reward-secrecy, disobedience?"
"Who was it said, 'Children are carpets, they should be

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stepped on
occasionally'? We've never lifted a hand. They're insufferable - let's admit
it. They come and go when they like; they treat us as if we were offspring.
They're spoiled and we're spoiled."
"They've been acting funny ever since you forbade them to take the
rocket to New York a few months ago."
"They're not old enough to do that alone, I explained."
"Nevertheless, I've noticed they've been decidedly cool toward us
since."
"I think I'll have David McClean come tomorrow morning to have a look
at Africa."
"But it's not Africa now, it's Green Mansions country and Rima."
"I have a feeling it'll be Africa again before then."
A moment later they heard the screams.
Two screams. Two people screaming from downstairs. And then a roar of
lions.
"Wendy and Peter aren't in their rooms," said his wife.
He lay in his bed with his beating heart. "No," he said. "They've
broken into the nursery."
"Those screams - they sound familiar."
"Do they?"
"Yes, awfully."
And although their beds tried very bard, the two adults couldn't be
rocked to sleep for another hour. A smell of cats was in the night air.
"Father?" said Peter.
"Yes."
Peter looked at his shoes. He never looked at his father any more, nor
at his mother. "You aren't going to lock up the nursery for good, are you?"
"That all depends."
"On what?" snapped Peter.
"On you and your sister. If you intersperse this Africa with a little
variety - oh, Sweden perhaps, or Denmark or China -"
"I thought we were free to play as we wished."
"You are, within reasonable bounds."
"What's wrong with Africa, Father?"
"Oh, so now you admit you have been conjuring up Africa, do you?"

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"I wouldn't want the nursery locked up," said Peter coldly. "Ever."
"Matter of fact, we're thinking of turning the whole house off for about a month. Live sort of a carefree one-for-all existence."
"That sounds dreadful! Would I have to tie my own shoes instead of letting the shoe tier do it? And brush my own teeth and comb my hair and give myself a bath?"
"It would be fun for a change, don't you think?"
"No, it would be horrid. I didn't like it when you took out the picture painter last month."
"That's because I wanted you to learn to paint all by yourself, son."
"I don't want to do anything but look and listen and smell; what else is there to do?"
"All right, go play in Africa."
"Will you shut off the house sometime soon?"
"We're considering it."
"I don't think you'd better consider it any more, Father."
"I won't have any threats from my son!"
"Very well." And Peter strolled off to the nursery.
"Am I on time?" said David McClean.
"Breakfast?" asked George Hadley.
"Thanks, had some. What's the trouble?"
"David, you're a psychologist."
"I should hope so."
"Well, then, have a look at our nursery. You saw it a year ago when you dropped by; did you notice anything peculiar about it then?"
"Can't say I did; the usual violences, a tendency toward a slight paranoia here or there, usual in children because they feel persecuted by parents constantly, but, oh, really nothing."
They walked down the ball. "I locked the nursery up," explained the father, "and the children broke back into it during the night. I let them stay so they could form the patterns for you to see."
There was a terrible screaming from the nursery.
"There it is," said George Hadley. "See what you make of it."
They walked in on the children without rapping.
The screams had faded. The lions were feeding.
"Run outside a moment, children," said George Hadley. "No, don't

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change
the mental combination. Leave the walls as they are. Get!"
With the children gone, the two men stood studying the lions
clustered
at a distance, eating with great relish whatever it was they had caught.
"I wish I knew what it was," said George Hadley. "Sometimes I
can
almost see. Do you think if I brought high-powered binoculars here and
-"
David McClean laughed dryly. "Hardly." He turned to study all
four
walls. "How long has this been going on?"
"A little over a month."
"It certainly doesn't feel good."
"I want facts, not feelings."
"My dear George, a psychologist never saw a fact in his life. He
only
hears about feelings; vague things. This doesn't feel good, I tell
you.
Trust my hunches and my instincts. I have a nose for something bad.
This is
very bad. My advice to you is to have the whole damn room torn down and
your
children brought to me every day during the next year for treatment."
"Is it that bad?"
"I'm afraid so. One of the original uses of these nurseries was so
that
we could study the patterns left on the walls by the child's mind,
study at
our leisure, and help the child. In this case, however, the room has
become
a channel toward-destructive thoughts, instead of a release away from
them."
"Didn't you sense this before?"
"I sensed only that you bad spoiled your children more than most.
And
now you're letting them down in some way. What way?"
"I wouldn't let them go to New York."
"What else?"
"I've taken a few machines from the house and threatened them, a
month
ago, with closing up the nursery unless they did their homework. I did
close
it for a few days to show I meant business."
"Ah, ha!"
"Does that mean anything?"
"Everything. Where before they had a Santa Claus now they

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have a
Scrooge. Children prefer Santas. You've let this room and this house replace
you and your wife in your children's affections. This room is their mother
and father, far more important in their lives than their real parents. And
now you come along and want to shut it off. No wonder there's hatred here.
You can feel it coming out of the sky. Feel that sun. George, you'll have to
change your life. Like too many others, you've built it around creature
comforts. Why, you'd starve tomorrow if something went wrong in your
kitchen. You wouldn't know bow to tap an egg. Nevertheless, turn everything
off. Start new. It'll take time. But we'll make good children out of bad in
a year, wait and see."
"But won't the shock be too much for the children, shutting the room up
abruptly, for good?"
"I don't want them going any deeper into this, that's all."
The lions were finished with their red feast.
The lions were standing on the edge of the clearing watching the two
men.
"Now I'm feeling persecuted," said McClean. "Let's get out of here. I
never have cared for these damned rooms. Make me nervous."
"The lions look real, don't they?" said George Hadley. I don't suppose
there's any way -"
"What?"
"- that they could become real?"
"Not that I know."
"Some flaw in the machinery, a tampering or something?"
"No."
They went to the door.
"I don't imagine the room will like being turned off," said the father.
"Nothing ever likes to die - even a room."
"I wonder if it hates me for wanting to switch it off?"
"Paranoia is thick around here today," said David McClean. "You can
follow it like a spoor. Hello." He bent and picked up a bloody scarf.

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"This yours?"

"No." George Hadley's face was rigid. "It belongs to Lydia."

They went to the fuse box together and threw the switch that killed the nursery.

The two children were in hysterics. They screamed and pranced and threw things. They yelled and sobbed and swore and jumped at the furniture.

"You can't do that to the nursery, you can't!"

"Now, children."

The children flung themselves onto a couch, weeping.

"George," said Lydia Hadley, "turn on the nursery, just for a few moments. You can't be so abrupt."

"No."

"You can't be so cruel..."

"Lydia, it's off, and it stays off. And the whole damn house dies as of here and now. The more I see of the mess we've put ourselves in, the more it sickens me. We've been contemplating our mechanical, electronic navels for too long. My God, how we need a breath of honest air!"

And he marched about the house turning off the voice clocks, the stoves, the heaters, the shoe shiners, the shoe lacers, the body scrubbers and swabbers and massagers, and every other machine be could put his hand to.

The house was full of dead bodies, it seemed. It felt like a mechanical cemetery. So silent. None of the humming hidden energy of machines waiting to function at the tap of a button.

"Don't let them do it!" wailed Peter at the ceiling, as if he was talking to the house, the nursery. "Don't let Father kill everything." He turned to his father. "Oh, I hate you!"

"Insults won't get you anywhere."

"I wish you were dead!"

"We were, for a long while. Now we're going to really start living. Instead of being handled and massaged, we're going to live."

Wendy was still crying and Peter joined her again. "Just a moment,

just
one moment, just another moment of nursery," they wailed.
"Oh, George," said the wife, "it can't hurt."
"All right - all right, if they'll just shut up. One minute, mind
you,
and then off forever."
"Daddy, Daddy, Daddy!" sang the children, smiling with wet faces.
"And then we're going on a vacation. David McClean is coming
back in
half an hour to help us move out and get to the airport. I'm going to
dress.
You turn the nursery on for a minute, Lydia, just a minute, mind you."
And the three of them went babbling off while he let
himself be
vacuumed upstairs through the air flue and set about dressing
himself. A
minute later Lydia appeared.
"I'll be glad when we get away," she sighed.
"Did you leave them in the nursery?"
"I wanted to dress too. Oh, that horrid Africa. What can they
see in
it?"
"Well, in five minutes we'll be on our way to Iowa. Lord, how
did we
ever get in this house? What prompted us to buy a nightmare?"
"Pride, money, foolishness."
"I think we'd better get downstairs before those kids get
engrossed
with those damned beasts again."
Just then they heard the children calling, "Daddy, Mommy, come
quick -
quick!"
They went downstairs in the air flue and ran down the hall.
The
children were nowhere in sight. "Wendy? Peter!"
They ran into the nursery. The veldtland was empty save for the
lions
waiting, looking at them. "Peter, Wendy?"
The door slammed.
"Wendy, Peter!"
George Hadley and his wife whirled and ran back to the door.
"Open the door!" cried George Hadley, trying the knob. "Why,
they've
locked it from the outside! Peter!" He beat at the door. "Open up!"
He heard Peter's voice outside, against the door.
"Don't let them switch off the nursery and the house," he was
saying.

