

The Psychedelic Children

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Whether or not one believes the scientific "evidence" that LSD-25 causes damage to the chromosomes, one has to admit that the idea of a child mutated by LSD use is an intriguing one. It must be intriguing. For I received about a dozen letters from readers about this story, and it has been published in French and will be included in a book of stories and author interviews to be published later this year in Spain. What interests readers, I think and hope, is not so much the plot, but the style (ah, now the traditionalists leap down my throat!). I have attempted to write a story whose style (typography and scene-switching, and of the psychedelic, of a mild acid trip. The end of the story fits into this attempt, for it is much like a drug delirium: how thin is the fabric of what you thought was reality. . . .

HE woke even before she and lay listening to the rasping of her breath: seafoam whispering over jagged rocks. It would get worse before she woke. He reached to the night-stand and took a cigarette from the nearly empty pack, lighted it, and sat up. He tried not to think of the energies roaring there. In the darkness, he tried to turn his mind to other things. The view from the window was pleasant, for snow had been falling since suppertime, embracing everything. The clouds parted now and then to let the moon through. It lighted the night, washing onto the white blanket and splashing back. Beyond the hoary willow tree lay the highway, a black slash in the calcimined wonderland. It was obvious that the heater coils in the roadbed had broken down again, for (he drifts were edging back onto the hard surface unchecked. Old-fashioned plows were working on "Ashen dreams fluttering flaked while lightning men with swords and draw fingernails over the ice ..."

He was not certain whether that was completely senseless or not. It was a mood piece, no doubt. He repeated it softly again. He would have to remember it, polish it-perhaps-for

Minutes later, he looked back to Laurie. Her face was pale, her eyes closed and edged with wrinkles, He ran his hand through the billows of raven hair that cascaded down her pillow. She moaned in answer, the air rushing in and out of her chest. Harder, harder she breathed. Deciding to get a head start this time, he stood and pulled on his trousers, slipped into a banian shirt.

"Frank?" she said.

"I know."

She slipped out of bed. naked, and dressed in a slieath-a red and black one that he liked.

"I'll pull the car out of the garage," he said.

The snow-

"They seem to have it under control. Don't worry. I'D pick you up at the front door in five minutes."

"I love you," she said as he went through the doorway into the shadow-filled living room. That always sent shivers through him: that face, that voice, those words.

He took a flashlight and the gun that lay beside it from the kitchen catchall drawer. Stepping into the glittering night, he stuffed the gun in a jacket pocket and sniffed the cold air. It hurt all the way down into his Kings and woke him all the way up. The path between house and garage was unshoveled: the snow lay a foot twelve or fourteen inches deep. He plodded through it,

listening to the caw sweep of the wind, the distant moan of heavy machinery battling Nature. The garage door hummed open when it recognized his thumbprint on the lock disc. He crawled into the car, started it, backed out, pushing snow with the rear bumper. He flipped on the front and rear heating bars. With Laurie's problem, he had to be ready

been a costly extra, but a necessary one. When he pulled up to the front door, she was waiting. She climbed in, hud-

"\Where tor

"The country somewhere," she whispered in her tiny voice. "Hurry, please. It's going to be real bad this time."

Melting snow in advance, he drove across the highway into the lane leading away from the city and suburbs. The roho-prid drove for him then while he stroked her forehead and kissed her cheeks, her ears, her neck . . .

the red eye winked at him as if to say he must now caress the controls. Somewhere in the bowels of the car a buzzer beeped for the same reason. HP turned left along a secondary route that was not nearly so well cleaned as the superhighway. Drifts were clawing at the macadam, choking it to half its normal width in many places. He held the accelerator down and kept the Champion moving.

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She was moaning . . .

This looked had. She was rapidly reaching the critical point: the moment when the psychic powers reached ma\i-mal point of tolerance and exploded violently and deadly. Laurie was an Esper, but it did her no good, for she could not control the power. She could not siphon it off until it reached the critical point, and once it had reached the critical point, there were only moments left to get rid of it.