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Mr. and Mrs. George Hadley beat at the door. "Now, don't be ridiculous,
children. It's time to go. Mr. McClean'll be here in a minute and..."
And then they heard the sounds.
The lions on three sides of them, in the yellow veldt grass, padding
through the dry straw, rumbling and roaring in their throats.
The lions.
Mr. Hadley looked at his wife and they turned and looked back at the
beasts edging slowly forward crouching, tails stiff.
Mr. and Mrs. Hadley screamed.
And suddenly they realized why those other screams bad sounded
familiar.
"Well, here I am," said David McClean in the nursery doorway, "Oh,
hello." He stared at the two children seated in the center of the open glade
eating a little picnic lunch. Beyond them was the water hole and the yellow
veldtland; above was the hot sun. He began to perspire. "Where are your
father and mother?"
The children looked up and smiled. "Oh, they'll be here directly."
"Good, we must get going." At a distance Mr. McClean saw the lions
fighting and clawing and then quieting down to feed in silence under the
shady trees.
He squinted at the lions with his hand tip to his eyes.
Now the lions were done feeding. They moved to the water hole to drink.
A shadow flickered over Mr. McClean's hot face. Many shadows flickered.
The vultures were dropping down the blazing sky.
"A cup of tea?" asked Wendy in the silence.
Last-modified: Wed, 01 Mar 2000 06:01:50 GMT
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1
Unterderseaboat Doktor
The incredible event occurred during my third visit to Gustav Von Seyfertitz, my foreign psychoanalyst.
I should have guessed at the strange explosion before it came.

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After all, my alienist, truly alien, had the coincidental name, Von Seyfertitz, of the tall, lean, aquiline, menacing, and therefore beautiful actor who played the high priest in the 1935 film She.
In She, the wondrous villain waved his skeleton fingers, hurled insults, summoned sulfured flames, destroyed slaves, and knocked the world into earthquakes.
After that, "At Liberty," he could be seen riding the Hollywood Boulevard trolley cars as calm as a mummy, as quiet as an unwired telephone pole.
Where was I? Ah, yes!
It was my third visit to my psychiatrist. He h~' called that day and cried, "Douglas, you stupid goddamn son of a bitch, it's time for beddy-bye!
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Beddy-bye was, of course, his couch of pain and humiliation where I lay writhing in agonies of assumed Jewish guilt and Northern Baptist stress as he from time to time muttered, "A fruitcake remark!" or "Dumb!" or "If you ever do that again, I'll kill you!"
As you can see, Gustav Von Seyfertitz was a most unusual mine specialist. Mine? Yes. Our problems are land mines in our heads. Step on them! Shock-troop therapy, he once called it, searching for words. "Blitzkrieg?" I offered.
"Ja!" He grinned his shark grin. "That's it!"
Again, this was my third visit to his strange, metallic-looking room with a most odd series of locks on a roundish door. Suddenly, as I was maundering and treading dark waters,
I heard his spine stiffen behind me. He gasped a great death rattle, sucked air, and blew it out in a yell that curled and bleached my hair:
"Dive! Dive!"
I dove.
Thinking that the room might be struck by a titanic iceberg, I fell, to scuttle beneath the lion-claw-footed couch.
"Dive!" cried the old man.
"Dive?" I whispered, and looked up.
To see a submarine periscope, all polished brass, slide up to vanish in the ceiling.
Gustav Von Seyfertitz stood pretending not to notice me, the sweat-oiled leather couch, or the vanished brass machine. Very calmly, in the fashion of Conrad Veidt in Casablanca, or Erich Von
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like Jack Nicklaus hits a ball? Bamm. A hand grenade!
That was the sound my Germanic friend's boots
made as he knocked them together in a salute Crrrack!
"Gustav Mannerheim Auschlitz Von Seyfertitz Baron Woldstein, at your service!" He lowered his voice. "Unterderseaboat-"
I thought he might say "Doktor." But:
"Unterderseaboat Captain!"
I scrambled off the floor.
Another crrrack and-The periscope slid calmly down out of the
ceiling, the most beautiful Freudian cigar I had ever seen.
"No!" I gasped.
"Have I ever lied to you?" "Many times!"
"But' '-he shrugged-' 'little white ones." He stepped to the periscope, slapped two

handles in place, slammed one eye shut, and crammed the other angrily against the view piece, turning the periscope in a slow roundabout of the room, the couch, and me.
"Fire one," he ordered.
I almost heard the torpedo leave its tube. "Fire two!" he said.
And a second soundless and invisible bomb
motored on its way to infinity. Struck midships, I sank to the couch.
"You, you!" I said mindlessly. "It!" I pointed

at the brass machine. "This!" I touched couch. "Why?"
"Sit down," said Von Seyfertitz.
"I am." "Lie down."
"I'd rather not," I said uneasily.
Von Seyfertitz turned the periscope so its topmost eye, raked at an angle, glared at me. It had an uncanny resemblance, in its glassy coldness, his own fierce hawk's gaze.
His voice, from behind the periscope, echoed. "So you want to know, eh, how Gustav Von Seyfertitz, Baron Woldstein, suffered to leave the cold ocean depths, depart his dear North Sea ship, flee his destroyed and beaten fatherland, to become the Unterderseaboat Doktor-"
"Now that you mention-"
"I never mention! I declare. And my declarations are sea-battle commands."
"So I noticed . .
"Shut up. Sit back-"
"Not just now . . ." I said uneasily.
His heels knocked as he let his right hand spider to his top coat pocket and slip forth yet a forth eye with which to fasten me: a bright, thin monocle which he screwed into his stare as if decupping a boiled egg. I winced. For now the monocle was part of his glare and regarded me with cold fire.
"Why the monocle?" I said.
"Idiot! It is to cover my good eye so that neither ther eye can see and my intuition is free to work!"
"Oh," I said.

And he began his monologue. And as he talked I realized his need had been pent up, capped, years, so he talked on and on, forgetting me.
And it was during this monologue that a strange thing occurred. I rose slowly to my feet as Herr Doktor Von Seyfertitz circled, his long, slim cigar printing smoke cumuli on the air,
which read like white Rorschach blots.
With each implantation of his foot, a word ca out, and then another, in a sort of plodding grammar. Sometimes he stopped and stood poised with one leg raised and one word stopped in his mouth to be turned on his tongue and examined. Then the shoe went down, the noun slid forth and the verb and object in good time.
Until at last, circling, I found myself in a chair stunned, for I saw:
Herr Doktor Von Seyfertitz stretched on his couch, his long spider fingers laced on his chest.
"It has been no easy thing to come forth on land," he sibilated. "Some days I was the jellyfish, frozen. Others, the shore-strewn octopi, at least with tentacles, or the crayfish

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sucked back into my skull. But I have built my spine, year on year, and now I walk among the land men and survive."
He paused to take a trembling breath, then continued:
"I moved in stages from the depths to a houseboat, to a wharf bungalow, to a shore-tent and then
back to a canal in a city and at last to New York
an island surrounded by water, eh? But where,
Unterderseaboat Doktor 7
where, in all this, I wondered, would a submarine commander find his place, his work, his mad love and activity?
"It was one afternoon in a building with the world's longest elevator that it struck me like a hand grenade in the ganglion. Going down, down, down, other people crushed around me,
and the numbers descending and the floors whizzing by the glass windows, rushing by flicker-flash, flicker-flash, conscious, subconscious, id, ego-id, life, death, lust, kill, lust, dark,
light, plummeting, falling, ninety, eighty, fifty, lower depths, high exhilaration, id, ego, id, until this shout blazed from my raw throat in a great all-accepting, panic-manic shriek:
"'Dive! Dive!'
"I remember," I said.
'Dive!' I screamed so loudly that my fellow passengers, in shock, peed merrily. Among stunned faces, I stepped out of the lift to find one-sixteenth of an inch of pee on the floor.
'Have a nice day!' I said, jubilant with self-discovery, then ran to self-employment, to hang a
shingle and next my periscope, carried from the mutilated, divested, castrated unterderseaboat all these years. Too stupid to see in it my psychological future and my final
downfall, my beautiful artifact, the brass genitalia of psychotic research, the Von Seyfertitz Mark Nine Periscope!"
"That's quite a story," I said.
"Damn right," snorted the alienist, eyes shut.

"And more than half of it true. Did you listen? What have you learned?"
"That more submarine captains should become psychiatrists."
"So? I have often wondered: did Nemo really die when his submarine was destroyed? Or did he run off to become my great-grandfather and were his psychological bacteria passed along until I came into the world, thinking to command the ghostlike mechanisms that haunt
the under tides, to wind up with the fifty-minute vaudeville routine in this sad, psychotic city?"
I got up and touched the fabulous brass symbol that hung like a scientific stalactite in mid-ceiling.
"May I look?"
"I wouldn't if I were you." He only half heard me, lying in the midst of his depression as in a dark cloud.
"It's only a periscope-"
"But a good cigar is a smoke."

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I remembered Sigmund Freud's quote about cigars, laughed, and touched the periscope again.
"Don't!" he said.
"Well, you don't actually use this for anything, do you? It's just a remembrance of your past, from your last sub, yes?"
"You think that?" He sighed. "Look!"
I hesitated, then pasted one eye to the viewer, shut the other, and cried:
"Oh, Jesus!"
"I warned you!" said Von Seyfertitz.
For they were there.
Unterderseaboat Doktor 9
Enough nightmares to paper a thousand cinema screens. Enough phantoms to haunt ten thousand castle walls. Enough panics to shake forty cities into ruin.
My God, I thought, he could sell the film rights to this worldwide!
The first psychological kaleidoscope in history.
And in the instant another thought came: how much of that stuff in there is me? Or Von Seyfertitz? Or both? Are these strange shapes my maundering daymares, sneezed out in the
past weeks? When I talked, eyes shut, did my mouth spray invisible founts of small beasts which, caught in the periscope chambers, grew outsize? Like the microscopic photos of those germs that hide in eyebrows and pores, magnified a million times to become elephants
on Scientific American covers? Are these images from other lost souls trapped on that couch and caught in the submarine device, or leftovers from my eyelashes and psyche?
"It's worth millions!" I cried. "Do you know what this is!?"
"Collected spiders, Gila monsters, trips to the Moon without gossamer wings, iguanas, toads out of bad sisters' mouths, diamonds out of good fairies ears, crippled shadow dancers from Bali, cut-string puppets from Geppetto's attic, little-boy statues that pee white
wine, sexual trapeze performers' allez-oop, obscene finger-pantomimes, evil clown faces, gargoyles that talk when it rains and whisper when the wind rises, basement bins
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full of poisoned honey, dragonflies that sew every fourteen-year-old's orifices to keep them neat until they rip the sutures, aged eighteen. Towers with mad witches, garrets with mummies for lumber-"
He ran out of steam.
"You get the general drift."
"Nuts," I said. "You're bored. I could get you a five-million-dollar deal with Amalgamated Fruit-cakes Inc. And the Sigmund F. Dreamboats, split three ways!"
"You don't understand," said Von Seyfertitz. "I am keeping myself busy, busy, so I won't remember all the people I torpedoed, sank, drowned mid-Atlantic in 1944. I am not in the Amalgamated Fruitcake Cinema business. I only wish to keep myself occupied by paring fingernails, cleaning earwax, and erasing inkblots from odd bean-bags like you. If I stop, I will fly apart. That periscope contains all and everything I have seen and known in the past forty years of observing pecans, cashews, and almonds. By staring at them I lose my own terrible life lost in the tides. If you won my periscope in some shoddy fly-by-night Hollywood strip poker, I would sink three times in my waterbed, never to be seen again.

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Have I shown you my waterbed? Three times as large as any pool. I do eighty laps asleep each night. Some-times forty when I catnap noons. To answer your million fold offer, no."
And suddenly he shivered all over. His hands clutched at his heart.

"My God!" he shouted.
Too late, he was realizing he had let me step into his mind and life. Now he was on his feet between me and the periscope, staring at it and me, as if we were both terrors.
"You saw nothing in that! Nothing at all!"
"I did!"
"You lie! How could you be such a liar? Do you know what would happen if this got out, if you ran around making accusations-?
"My God," he raved on, "If the world knew, if someone said' '-His words gummed shut in his mouth as if he were tasting the truth of what he said, as if he saw me for the first time and I was a gun fired full in his face. "I would be... laughed out of the city. Such a goddamn ridiculous . . . hey, wait a minute. You!"
It was as if he had slipped a devil mask over his face. His eyes grew wide. His mouth gaped.
I examined his face and saw murder. I sidled toward the door.
"You wouldn't say anything to anyone?" he said.
"No"
"How come you suddenly know everything about me?"
"You told me!"
"Yes," he admitted, dazed, looking around for a weapon. "Wait."
"if you don't mind," I said, "I'd rather not." And I was out the door and down the hall, my knees jumping to knock my jaw.

"Come back!" cried Von Seyfertitz, behind me. "I must kill you!"
"I was afraid of that!"
I reached the elevator first and by a miracle it flung wide its doors when I banged the Down button. I jumped in.
"Say good-bye!" cried Von Seyfertitz, raising his fist as if it held a bomb.
"Good-bye!" I said. The doors slammed.
I did not see Von Seyfertitz again for a year.
Meanwhile, I dined out often, not without guilt, telling friends, and strangers on street corners, of my collision with a submarine commander become phrenologist (he who feels your skull to count the beans).
So with my giving one shake of the ripe fruit tree, nuts fell. Overnight they brimmed the Baron's lap to flood his bank account. His Grand Slam will be recalled at century's end: appearances on Phil Donahue, Oprah Winfrey, and Gerarldo in one single cyclonic afternoon, with interchangeable hyperboles, positive-negative-positive every hour. There were Von Seyfertitz laser games and duplicates of his submarine periscope sold at the Museum of Modern Art and the Smithsonian. With the super inducement of a half-million dollars, he force-fed and easily sold a bad book. Duplicates of the animalcules, lurks, and curious critters trapped in his brass viewer arose in pop-up coloring books, paste-on tattoos, and inkpad rubberstamp nightmares at Beasts-R-Us.

I had hoped that all this would cause him to forgive and forget. No.
One noon a year and a month later, my doorbell rang and there stood Gustav Von Seyfertitz, F Baron Woldstein, tears streaming down his cheeks.
"How come I didn't kill you that day?" he mourned.
"You didn't catch me," I said.
"Oh, ja. That was it."
I looked into the old man's rain-washed, tear-ravened face and said, "Who died?"
"Me. Or is it I? Ah, to hell with it: me. You see before you," he grieved, "a creature who suffers from the Rumpelstiltskin Syndrome!"
"Rumpel-"
"-stiltskin! Two halves with a rip from chin to fly. Yank my forelock, go ahead! Watch me fall apart at the seam. Like zipping a psychotic zipper, I fall, two Herr Doktor Admirals for the sick price of one. And which is the Doktor who heals and which the sellout best-seller Admiral? It takes two mirrors to tell. Not to mention the smoke!"
He stopped and looked around, holding his head together with his hands.
"Can you see the crack? Am I splitting again to become this crazy sailor who desires richness and fame, being sieved through the hands of crazed ladies with ruptured libidos? Suffering fish, I call them! But take their money, spit, spend! You should have such a year. Don't laugh."
"I'm not laughing."

"Then cheer up while I finish. Can I lie down? Is that a couch? Too short. What do I do with my legs?"
"Sit sidesaddle."
Von Seyfertitz laid himself out with his legs draped over one side. "Hey, not bad. Sit behind. Don't look over my shoulder. Avert your gaze. Neither smirk nor pull long faces as I get out the crazy-glue and paste Rumpel back with Stiltskin, the name of my next book, God help me. Damn you to hell, you and your damned periscope!"
"Not mine. Yours. You wanted me to discover it that day. I suppose you had been whispering Dive, Dive, for years to patients, half asleep. But you couldn't resist the loudest scream ever: Dive! That was your captain speaking, wanting fame and money enough to chock a horse show."
"God," murmured Von Seyfertitz, "How I hate it when you're honest. Feeling better already. How much do I owe you?"
He arose.
"Now we go kill the monsters instead of you."
"Monsters?"
"At my office. If we can get in past the lunatics."
"You have lunatics outside as well as in, now?"
"Have I ever lied to you?"
"Often. But," I added, "little white ones."
"Come," he said.

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We got out of the elevator to be confronted by a long line of worshippers and supplicants. There

must have been seventy people strung out between the elevator and the Baron's door, waiting with copies of books by Madame Blavatsky, Krishna murti, and Shirley MacLaine under their arms. There was a roar like a suddenly opened furnace door when they saw the Baron. We beat it on the double and got inside his office before anyone could surge to follow.

"See what you have done to me!" Von Seyfertitz pointed.