He was glad he had had the melting bars installed. Someday all cars, he thought, would have them. Then the snuw plows and heating coils would both be obsolete. The bars burned away the crystals, evaporating some, melting some and leaving them behind to freeze into Ice as the night wind roared in and covered the road in their wake. -A little further yet." he said.

He risked a glance away from the road, was shocked-as always-by the white fish-belly color of her beautiful face. It always reminded him of the dead. It always frightened him, "Hold on."

The car skidded sideways without warning. He grabbed desperately at the wlieel, then remembered to let the car Follow the direction of the slide. They lodged in a drift, and it took the melting bars a few minutes to free them.

fore-turned abruptly across what appeared to be a wheat field, flat and snow covered. The bars were burning at full capacity. He took it slow, melting his way toward the edge of the forest which began where the field sloped Tip-When they reached the forest's perimeter, he braked, stopped, shut off the lights. They would not be seen from the highway against the Mark backdrop of trees.

He sat with her at the side of a tree, sat on the snow with her. She had reached the critical point

"Okay," he said. "There is no one here."

She whimpered again . . .

Her breath rushed out . . .

there was a four-foot circle of bare earth. Then there was

"I remember wall papered parlors With a grandfather clock that chimed _ Like a voice saying I'll give you A dollar for a dime.

"I recall sun-bleached kitchens On a then lute afternoon, A hundred thousand fragrances, My mother's tasting spoon . . ."

He flipped off the recording machine, rewound the tape, removed and packaged it. That was Saturday's show-Sired on one hundred and two FM radio stations. Fifteen minutes of poetry and commentary, recital and rebuttal. He was a little bitter about it. He wondered how many really listened and how many only laughed. He suspected that many of the Rentier arts were not designed for the mass media. But then, it brought pennies for bread, pennies for lard.

"Frank-" Laurie came into the den, all sweet-smiling in a dress covered with large red apples on a straw background, a red band dipping in and out of her dark hair. "Have you seen this morning's paper?" He couldn't have missed the headline: HALLUCINO-CHILD BELIEVED TO BE IN AREA. And below that: POLICE BEGIN SEARCH. It told about the field near Crockerton where the snow had been vaporized, the earth boiled and glazed, the trees splintered and charred.

It told how there was only one thing that could have done all that. And they were searching for the halhicino-child.

"Don't worry," he said.

"But they say the police are searching outward on a He pulled her down on his lap and kissed her. "And what can they find? I'm a poet who contributes well to the party in power; the party in power is very anti-Esper. We live normal lives. We have never once voiced disapproval over punishment of captured hallueino-children."

"Just the same," she said, "I'll worry."

So would he.

They stood watching through the porthole in the front door as the police approached the house. "It's just a question party. Only routine investigators following routine procedures," he said.

She was trembling just the same. She retreated to the kitchen.

He waited for two knocks before he opened the door. He did not want to appear too anxious, and he needed

"Yes?"

"Police Inspector Jameson and android assistant T," the dark-eyed detective said, motioning to the parody of a man beside him.

"Oh, this must be about the hallucine-child in the papers. Come in, inspector."

He led them into the den. The inspector and he sat, but T remained standing.

The snow-flakes (bat had fallen on his

cutting wet swaths across the "skin" of his face to the precipice of his chin.

"Nice place you have here, Mr. Cauvell."

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"Thank you."

"This where yrm write poems?"

Cauvell looked to the desk, nodded.

"I'm a fan of yours. Though I must say I don't often like

He breathed more easily. The man was certainly not a

in fact. Why, Cauvell thought, fie can't even meet my eyes directly. . . .

"Is your wife-Mrs. Canvell-at home?"

His heart jumped a little, but he did not hesitate- "Yes, she is. Lauriel" he shouted, perhaps a bit too loud. "Lauriel"

She came in from the kitchen and stood next to his

Cauvell was afraid. Would T notice and become suspicious of her suspicion?

"Please sit down. Mrs. Cmivell," Jameson said. He ndthe

neighborhood and would like to ask you both a few questions."

They both nodded.

T," Jameson said.

The android's throat seemed to hum For a moment; then a deep, hoarse voice groaned from a plate in the lower portion of his neck.