The office walls were covered with expensive teak paneling. The desk was from Napoleon's age an exquisite Empire piece worth at least fifty thousand dollars. The couch was the best soft leather I had ever seen, and the two pictures on the wall were originals -a Renoir and a Monet. My God, millions! I thought.

"Okay," I said. "The beasts, you said. You'll kill them, not me?"

The old man wiped his eyes with the back of one hand, then made a fist.

"Yes!" he cried, stepping up to the fine periscope, which reflected his face, madly distorted, in its elongated shape. "Like this. Thus and so!"

And before I could prevent, he gave the brass machine a terrific slap with his hand and then a blow and another blow and another, with both fists, cursing. Then he grabbed the periscope as if it were the neck of a spoiled child and throttled and shook it.

I cannot say what I heard in that instant. Perhaps real sounds, perhaps imagined temblors, like a glacier

cracking in the spring, or icicles in mid-night. Perhaps it was a sound like a great kite breaking its skeleton in the wind and collapsing in folds of tissue. Maybe I thought I heard a
vast breath in sucked, a cloud dissolving up inside itself. Or did I sense clock machineries spun so wildly they smoked off their foundations and fell like brass snowflakes?

I put my eye to the periscope.

I looked in upon-

Nothing.

It was just a brass tube with some crystal lenses and a view of an empty couch.

No more.

I seized the view piece and tried to screw it into some new focus on a far place and some dream bacteria that might fibrillate across an unimaginable horizon.

But the couch remained only a couch, and the wall beyond looked back at me with its great blank face.

Von Seyfertitz leaned forward and a tear ran off the tip of his nose to fall on one rusted fist.

"Are they dead?" he whispered.

"Gone."

"Good, they deserved to die. Now I can return to some kind of normal, sane world."

And with each word his voice fell deeper within his throat, his chest, his soul, until it, like the vaporous haunts within the peri-kaleidoscope, melted into silence.

He clenched his fists together in a fierce clasp

of prayer, like one who beseeches God to deliver him from plagues. And whether he was

once again praying for my death, eyes shut, or whether he simply wished me gone with the visions within the brass device, I could not say.
I only knew that my gossip had done a terrible and irrevocable thing. Me and my wild enthusiasm for a psychological future and the fame of this incredible captain from beneath Nemo's tidal seas.
"Gone," murmured Gustav Von Seyfertitz, Baron Woldstein, whispered for the last time.
"Gone."
That was almost the end.
I went around a month later. The landlord reluctantly let me look over the premises, mostly because I hinted that I might be renting.
We stood in the middle of the empty room where I could see the dent marks where the couch had once stood.
I looked up at the ceiling. It was empty.
"What's wrong?" said the landlord. "Didn't they fix it so you can't see? Damn fool Baron made a damn big hole up into the office above. Rented that, too, but never used it for anything I knew of. There was just that big damn hole he left when he went away."
I sighed with relief.
"Nothing left upstairs?"
"Nothing."
I looked up at the perfectly blank ceiling.
"Nice job of repair," I said.
"Thank God," said the landlord.

What, I often wonder, ever happened to Gustav Von Seyfertitz? Did he move to Vienna, to take up residence, perhaps, in or near dear Sigmund's very own address? Does he live in Rio, aerating fellow Unterderseaboat Captains who can't sleep for seasickness, roiling on their waterbeds under the shadow of the Andes Cross? Or is he in South Pasadena, within striking distance of the fruit larder nut farms disguised as film studios?
I cannot guess.
All I know is that some nights in the year, oh, once or twice, in a deep sleep I hear this terrible shout, his cry,
"Dive! Dive! Dive!"
And wake to find myself, sweating, far und my bed.

Bradbury, Ray - WONDERFUL ICECREAM SUIT.txt
THE WONDERFUL ICE CREAM SUIT
Ray Bradbury
It was summer twilight in the city, and out front of the quiet-clicking pool hall three young Mexican-American men breathed the warm air and looked around at the world. Sometimes they talked and sometimes they said nothing at all but watched the cars glide by like black panthers on the hot asphalt or saw trolleys loom up like thunderstorms, scatter lightning, and rumble away into silence.
"Hey," sighed Martinez at last. He was the youngest, the most sweetly sad of the three. "It's a swell night, huh? Swell."
As he observed the world it moved very close and then drifted away and then came

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close again. People, brushing by, were suddenly across the street. Buildings five miles away suddenly leaned over him. But most of the time everything - people, cars, and buildings - stayed way out on the edge of the world and could not be touched. On this quiet warm summer evening Martinez's face was cold.
"Nights like this you wish . . . lots of things."
"Wishing," said the second man, Villanazul, a man who shouted books out loud in his room but spoke only in whispers on the street. "Wishing is the useless pastime of the unemployed."
"Unemployed?" cried Vamenos, the unshaven. "Listen to him! We got no jobs, no money!"
"So," said Martinez, "we got no friends."
"True." Villanazul gazed off toward the green plaza where the palm trees swayed in the soft night wind. "Do you know what I wish? I wish to go into that plaza and speak among the businessmen who gather there nights to talk big talk. But dressed as I am, poor as I am, who would listen? So, Martinez, we have each other. The friendship of the poor is real friendship. We-"
But now a handsome young Mexican with a fine thin mustache strolled by. And on each of his careless arms hung a laughing woman.
"Madre mía! " Martinez slapped his own brow. "How does that one rate two friends?"
"It's his nice new white summer suit." Vamenos chewed a black thumbnail. "He looks sharp."
Martinez leaned out to watch the three people moving away, and then at the tenement across the street, in one fourth-floor window of which, far above, a beautiful girl leaned out, her dark hair faintly stirred by the wind. She had been there forever, which was to say for six weeks. He had nodded, he had raised a hand, he had smiled, he had blinked rapidly, he had even bowed to her, on the street, in the hall when visiting friends, in the park, downtown. Even now, he put his hand up from his waist and moved his fingers. But all the lovely girl did was let the summer wind stir her dark hair. He did not exist. He was nothing.

"Madre mía! " He looked away and down the street where the man walked his two friends around a corner. "Oh, if just I had one suit, one! I wouldn't need money if I looked okay."
"I hesitate to suggest," said Villanazul, "that you see Gómez. But he's been talking some crazy talk for a month now about clothes. I keep on saying I'll be in on it to make him go away. That Gómez."
"Friend," said a quiet voice.
"Gómez!" Everyone turned to stare.
Smiling strangely, Gómez pulled forth an endless thin yellow ribbon which fluttered and swirled on the summer air.
"Gómez," said Martinez, "what you doing with that tape measure?"
Gómez beamed. "Measuring people's skeletons."
"Skeletons!"
"Hold on." Gómez squinted at Martinez. "Caramba! Where you been all my life! Let's try you! "
Martinez saw his arm seized and taped, his leg measured, his chest encircled.

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"Hold still!" cried Gómez. "Arm - perfect. Leg - chest - perfecto! Now quick, the height! There! Yes! Five foot five! You're in! Shake!" Pumping Martinez's hand, he stopped suddenly. "Wait. You got . . . ten bucks?"
"I have!" Vamenos waved some grimy bills. "Gómez, measure me!"
"All I got left in the world is nine dollars and ninety-two cents." Martinez searched his pockets. "That's enough for a new suit? Why?"
"Why? Because you got the right skeleton, that's why!"
"Seòor Gómez, I don't hardly know you-"
"Know me? You're going to live with me! Come on!"
Gómez vanished into the poolroom. Martinez, escorted by the polite Villanazul, pushed by an eager Vamenos, found himself inside.
"Dominguez!" said Gómez.
Dominguez, at a wall telephone, winked at them. A woman's voice squeaked on the receiver.
"Manulo!" said Gómez.
Manulo, a wine bottle tilted bubbling to his mouth, turned.
Gómez pointed at Martinez.
"At last we found our fifth volunteer!"
Dominguez said, "I got a date, don't bother me-" and stopped. The receiver slipped from his fingers. His little black telephone book full of fine names and numbers went quickly back into his pocket. "Gómez, you-?"
"Yes, yes! Your money, now! Ándale! "

The woman's voice sizzled on the dangling phone.
Dominguez glanced at it uneasily.
Manulo considered the empty wine bottle in his hand and the liquor-store sign across the street.
Then very reluctantly both men laid ten dollars each on the green velvet pool table. Villanazul, amazed, did likewise, as did Gómez, nudging Martinez. Martinez counted out his wrinkled bills and change. Gómez flourished the money like a royal flush.
"Fifty bucks! The suit costs sixty! All we need is ten bucks!"
"Wait," said Martinez. "Gómez, are we talking about one suit? Uno? "
"Uno! " Gómez raised a finger. "One wonderful white ice cream summer suit! White, white as the August moon!"
"But who will own this one suit?"
"Me!" said Manulo.
"Me!" said Dominguez.
"Me!" said Villanazul.
"Me!" cried Gómez. "And you, Martinez. Men, let's show him. Line up!"
Villanazul, Manulo, Dominguez, and Gómez rushed to plant their backs against the poolroom wall.
"Martinez, you too, the other end, line up! Now, Vamenos, lay that billiard cue across our heads!"
"Sure, Gómez, sure!"
Martinez, in line, felt the cue tap his head and leaned out to see what was happening. "Ah!" he gasped.