THIS INTERVIEW is BEING RECORDED.

ARE YOU AWARE OF THIS, MR. AND MRS. FRANK CAUVBLL?

"Yes," they answered ceremoniously'

ALL INFORMATION RECORDED MAY BE USED IN A COURT OF LAW. ARE YOU AWARE OF Tins, MR. AND MRS. CAUVELL?

"Yes."

THIS IS ANDROID T OF CITY DIVISION COOPERATING WITH INSPECTOR HAROLD JAMESON. MR. CAUVELL, A HALLUCINO-PARENTS WHOSE GENES WERE ALTERED BY THEIR USE OF LSD-25. THESE CHILDREN BECOME EITHER PHYSICAL FREAKS UNDERSTAND THE USE OF THE TERM HALLUCINO-CHILDREN

"Yes."

AND YOU, MRS. CAUVELL?

I do.

THE PHYSICAL FREAKS ARE CARETAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT. THE HALLUCINO-CHILDREN WHO ARE BORN WITH THE SENSITIVITY ARE A DANGER TO THEIR STATE AND CANNOT BE AFFORDED FULL CITIZENSHIP. BECAUSE OF THE NATURE OF ONLY HE STUDIED AT THE CRITICAL POINT AND WHICH IS TOO DANGEROUS AT THE CRITICAL POINT TO STUDY-MANY OF THEM PUT TO SLEEP. HUMANELY. DO YOU UNDERSTAND THIS, MRS. CAUVELL?

They said that they did. The formalities were over.

WE HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE THERE IS A HALLUCINO-CHILDREN IN Tins VICINITY. HAVE EITHER OF YOU KNOWLEDGE OF SAID CHILDREN?

DID EITHER OF YOU LEAVE THE HOUSE LAST NIGHT?

"No,"

The question suddenly became very pointed. THEN

HOW DID THE DRIVEWAY AND ENTRANCE TO THE SUPER-HIGHWAY BECOME CLEARED?

"We noticed as we came in," Jameson said, "that your driveway seems to have been cleared by melting bars."

"I went out this morning for a few groceries," Cauvell answered a bit too quickly.

"You do your own shopping?" Jameson asked, raising his eyebrows.

"Yes." Cauvell was suddenly glad that he had never gone completely modern. Less than a fifth of the population did their own

grocery shopping in person anymore. The banks of robot clerks that took the orders by phone had more-or-less depersonalized food

purchasing. Cauvell, however, had always liked to see the steak before he bought it. Perhaps it was his picky appetite.

MRS. CAUVELL'S FATHER WAS A COLLEGE PROFESSOR, T said gratingly. THE COLLEGE INSTITUTIONS OF THE SIXTIES

AND SEVENTIES WERE OFTEN QUITE LIBERAL AND AS ANXIOUS AS THEIR STUDENTS TO EXPERIMENT. MR. CAUVELL, DID THEY HAVE PREPARED THEMSELVES, LONG AGO, FOR THE POSSIBILITY OF QUESTIONS LIKE THESE. AND THEY HAD AGREED THAT A LITTLE BIT OF THE

truth would be better than a complete lie. "I believe he tried it twice with bad experiences both times," Laurie said.

Cauvell was proud of her firm, unshaken answers.

HE WAS NOT A RECURRING USER?

"No."

"How can you be so certain, my dear?" Jameson asked kindly.

Cauvell realized that Jameson was anything but stupid, anything but meek. He was T's straight man, but some of his own lines hit the mark close to center.

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"My mother told me," Laurie said. "My father died when I was seven, My mother spent the rest of her life telling me about everything he did. I heard all the stories a thousand times. I couldn't forget them. He took LSD twice and had bad trips both times."

WHICH PARTY DO YOU BELONG TO? T asked.

"The party in power for the last thirteen years. The Constitutional Tolerant Party." Cauvell tried to force pride into his voice while he forced his gorge down.

AND WHY DID YOU JOIN THE PARTY?

"Because we feared the Communist countries and realized the subversive trends within our own society must stop."

AND YOU HAVE SEEN NOR HEARD NOTHING OF THE HAL-LUCINO-CHILD?