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The cue lay flat on all their heads, with no rise or fall, as Vamenos slid it along, grinning.
"We're all the same height!" said Martinez.
"The same!" Everyone laughed.
Gómez ran down the line, rustling the yellow tape measure here and there on the men so they laughed even more wildly.
"Sure!" he said. "It took a month, four weeks, mind you, to find four guys the same size and shape as me, a month of running around measuring. Sometimes I found guys with five-foot-five skeletons, sure, but all the meat on their bones was too much or not enough. Sometimes their bones were too long in the legs or too short in arms. Boy, all the bones! I tell you! But now, five of us, same shoulders, chests, waists, arms, and as for weight? Men!"
Manulo, Dominguez, Villanazul, Gómez, and at last Martinez stepped onto the scales which flipped ink-stamped cards at them as Vamenos, still smiling wildly, fed pennies. Heart pounding, Martinez read the cards.
"One hundred thirty-five pounds . . . one thirty-six . . . one thirty-three . . . one thity-four . . . one thirty-seven . . . a miracle!"

"No," said Villanazul simply, "Gómez."
They all smiled upon that genius who now circled them with his arms.
"Are we not fine?" he wondered. "All the same size, all the same dream - the suit. So each of us will look beautiful at least one night each week, eh?"
"I haven't looked beautiful in years," said Martinez. "The girls run away."
"They will run no more, they will freeze," said Gómez, "when they see you in the cool white summer ice cream suit."
"Gómez," said Villanazul, "just let me ask one thing."
"Of course, compadre."
"When we get this nice new white ice cream summer suit, some night you're not going to put it on and walk down to the Greyhound bus in it and go live in El Paso for a year in it, are you?"
"Villanazul, Villanazul, how can you say that?"
"My eye sees and my tongue moves," said Villanazul. "How about the Everybody Wins! Punchboard Lotteries you ran and you kept running when nobody won? How about the United Chili Con Carne and Frijole Company you were going to organize and all that ever happened was the rent ran out on a two-by-four office?"
"The errors of a child now grown," said Gómez. "Enough! In this hot weather someone may buy the special suit that is made just for us that stands waiting in the window of SHUMWAY'S SUNSHINE SUITS! We have fifty dollars. Now we need just one more skeleton!"
Martinez saw the men peer around the pool hall. He looked where they looked. He felt his eyes hurry past Vamenos, then come reluctantly back to examine his dirty shirt, his huge nicotined fingers.
"Me!" Vamenos burst out at last. "My skeleton, measure it, it's great! Sure, my hands are big, and my arms, from digging ditches! But-"
Just then Martinez heard passing on the sidewalk outside that same terrible man with his two girls, all laughing together.

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He saw anguish move like the shadow of a summer cloud on the faces of the other men in this poolroom.
Slowly Vamenos stepped onto the scales and dropped his penny. Eyes closed, he breathed a prayer.
"Madre mía, please . . ."
The machinery whirred; the card fell out. Vamenos opened his eyes.
"Look! One thirty-five pounds! Another niiracle!"
The men stared at his right hand and the card, at his left hand and a soiled ten-dollar bill.
Gómez swayed. Sweating, he licked his lips. Then his hand shot out, seized the money.
"The clothing store! The suit! Vamos! "
Yelling, everyone ran from the poofroom.

The woman's voice was still squeaking on the abandoned telephone. Martinez, left behind, reached out and hung the voice up. In the silence he shook his head.
"Santos, what a dream! Six men," he said, "one suit. What will come of this? Madness? Debauchery? Murder? But I go with God. Gómez, wait for me!"
Martinez was young. He ran fast.
Mr. Shumway, of SHUMWAY'S SUNSHINE SUITS, paused while adjusting a tie rack, aware
of some subtle atmospheric change outside his establishinent.
"Leo," he whispered to his assistant. "Look . . ."
Outside, one man, Gómez, strolled by, looking in. Two men, Manulo and Dominguez, hurried by, staring in. Three men, Villanazul, Martinez, and Vamenos, jostling shoulders, did the same.
"Leo." Mr. Shumway swallowed. "Call the police!"
Suddenly six men filled the doorway.
Martinez, crushed among them, his stomach slightly upset, his face feeling feverish, smiled so wildly at Leo that Leo let go the telephone.
"Hey," breathed Martinez, eyes wide. "There's a great suit over there!"
"No." Manulo touched a lapel. "This one!"
"There is only one suit in all the world!" said Gómez coldly. "Mr. Shumway, the ice cream white, size thirty-four, was in your window just an hour ago! It's gone! You didn't-"
"Sell it?" Mr. Shumway exhaled. "No, no. In the dressing room. It's still on the dummy."
Martinez did not know if he moved and moved the crowd or if the crowd moved and moved him. Suddenly they were all in motion. Mr. Shumway, running, tried to keep ahead of them.
"This way, gents. Now which of you . . .?"
"All for one, one for all!" Martinez heard himself say, and laughed. "We'll all try it on!"
"All?" Mr. Shumway clutched at the booth curtain as if his shop were a steamship that had suddenly tilted in a great swell. He stared.
That's it, thought Martinez, look at our smiles. Now, look at the skeletons behind

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our smiles! Measure here, there, up, down, yes, do you see?
Mr. Shumway saw. He nodded. He shrugged.
"All!" He jerked the curtain. "There! Buy it, and I'll throw in the dummy free!"
Martinez peered quietly into the booth, his motion drawing the others to peer too. The suit was there.
And it was white.
Martinez could not breathe. He did not want to. He did not need to. He was afraid his breath would melt the suit. It was enough, just looking.
But at last he took a great trembling breath and exhaled, whispering, "Ay. Ay, caramba! "

"It puts out my eyes," murmured Gómez.
"Mr. Shumway," Martinez heard Leo hissing. "Ain't it dangerous precedent, to sell it? I mean, what if everybody bought one suit for six people?"
"Leo," said Mr. Shumway, "you ever hear one single fifty-nine-dollar suit make so many people happy at the same time before?"
"Angels' wings," murmured Martinez. "The wings of white angels."
Martinez felt Mr. Shumway peering over his shoulder into the booth. The pale glow filled his eyes.
"You know something, Leo?" he said in awe. "That's a suit! "
Gómez, shouting, whistling, ran up to the third-floor landing and turned to wave to the others, who staggered, laughed, stopped, and had to sit down on the steps below.
"Tonight!" cried Gómez. "Tonight you move in with me, eh? Save rent as well as clothes, eh? Sure! Martinez, you got the suit?"
"Have I?" Martinez lifted the white gift-wrapped box high. "From us to us! Ay-hah! "
"Vamenos, you got the dummy?"
"Here!"
Vamenos, chewing an old cigar, scattering sparks, slipped. The dummy, falling, toppled, turned over twice, and banged down the stairs.
"Vamenos! Dumb! Clumsy!"
They seized the dummy from him. Stricken, Vamenos looked about as if he'd lost something.
Manulo snapped his fingers. "Hey, Vamenos, we got to celebrate! Go borrow some wine!"
Vamenos plunged downstairs in a whirl of sparks.
The others moved into the room with the suit, leaving Martinez in the hall to study Gómez's face.
"Gómez, you look sick."
"I am," said Gómez. "For what have I done?" He nodded to the shadows in the room working about the dummy. "I pick Dominguez, a devil with the women. All right. I pick Manulo, who drinks, yes, but who sings as sweet as a girl, eh? Okay. Villanazul reads books. You, you wash behind your ears. But then what do I do? Can I wait? No! I got to buy that suit! So the last guy I pick is a clumsy slob who has the right to wear my suit-" He stopped, confused. "Who gets to wear our suit one night a week, fall down in it, or not come in out of the rain in it! Why, why, why did I do it!"
"Gómez," whispered Villanazul from the room. "The suit is ready. Come see if it

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looks as good using your light bulb."
Gómez and Martinez entered.
And there on the dummy in the center of the room was the phosphorescent, the

miraculously white-fired ghost with the incredible lapels, the precise stitching, the neat buttonholes. Standing with the white illumination of the suit upon his cheeks, Martinez suddenly felt he was in church. White! White! It was white as the whitest vanilla ice cream, as the bottled milk in tenement halls at dawn. White as a winter cloud all alone in the moonlit sky late at night. Seeing it here in the warm summer-night room made their breath almost show on the air. Shutting his eyes, he could see it printed on his lids. He knew what color his dreams would be this night.
"White . . . murmured Villanazul. "White as the snow on that mountain near our town in Mexico, which is called the Sleeping Woman."
"Say that again," said Gómez.
Villanazul, proud yet humble, was glad to repeat his tribute.
". . . white as the snow on the mountain called-"
"I'm back!"
Shocked, the men whirled to see Vamenos in the door, wine bottles in each hand.
"A party! Here! Now tell us, who wears the suit first tonight? Me?"
"It's too late!" said Gómez.
"Late! It's only nine-fifteen!"
"Late?" said everyone, bristling. "Late?"
Gómez edged away from these men who glared from him to the suit to the open window. Outside and below it was, after all, thought Martinez, a fine Saturday night in a summer month and through the calm warm darkness the women drifted like flowers on a quiet stream. The men made a mournful sound.
"Gómez, a suggestion." Villanazul licked his pencil and drew a chart on a pad. "You wear the suit from nine-thirty to ten, Manulo till ten-thirty, Dominguez till eleven, mysell till eleven-thirty, Martinez till midnight, and-"
"Why me last? " demanded Vamenos, scowling.
Martinez thought quickly and smiled. "After midnight is the best time, friend."
"Hey," said Vamenos, "that's right. I never thought of that. Okay."
Gómez sighed. "All right. A half hour each. But from now on, remember, we each wear the suit just one night a week. Sundays we draw straws for who wears the suit the extra night"
"Me!" laughed Vamenos. "I'm lucky!"
Gómez held onto Martinez, tight.
"Gómez," urged Martinez, "you first. Dress."
Gómez could not tear his eyes from that disreputable Varnenos. At last, impulsively, he yanked his shirt off over his head. "Ay-yeah!" he howled. "Ay-yeee! "
Whisper rustle . . . the clean shirt.

"Ah . . .!"
How clean the new clothes feel, thought Martinez, holding the coat ready. How clean they sound, how clean they smell!

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Whisper . . . the pants . . . the tie, rustle . . . the suspenders. Whisper . . .
now Martinez let loose the coat, which fell in place on flexing shoulders.
"Ole! "
Gómez turned like a matador in his wonderous suit-of-lights.
"Ole, Gómez, ole! " Gómez bowed and went out the door. Martinez fixed his eyes to his watch. At ten sharp he heard someone wandering about in the hall as if they had forgotten where to go. Martinez pulled the door open and looked out.
Gómez was there, heading for nowhere. He looks sick, thought Martinez. No, stunned, shook up, surprised, many things.
"Gómez! This is the place!" Gómez turned around and found his way through the door.
"Oh, friends, friends," he said. "Friends, what an experience! This suit! This suit!"
"Tell us, Gómez!" said Martinez.
"I can't, how can I say it!" He gazed at the heavens, arms spread, palms up.
"Tell us, Gómez!"
"I have no words, no words. You must see, yourself! Yes, you must se-" And here he lapsed into silence, shaking his head until at last he remembered they all stood watching him. "Who's next? Manulo?"
Manulo, stripped to his shorts, leapt forward.
"Ready!"
All laughed, shouted, whistled.
Manulo, ready, went out the door. He was gone twenty-nine minutes and thirty seconds. He came back holding to doorknobs, touching the wall, feeling his own elbows, putting the flat of his hand to his face.
"Oh, let me tell you," he said. "Compadres, I went to the bar, eh, to have a drink? But no, I did not go in the bar, do you hear? I did not drink. For as I walked I began to laugh and sing. Why, why? I listened to myself and asked this. Because. The suit made me feel better than wine ever did. The suit made me drunk, drunk! So I went to the Guadalajara Refritería instead and played the guitar and sang four songs, very high! The suit, ah' the suit!"
Dominguez, next to be dressed, moved out through the world, came back from the world.
The black telephone book! thought Martinez. He had it in his hands when he left! Now, he returns, hands empty! What? What?
"On the street," said Dominguez, seeing it all again, eyes wide, "on the street I walked, a woman cried, 'Dominguez, is that you?' Another said, 'Dominguez? No, Quetzalcoatl, the Great White God come from the East,' do you hear? And suddenly I didn't want to go with six women or eight, no. One, I thought. One! And to this one, who knows what I would say? 'Be mine!' Or 'Marry me!' Cararnba! This suit is dangerous! But I did not care! I live, I live! Gómez, did it happen this way with you?"

Gómez, still dazed by the events of the evening, shook his head. "No, no talk. It's too much. Later. Villanazul . . .?"
Villanazul moved shyly forward.
Villanazul went shyly out.

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Villanazul came shyly home.
"Picture it," he said, not looking at them, looking at the floor, talking to the floor. "The Green Plaza, a group of elderly businessmen gathered under the stars and they are talking, nodding, talking. Now one of them whispers. All turn to stare. They move aside, they make a channel through which a white-hot light burns its way as through ice. At the center of the great light is this person. I take a deep breath. My stomach is jelly. My voice is very small, but it grows louder. And what do I say? I say, 'Friends. Do you know Carlyle's Sartor Resartus? In that book we find his Philosophy of Suits . . .'"
And at last it was time for Martinez to let the suit float him out to haunt the darkness.
Four times he walked around the block. Four times he paused beneath the tenement porches, looking up at the window where the light was lit; a shadow moved, the beautiful girl was there, not there, away and gone, and on the fifth time there she was on the porch above, driven out by the summer heat, taking the cooler air. She glanced down. She made a gesture.
At first be thought she was waving to him. He felt like a white explosion that had riveted her attention. But she was not waving. Her hand gestured and the next moment a pair of dark-framed glasses sat upon her nose. She gazed at him.
Ah, ah, he thought, so that's it. So! Even the blind may see this suit! He smiled up at her. He did not have to wave. And at last she smiled back. She did not have to wave either. Then, because he did not know what else to do and he could not get rid of this smile that had fastened itself to his cheeks, he hurried, almost ran, around the corner, feeling her stare after him. When he looked back she had taken off her glasses and gazed now with the look of the nearsighted at what, at most, must be a moving blob of light in the great darkness here. Then for good measure he went around the block again, through a city so suddenly beautiful he wanted to yell, then laugh, then yell again.
Returning, he drifted, oblivious, eyes half closed, and seeing him in the door, the others saw not Martinez but themselves come home. In that moment, they sensed that something had happened to them all.
"You're late!" cried Vamenos, but stopped. The spell could not be broken.
"Somebody tell me," said Martinez. "Who am I?"
He moved in a slow circle through the room.
Yes, he thought, yes, it's the suit, yes, it had to do with the suit and them all together in that store on this fine Saturday night and then here, laughing and feeling more drunk without drinking as Manulo said himself, as the night ran and each slipped on the pants and held, toppling, to the others and, balanced, let the feeling get bigger and warmer and finer as each man departed and the next took his place in the suit until now here stood Martinez all splendid and white as one who gives orders and the world grows quiet and moves aside.
"Martinez, we borrowed three mirrors while you were gone. Look!"
The mirrors, set up as in the store, angled to reflect three Martinezes and the echoes and memories of those who had occupied this suit with him and known the

bright world inside this thread and cloth. Now, in the shimmering mirror, Martinez

saw the enormity of this thing they were living together and his eyes grew wet. The others blinked. Martinez touched the mirrors. They shifted. He saw a thousand, a million white-armored Martinezes march off into eternity, reflected, re-reflected, forever, indomitable, and unending.

He held the white coat out on the air. In a trance, the others did not at first recognize the dirty hand that reached to take the coat. Then:

"Vamenos!"

"Pig!"

"You didn't wash!" cried Gómez. "Or even shave, while you waited! Compadres, the bath!"

"The bath!" said everyone.

"No!" Vamenos flailed. "The night air! I'm dead!"

They hustled him yelling out and down the hall.

Now here stood Vamenos, unbelievable in white suit, beard shaved, hair combed, nails scrubbed.

His friends scowled darkly at him.

For was it not true, thought Martinez, that when Vamenos passed by, avalanches itched on mountaintops? If he walked under windows, people spat, dumped garbage, or worse. Tonight now, this night, he would stroll beneath ten thousand wide-opened windows, near balconies, past alleys. Suddenly the world absolutely sizzled with flies. And here was Vamenos, a fresh-frosted cake.

"You sure look keen in that suit, Vamenos," said Manulo sadly.

"Thanks." Vamenos twitched, trying to make his skeleton comfortable where all their skeletons had so recently been. In a small voice Vamenos said, "Can I go now?"