"Nothing."

WAS THIS INTERVIEW RECORDED WITH YOUR KNOWLEDGE, MR. AND MRS. CAUVELL?

They said it was.

The android's voice clicked off, its throat humming for a moment before going tomb silent. Inspector Jameson got to his feet. "

Sorry to inconvenience you. It has been ^pleas-sure. Thank you for cooperating."

"Only too happy," Frank said.

"Hope you find the mutant," Laurie said.

They watched through the porthole as the inspector and the android stepped into the police car and pulled onto the highway, growing smaller, smaller, and disappearing in the distance.

From the looks of the sky, it was going to snow again,

Somewhere a mutated boy hid, shivering.

Some unbearable moment, his nerves split; he ran.

He ran right into the arms of the android. The eyes of the metal man were jewels, even as the tears on his oion cheeks frosted into diamonds. He backed away, but there were others behind him. There was no place to go.

He unleashed the psychic forces at them, watched them go tip in flames, watched their faces melt, watched their insides smoke.

But there were more of them. And they would not wait. Nozzles opened on their hips. Fire sprayed; flames engulfed him, swallowed, digested him.

All the while the snow fell. . . little white bullets ...

They got some poor devil," Laurie said, handing him the paper.

He looked at it, grimaced. HALLUCINO-CHILD FIGHTS IT OUT WITH POLICE. Not

"fights it out with robots' for that was too crude. That

would make the entire thing seem prominent. Cauvell wagered a k've cop had not come within a hundred yards of the boy.

"It's rny fault," Laurie said.

"That's absurdl How could it possibly be your fault?"

"We were too open. We left a trail or clues, at least, that rnad-e them search."

"And it was an emergency," he argued. "You'd have blasted the both of us to kingdom come if you had tried to hold back that force any longer."

"Just the same, they might not have flushed the boy out if we-"

"Forget it. What's for supper?"

"Spaghetti."

The next night it was pork chops. The next night, meat loaf. The night after that, he woke up to her heavy breathing.

"Laurie?"

Her eyes were open. "Yes?"

"Why didn't you wake me?" He got out of bed, began to dress.

"Frank?"

"What? Hurry and get your clothes on."

"Frank, maybe it would be a lot better if I just let It kill me."

He stopped tucking his shirt in and turned around to face her. He could see only the vague outline of her small but womanly body

outlined by the sheet, her hair like spun silk ... He crossed to her and lifted her head up. "What is that supposed to mean?"

She was crying.

"Don't you love me?" he asked.

She tried to answer, but the words were sobs.

"Then get the hell dressed," he said gently.
And he left. In the kitchen, he took the gun from the drawer. Outside, the sky was clear; the wind was stiff, whipping the snow into a frenzy. When he brought the car to the front door, she was waiting. "Where will we go?" she asked.
"Farther out than before. And we will cover well."
Christmas was coming.
He thought about that as he drove. He thought about parties and eggnog. church services, candles on altars, candles in windows. He thought about Christ climbing down from his bare tree and wondered what Ferlinghetti would have written had he lived in the present and been married to a hallucino-clild.
Far out in the country, he angled the Champion onto a side road, cruised along it for a time, broke off the road into a wide trench that petered out into woods at a clearing in the center of the forest. They were three miles from a road, sheltered on all sides by trees, exposed only directly overhead where the clearing allowed the stars to look down. When they got out. they heard the helicopter whining somewhere above them.
Then the sun came on. The copter settled into the clearing, its headlamps like the eyes of some tremendous moth, its rotors like wings.
"Frank!"
He grabbed her, pulled her back into the car, scrambled behind the wheel. PLEASE DO NOT ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE. It was the Voice of T.
He would have to reverse out of there, which would be a disastrous undertaking in this rugged terrain. Or he would have to push through them. Jameson, T, and another android labeled JJK were crossing the hoary field, legs frosted with snow, weapons drawn. He rolled down the window. "What do you want?"
"If you bought groceries that morning, Mr. Cauvell," Jameson said between breaths, "why did no grocer within fifty miles have a record of your personal purchase?"
T was twenty feet away, directly in front of the car.
He slammed down on the accelerator, flipped the melting bars to full power, felt the jolt when T went under the wheels, as the second android was struck a glancing blow that tore its arm off. The engine was whining. He could not make a swift escape through the drifts, for the melting bars would not be able to work fast enough. He wrenched the wheel to the left, spun the Champion around, and shot back along the trail he had burned into the clearing in the first place. He passed Jameson who leaped out of his way. The two androids were lifeless.
"We're free!" he shouted excitedly.
The vibra-beam sliced a neat hole through the rear window and struck Laurie on the temple. She slumped across him, dribbling blood from one ear . . .
He could personify the moon: the moon peered down patronizingly. He could make a girl into a rose: she was a rose, soft and gentle.
He could forge metaphors, hammer out similes; he could allocate so much alliteration to just so many lines. But he could not stop the bleeding from her ear.
He could rise up in the morning like a dragon from the sea.
With the sun over his shoulder, he could warp words to say his thoughts.
He could lie down at night, satisfied as a god must be.
But stopping the blood was beyond his powers.
She was stretched across the back seat, face up, pale and ghostly in what little moonlight filtered through the tinted windows.
Cauvell lashed himself into the bucket seat, gripped the wheel viciously. Where to? How long would he have until all roads were