"Villanazul!" said Gómez. "Copy down these rules." Villanazul licked his pencil.

"First," said Gómez, "don't fall down in that suit, Vamenos!"

"I won't."

"Don't lean against buildings in that suit."

"No buildings."

"Don't walk under trees with birds in them in that suit. Don't smoke. Don't drink-"

"Please," said Vamenos, "can I sit down in this suit?"

"When in doubt, take the pants off, fold them over a chair."

"Wish me luck," said Vamenos.

"Go with God, Vamenos."

He went out. He shut the door.

There was a ripping sound.

"Vamenos!" cried Martinez.

He whipped the door open.

Vamenos stood with two halves of a handkerchief torn in his hands, laughing.

"Rrrip! Look at your faces! Rrrip!" He tore the cloth again. "Oh, oh, your faces, your faces! Ha!"

Roaring, Vamenos slammed the door, leaving them stunned and alone.

Gómez put both hands on top of his head and turned away. "Stone me. Kill me. I have sold our souls to a demon!"

Villanazul dug in his pockets, took out a silver coin, and studied it for a long

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while.
"Here is my last fifty cents. Who else will help me buy back Vamenos' share of the suit?"
"It's no use." Manulo showed them ten cents. "We got only enough to buy the lapels and the buttonholes."
Gómez, at the open window, suddenly leaned out and yelled. "Vamenos! No!"
Below on the street, Vamenos, shocked, blew out a match and threw away an old cigar butt he had found somewhere. He made a strange gesture to all the men in the window above, then waved airily and sauntered on.
Somehow, the five men could not move away from the window. They were crushed together there.
"I bet he eats a hamburger in that suit," mused Villanazul. "I'm thinking of the mustard."
"Don't!" cried Gómez. "No, no!" Manulo was suddenly at the door.
"I need a drink, bad."
"Manulo, there's wine here, that bottle on the floor-"
Manulo went out and shut the door.
A moment later Villanazul stretched with great exaggeration and strolled about the room.
"I think I'll walk down to the plaza, friends."
He was not gone a minute when Dominguez, waving his black book at the others, winked and turned the doorknob.
"Dominguez," said Gómez.
"Yes?"
"If you see Vamenos, by accident," said Gómez, "warn him away from Mickey Murrillo's Red Rooster Café. They got fights not only on TV but out front of the TV too."
"He wouldn't go into Murrillo's," said Domlnguez. "That suit means too much to Vamenos. He wonldn't do anything to hurt it."
"He'd shoot his mother first," said Martinez.

"Sure he would."
Martinez and Gómez, alone, listened to Dominguez's footsteps hurry away down the stairs. They circled the undressed window dummy.
For a long while, biting his lips, Gómez stood at the window, looking out. He touched his shirt pocket twice, pulled his hand away, and then at last pulled something from the pocket. Without looking at it,. he handed it to Martinez.
"Martinez, take this."
"What is it?"
Martinez looked at the piece of folded pink paper with print on it, with names and numbers. His eyes widened.
"A ticket on the bus to El Paso three weeks from now!"
Gómez nodded. He couldn't look at Martinez. He stared out into the summer night.
"Turn it in. Get the money," he said. "Buy us a nice white panama hat and a pale blue tie to go with the white ice cream suit, Martinez. Do that."
"Gómez-"
"Shut up. Boy, is it hot in here! I need air."

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"Gómez. I am touched. Gómez-"
But the door stood open. Gómez was gone.
Mickey Murrillo's Red Rooster Café and Cocktail Lounge was squashed between two big brick buildings and, being narrow, had to be deep. Outside, serpents of red and sulphur-green neon fizzed and snapped. Inside, dim shapes loomed and swam away to lose themselves in a swarming night sea.
Martinez, on tiptoe, peeked through a flaked place on the red-painted front window. He felt a presence on his left, heard breathing on his right. He glanced in both directions.
"Manulo! Villanazul!"
"I decided I wasn't thirsty," said Manulo. "So I took a walk."
"I was just on my way to the plaza," said Villanazul, "and decided to go the long way around."
As if by agreement, the three men shut up now and turned together to peer on tiptoe through various flaked spots on the window.
A moment later, all three felt a new very warm presence behind them and heard still faster breathing.
"Is our white suit in there?" asked Gómez's voice.
"Gómez!" said everybody, surprised. "Hi!"
"Yes!" cried Dominguez, having just arrived to find his own peephole. "There's the

suit! And, praise God, Vamenos is still in it!"
"I can't see!" Gómez squinted, shielding his eyes. "What's he doing? "
Martinez peered. Yes! There, way back in the shadows, was a big chunk of snow and the idiot smile of Vamenos winking above it, wreathed in smoke.
"He's smoking!" said Martinez.
"He's drinking!" said Dominguez.
"He's eating a taco!" reported Villanazul.
"A juicy taco," added Manulo.
"No," said Gómez. "No, no, no . . ."
"Ruby Escuadrillo's with him!"
"Let me see that!" Gómez pushed Martinez aside.
Yes, there was Ruby! Two hundred pounds of glittering sequins and tight black satin on the hoof, her scarlet fingernails clutching Vamenos' shoulder. Her cowlike face, floured with powder, greasy with lipstick, hung over him!
"That hippo!" said Dominguez. "She's crushing the shoulder pads. Look, she's going to sit on his lap!"
"No, no, not with all that powder and lipstick!" said Gómez. "Manulo, inside! Grab that drink! Villanazul, the cigar, the taco! Dominguez, date Ruby Escuadrillo, get her away. Ándale, men!"
The three vanished, leaving Gómez and Martinez to stare, gasping, through the peephole.
"Manulo, he's got the drink, he's drinking it!"
"Ay! There's Villanazul, he's got the cigar, he's eating the taco!"
"Hey, Dominguez, he's got Ruby! What a brave one!" A shadow bulked through Murrillo's front door, traveling fast.

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"Gómez!" Martinez clutched Gómez's arm. "That was Ruby Escuadrillo's boy friend, Toro Ruiz. If he finds her with Vamenos, the ice cream suit will be covered with blood, covered with blood-"
"Don't make me nervous," said Gómez. "Quickly!"
Both ran. Inside they reached Vamenos just as Toro Ruiz grabbed about two feet of the lapels of that wonderful ice cream suit.
"Let go of Vamenos!" said Martinez.
"Let go that suit! " corrected Gómez.
Toro Ruiz, tap-dancing Vamenos, leered at these intruders.
Villanazul stepped up shyly.
Villanazul smiled. "Don't hit him. Hit me."
Toro Ruiz hit Villanazul smack on the nose.
Villananul, holding his nose, tears stinging his eyes, wandered off.

Gómez grabbed one of Toro Ruiz's arms, Martinez the other.
"Drop him, let go, cabrón, coyote, vaca! "
Toro Ruiz twisted the ice cream suit material until all six men screamed in mortal agony. Grunting, sweating, Toro Ruiz dislodged as many as climbed on. He was winding up to hit Vamenos when Villanazul wandered back, eyes streaming.
"Don't hit him. Hit me!"
As Toro Ruiz hit Villanazul on the nose, a chair crashed on Toro's head.
"Ai! " said Gómez.
Toro Ruiz swayed, blinking, debating whether to fall. He began to drag Vamenos with him.
"Let go!" cried Gómez. "Let go!"
One by one, with great care, Toro Ruiz's banana-like fingers let loose of the suit.
A moment later he was ruins at their feet.
"Compadres, this way!"
They ran Vamenos outside and set him down where he freed himself of their hands with injured dignity.
"Okay, okay. My time ain't up. I still got two minutes and, let's see - ten seconds."
"What!" said everybody.
"Vamenos," said Gómez, "you let a Guadalajara cow climb on you, you pick fights, you smoke, you drink, you eat tacos, and now you have the nerve to say your time ain't up?"
"I got two minutes and one second left!"
"Hey, Vamenos, you sure look sharp!" Distantly, a woman's voice called from across the street.
Vamenos smiled and buttoned the coat.
"It's Ramona Alvarez! Ramona, wait!" Vamenos stepped off the curb.
"Vamenos," pleaded Gómez. "What can you do in one minute and" - he checked his watch - "forty seconds!"
"Watch! Hey, Ramona!"
Vamenos loped.
"Vamenos, look out!"

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Vamenos, surprised, whirled, saw a car, heard the shriek of brakes.
"No," said all five men on the sidewalk.
Martinez heard the impact and flinched. His head moved up. It looks like white laundry, he thought, flying through the air. His head came down.
Now he heard himself and each of the men make a different sound. Some swallowed too much air. Some let it out. Some choked. Some groaned. Some cried aloud for justice.

Some covered their faces. Martinez felt his own fist pounding his heart in agony. He couid not move his feet.
"I don't want to live," said Gómez quietly. "Kill me, someone."
Then, shuffling, Martinez looked down and told his feet to walk, stagger, follow one after the other. He collided with other men. Now they were trying to run. They ran at last and somehow crossed a street like a deep river through which they could only wade, to look down at Vamenos.
"Vamenos!" said Martinez. "You're alive!"
Strewn on his back, mouth open, eyes squeezed tight, tight, Vamenos motioned his head back and forth, back and forth, moaning.
"Tell me, tell me, oh, tell me, tell me."
"Tell you what, Vamenos?"
Vamenos clenched his fists, ground his teeth.
"The suit, what have I done to the suit, the suit, the suit!"
The men crouched lower.
"Vamenos, it's . . . why, it's okay! "
"You lie!" said Vamenos. "It's torn, it must be, it must be, it's torn, all around, underneath? "
"No." Martinez knelt and touched here and there. "Vamenos, all around, underneath even, it's okay!"
Vamenos opened his eyes to let the tears run free at last. "A miracle," he sobbed.
"Praise the saints!" He quieted at last "The car?"
"Hit and run." Gómez suddenly remembered and g!ared at the empty street. "It's good he didn't stop. We'd have-"
Everyone listened.
Distantly a siren walled.
"Someone phoned for an ambulance."
"Quick!" said Vamenos, eyes rolling. "Set me up! Take off our coat!"
"Vamenos-"
"Shut up, idiots!" cried Vamenos. "The coat, that's it! Now, the pants, the pants, quick, quick, peónes! Those doctors! You seen movies? They rip the pants with razors to get them off! They don't care! They're maniacs! Ah, God, quick, quick!"
The siren screamed.
The men, panicking, all handled Vamenos at once.
"Right leg, easy, hurry, cows! Good! Left leg, now, left, you hear, there, easy, easy! Ow, God! Quick! Martinez, your pants, take them off!"
"What?" Martinez froze.
The siren shrieked.

"Fool!" wailed Vamenos. "All is lost! Your pants! Give me!"
Martinez jerked at his belt buckle.
"Close in, make a circle!"
Dark pants, light pants flourished on the air.
"Quick, here come the maniacs with the razors! Right leg on, left leg, there! "
"The zipper, cows, zip my zipper!" babbled Vamenos.
The siren died.
"Madre mía, yes, just in time! They arrive." Vamenos lay back down and shut his eyes. "Gracias."
Martinez turned, nonchalantly buckling on the white pants as the interns brushed past.
"Broken leg," said one intern as they moved Vamenos onto a stretcher.
"Compadres," said Vamenos, "don't be mad with me."
Gómez snorted. "Who's mad?"
In the ambulance, head tilted back, looking out at them upside down, Vamenos faltered.
"Compadres, when . . . when I come from the hospital . . . am I still in the bunch? You won't kick me out? Look, I'll give up smoking, keep away from Murrillo's, swear off women-"
"Vamenos," said Martinez gently, "don't pronsise nothing."
Vamenos, upside down, eyes brimming wet, Martinez there, all white now against the stars.
"Oh, Martinez, you sure look great in that suit. Compadres, don't he look beautiful? "
Villanazul climbed in beside Vamenos. The door slammed. The four remaining men watched the ambulance drive away.
Then, surrounded by his friends, inside the white suit, Martinez was carefully escorted back to the curb.
In the tenement, Martinez got out the cleaning fluid and the others stood around, telling him how to clean the suit and, later, how not to have the iron too hot and how to work the lapels and the crease and all. When the suit was cleaned and pressed so it looked like a fresh gardenia just opened, they fitted it to the dummy.
"Two o'clock," murmured Villanazul. "I hope Vamenos sleeps well. When I left him at the hospital, he looked good."
Manulo cleared his throat. "Nobody else is going out with that suit tonight, huh?"
The others glared at him.
Manulo flushed. "I mean . . . it's late. We're tired. Maybe no one will use the suit for forty-eight hours, huh? Give it a rest. Sure. Well. Where do we sleep?"
The night being still hot and the room unbearable, they carried the suit on its dummy out and down the hall. They brought with them also some pillows and blankets.

They climbed the stairs toward the roof of the tenement. There, thought Martinez, is the cooler wind, and sleep.
On the way, they passed a dozen doors that stood open, people still perspiring and awake, playing cards, drinking pop, fanning themselves with movie magazines.

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I wonder, thought Martinez. I wonder if - Yes!
On the fourth floor, a certain door stood open.
The beautiful girl looked up as the men passed. She wore glasses and when she saw Martinez she snatched them off and hid them under her book.
The others went on, not knowing they had lost Martinez, who seemed stuck fast in the open door.
For a long moment he could say nothing. Then he said:
"José Martinez."
And she said:
"Celia Obregón."
And then both said nothing.
He heard the men moving up on the tenement roof. He moved to follow.
She said quickly, "I saw you tonight!"
He came back.
"The suit," he said.
"The suit," she said, and paused. "But not the suit."
"Eh?" he said.
She lifted the book to show the glasses lying in her lap. She touched the glasses.
"I do not see well. You would think I would wear my glasses, but no. I walk around for years now, hiding them, seeing nothing. But tonight, even without the glasses, I see. A great whiteness passes below in the dark. So white! And I put on my glasses quickly!"
"The suit, as I said," said Martinez.
"The suit for a little moment, yes, but there is another whiteness above the suit."
"Another?"
"Your teeth! Oh, such white teeth, and so many!"
Martinez put his hand over his mouth.
"So happy, Mr. Martinez," she said. "I have not often seen such a happy face and such a smile."
"Ah," he said, not able to look at her, his face flushing now.
"So, you see," she said quietly, "the suit caught my eye, yes, the whiteness filled the night below. But the teeth were much whiter. Now, I have forgotten the suit."
Martinez flushed again. She, too, was overcome with what she had said. She put her

glasses on her nose, and then took them off, nervously, and hid them again. She looked at her hands and at the door above his head.
"May I-" he said, at last.
"May you-"
"May I call for you," he asked, "when next the suit is mine to wear?"
"Why must you wait for the suit?" she said.
"I thought-"
"You do not need the suit," she said.
"But-"
"If it were just the suit," she said, "anyone would be fine in it. But no, I watched. I saw many men in that suit, all different, this night. So again I say, you do not need to wait for the suit."

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"Madre mía, madre mía! " he cried happily. And then, quieter, "I will need the suit for a little while. A month, six months, a year. I am uncertain. I am fearful of many things. I am young."
"That is as it should be," she said.
"Good night, Miss-"
"Celia Obregón."
"Celia Obregón," he said, and was gone from the door.
The others were waiting on the roof of the tenement. Coming up through the trapdoor, Martinez saw they had placed the dummy and the suit in the center of the roof and put their blankets and pillows in a circle around it. Now they were lying down. Now a cooler night wind was blowing here, up in the sky.
Martinez stood alone by the white suit, smoothing the lapels, talking half to himself.
"Ay, caramba, what a night! Seems ten years since seven o'clock, when it all started and I had no friends. Two in the morning, I got all kinds of friends . . ." He paused and thought, Celia Obregón, Celia Obregón. ". . . all kinds of friends," he went on. "I got a room, I got clothes. You tell me. You know what?" He looked around at the men lying on the rooftop, surrounding the dummy and himself. "It's funny. When I wear this suit, I know I will win at pool, like Gómez. A woman will look at me like Dominguez. I will be able to sing like Manulo, sweetly. I will talk fine politics like Villanazul. I'm strong as Vamenos. So? So, tonight, I am more than Martinez. I am Gómez, Manulo, Dominguez, Villanazul, Vamenos. I am everyone. Ay . . . ay . . ." He stood a moment longer by this suit which could save all the ways they sat or stood or walked. This suit which could move fast and nervous like Gómez or slow and thoughtfully like Villanazul or drift like Dominguez, who never touched ground, who always found a wind to take him somewhere. This suit which belonged to them but which also owned them all. This suit that was - what? A parade.
"Martinez," said Gómez. "You going to sleep?"
"Sure. I'm just thinking."
"What?"
"If we ever get rich," said Martinez softly, "it'll be kind of sad. Then we'll all have suits. And there won't be no more nights like tonight. It'll break up the old

gang. It'll never be the same after that."
The men lay thinking of what had just been said.
Gómez nodded gently.
"Yeah . . . it'll never be the same . . . after that."
Martinez lay down on his blanket. In darkness, with the others, he faced the middle of the roof and the dummy, which was the center of their lives.
And their eyes were bright, shining, and good to see in the dark as the neon lights from nearby buildings flicked on, flicked off, flicked on, flicked off, revealing and then vanishing, revealing and then vanishing, their wonderful white vanilla ice cream summer suit.

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