blocked? The forest clearing was fifteen miles behind, but the world had shrunk to the size of an orange in recent years, and fifteen miles was hardly the length of one seed. The thing, perhaps, was to find a small town and-with the gun-force a doctor to care for her. Hide the Champion in the doctor's garage. He turned the engine over, wheeled into the twisting lane, and spun his wheels over the snow.

Thin rust trickled from her ear-liquid.

Caldwell twenty-six miles . . .

Caldwell nineteen miles . . .

He was ten miles from Caldwell when the helicopter fluttered over the tree tops that sheltered much of the road. The car was

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bathed in sickly yellow light. He swerved left, right, darting out of the beam. But they broadened the shaft and covered both lanes with it. Bullets cut up the pavement in front of him. One pinged off the hood. A few vihra-bearns sent little sections of the pavement boiling. Then, abruptly, there was darkness and no helicopter. Slowing, he rolled down the window, listened. No whitpa-whupa of fiercely beating blades. It was gone. It vanished; it did not simply drift away. Perhaps it had crashed. Yet there was no explosion, no crashing sound. He rolled the window up and drove on.

They had spotted him near Caldwell, and he must bypass that town now. Forty miles away lay Steepleton.

He looked over the sent, felt his stomach flop at the sight of her, comatose and pale-dark. He pressed down on the accelerator.

Steepleton thirty-two miles . . .

Steepleton twenty-four miles . . .

At the boundaries of Steepleton there was a roadblock. Seven men, seven androids. And they knew damn well whose car was coming; they had their weapons raised . . .

Death is not something that creeps about in black robes, slavering. Death cannot be seen . . .

It can't!

And yet his world teas a graveyard. The moon rode high above clouds like pieces of torn shrouds flapping madly to the time of the winds in the dead trees. He struggled up the hiU in the cold air, the wind-born explosions of snow forcing him to squint.

"Good evening," said the mortician.

Re said good evening . . .

"Dust to dust" the embalmer said from his perch atop a monument steeple.

"Ashes to ashes," said the sexton.

He ignored all of them. He pushed onward, toward the summit of the hill where the sepulcher bit at the sky, a broken tooth.

Somewhere a muffled drum. Somewhere a passing hell . . .

He pushed his shoulder against the stone door, felt the rusted hinges move a bit, heard them squeak, heard the rats run inside.

Stepping in, the moonlight flooding in he-hind him, he advanced to the sarcophagus. They had Jntried her in a limestone coffin,

for that facilitated the rotting of the corpse. Somehow, that filled him with rage. He thrust the immensely heavy lid free, looked down at her pale face. Gently-ohf so gently-he lifted her out, placed her upon the marble slab where no coffin yet lay.

Somewhere a tolling-in rereverse; somewhere a dirge is sung backwards.

And he would sing the oration; he would make with panegyrics . . .

"For the Moon never beams without bringing me dreams

Of the beautiful Annabel Lee; And the stars never ri.te hut I see the bright eyes

Of the beautiful Annabel Lee; And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side Of mij darling, mi/ darling, my life and my bride,

In her sepulcher there by the sea-

In her tomb by . . ."

He was three miles past Steepleton. And there were no guards . . .

He pulled the car off the road and sat thinking for a time.

Was his mind leaving him? There had been guards and a roadblock back there, had there not? Which was real, the police or the

graveyard world? The police, certainly. He was no E.A. foe who slept with his dead mistress. Besides, his mistress was not dead.

He turned to look at her. Her face had become wrinkled as if she were in pain.

He called her name. For a brief second, he thought

she answered. But her lips had not moved. He turned back and faced front. It

was ten miles to Kingsmir. What would happen there?

Would the graveyard delusion come back? Would there be further oddities? He

suddenly remembered the disappearance of the

helicopter and shuddered. Pulling back onto the road . . .

. . . He woke and kissed her on the neck.

liar black-black hair spilled doion her bare shoulders, over her bare breasts, curled tinder her pink ears . . .

She kissed him hack . . .

And then she was lying in a limestone casket . . . Then warm and alive , , ,

then cold and rotting . . . A helicopter flattered

again . . . A helicopter blinked out of existence in a world where men had

suddenly never learned to fit/ . . . , Then if was back

again, chasing after quarry that had gone Ions ago when the world had been

different for a few moments . . .

Tombstones . . .

Blink!

A warm bed, warm bodies . . .

Blink!

Blink! Blink!

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He woke up two miles closer to Kingsmir. And he knew! He pulled the Champion onto the berm and crawled be-tween the bucket seats

to where she lay. He ran his fingers over her face, trailed them under her chin, felt the blood pulsing in her neck. Laurie was

changing reality! Somehow, comatose as she was, the psychic powers were siphoning themselves off instead of exploding violently.

They were under control! And they were not merely powers of teleportation and mind reading; they were powers that could change the

basic fiber of the universe. He had thought he imagined her answering him a while back; now he knew she had answered. There had

been no need of lips.

"Laurie, can you hear me?"

There was the distant answer that he had to strain to hear.

"Laurie, you heard the helicopter, sensed the guards and the roadblock. And you changed reality for a while until the car-moving

independent of both worlds-had passed the trouble spot. Isn't that what you did, Laurie?"

A distant yes.

"Listen, Laurie. The graveyard is all wrong. Poetic as hell, but wrong. The other one. The one where we are in bed. Laurie," He

stroked her chin. He kissed her lips and urged her to concentrate. He heard the sirens on the road and talked faster . . .

He talked of a world where there had never been hallucino-children- He spoke of a world where ali were normal . . .

He woke before she did and lay listening to the rasping of her breath: seafoam whispering over jagged rocks. It would get worse

before she woke.

The view froni the window was pleasant. It had been snowing since supptime.

Beyond the hoary willow tree lay the highway, a

black slash in the calcimined wonderland. They were plowing the road, for the heating coils had broken down again. Somehow, he felt that he had seen it all before. Everything was like an echo being relived.

"Glittering dreams fluttering flaked float softly downward while snow -priests prepare for fairy cotillions . . ."

He was not sure whether that was senseless or not. And even the poem seemed Haggling familiar. He repeated it softly.

"Frank?" she said.

"I know."

"Soon."

Til pull the car out of the garage."

The snow-

"They seem to have it under control," he said, feeling as if he had said the same thing once before.

"I love you," she said as he went through the doorway into the shadow-filled living room. That always sent shivers through

him-that face, that voice, those words. The shiver continued, however,

rippling over his spine, quaking across his forehead,

spreading to ne3rly every nerve in his body. What was he frightened of? And what was this feeling of familiarity all about? He was

more than normally afraid for Laurie. After all, she was only pregnant.

Suddenly, he hoped to hell it would be a girl. And then

the shivers were gone as he rushed for the car. He was warm, the world was wonderful, and there was no longer a sense of

familiarity. Suddenly things were very much different and very new indeed.