

## Android Henry Kuttner

BRADLEY LOOKED at the Director's head. His stomach tried to crawl up into his throat. He felt suddenly dizzy. He knew that he was betraying himself, and that would be absolutely fatal.

He reached into his pocket, pulled out a pack of cigarettes and a few coins, and let the coins drop, as though by accident, to the airfoam carpet.

"Oh-oh," he said, and immediately crouched down to recover the money. It's a basic principle of first aid, in cases of shock or faintness, to lower the head, and Bradley was doing just that. The giddiness began to pass as his circulation picked up. In a moment, he knew, he'd have to stand up and face the Director, and by that time he was determined to have his feelings under control. But how the devil could the Director's head be where it was—after last night?

And then sanity came back. He remembered that, last night, the Director couldn't possibly have recognized him through the rubber-plastic false-face he had worn. On the other hand, after last night, the Director of New Products, Inc., should have been incapable of living or breathing, not to speak of using his memory-centers. Bradley had left the man's body in one corner of the room and his head in another.

Man?

With a violent effort he controlled himself. He recaptured the last coin and stood up, his face flushed. "Sorry," he said. "I came in to deliver that report on the induced mutation project, not to act like a horn of plenty." His fascinated stare moved down to the Director's neck and flicked away. The high collar concealed any—any mark. Any mark, such as might have been left by razor-sharp steel shearing through flesh and bone. . . . Was there a reason for the high collar? Bradley couldn't be sure. In the fall of 2060, men's fashions had changed considerably from the uncomfortable styles of a few years before, and the Director's flaring half-cape, with its gilt-braided, close-fitting collar, was far from extreme. Bradley owned one like that himself.

Lord, he thought in white panic—can't the—the things even be killed?

Arthur Court, the Director, turned a bland smile on his Chief of Organization. "Hangover?" he asked. "Take an irradiation treatment. Medical's always happy to use their gadgets. Our staff's too healthy to suit them, I think." He talked!

A mad thought whirled into Bradley's brain: a ringer? Was this really Court sitting behind the desk? But instantly he knew that couldn't be the explanation. It was Court, the same Arthur Court whom Bradley had killed not many hours ago. If you could call it killing, when Court hadn't actually been alive ... at least, not with the same sort of life that activated human beings.

He forced his mind from the danger-level and became the efficient Chief of Organization of the company. "You can't argue with a hangover," he said. "Here're the latest figures—"

"What about that variant factor? I gathered there was something that upset the calculations."

"There was," Bradley said. "But it's a theoretical variable. It doesn't matter a bit in practice, because we're not trying to mutate people. And the sterility rate doesn't vary abnormally with fruit-flies or—or strawberries."

"But it does with people—eh?" Court glanced rapidly through the papers Bradley had given him.

"Uh-huh. We could follow it up, but it would cost money and wouldn't have any immediately practical results. That's up to you to decide, sir."

"We can predict non-human reactions with reasonable accuracy, though?"

Bradley nodded. "Two per cent factor of error. Close enough for us to mutate potatoes twenty feet long and tasting like roast beef, without any danger of getting them half an inch long instead, and tasting like cyanide."

"Does the curve of variance rise with animals?"

"No. Only people. We can hatch chickens which are all white meat and built cube-shaped for easy carving. And, really, we could mutate people too, if it weren't illegal—but the uncertainty factor steps in there, as I said. Too many people become sterilized instead of having mutated children."

“Um,” Court said, and pondered. “Well, forget about the people, then. There’s no profit in it. Drop that part of the investigation. Go ahead with the rest. All right?”

“Fine,” Bradley agreed. He had expected to be stopped at this point of the inquiry, though, since last night, not by Court. He found he was still holding an unlighted cigarette. He put it in his mouth and went to the side door and opened it. Then he turned.

“That’s all?”

He watched Court twist his neck around, and had an insane fear that the man’s head might fall off. But it didn’t.

“Yes, that’s all for now,” Court said pleasantly.

Bradley went out, trying to forget the narrow red line he had just seen circling the Director’s throat, revealed when the man had turned his head.

The things couldn’t be killed by decapitation, then. But they could be destroyed. They could be dissolved with acid, smashed with a hammer, dismantled, burned. . . .

The trouble was, there was as yet no sure way to recognize the creatures. The sterility curve after exposure to mild radioactivity meant something, but ordinary humans could have become sterilized too—though not usually by such slight dosages of gamma rays. And even then, some people were sterile anyway.

All Bradley had was a general method of screening. After that, he had to depend on psychology to weed out the monsters. He knew that they could usually be found in positions of power and influence, though not necessarily in the public eye. Like Arthur Court, who, as Director of New Products, Inc., wielded tremendous influence on the culture—since civilization is moulded by the technological tools placed in its hands.

Bradley shivered.

Last night he had cut off Arthur Court’s head.

Arthur Court was an android.

“And what are you going to do about it?” Bradley asked himself in the hall outside Court’s door. He looked down with a certain academic interest at his own hand shaking until the papers he held fluttered. What could he do about it? He or any other man?

You couldn’t fight them on equal terms. Probably their I.Q. was far higher than mankind’s. On terms of pure intellect Bradley would have no chance at all. Super-comptometers could solve abstruse problems no limited human mind could tackle. Last night Bradley had worn a distorting rubber mask—but if Court’s cold metallic brain set itself the problem of reasoning out his identity, wouldn’t Court arrive at the right answer sooner or later?

Had he already arrived at an answer?

Bradley suppressed a panicky impulse to run. There was such dead silence behind the door at his elbow. For all he knew they had vision that could slip between the buzzing atoms of the door and see Bradley here as if he stood beyond glass—see through him and into the patterns of his brain, and read all his thoughts as they took form.

“They’re only androids,” he reminded himself with great firmness, forcing his gait to a walk as he turned away down the hall. “If they had that much power I wouldn’t be here now.”

Still, he wondered with a corroding urgency just what had happened last night after he left Court’s apartment. He would not think of how Court had looked, lying there motionless beside the heavy steel blade dimmed by that stickiness that looked like blood and was not human blood.

Had he repaired himself, after Bradley left? Repaired was the word, of course—not cured. Only a human could be cured. It probably depended on just where the brain of the android was located. Not necessarily in the head. The head is really too vulnerable a place for such an important mechanism. You could improve on the structure of the human in so many ways. Perhaps the androids had. Perhaps Court’s brain was sheltered somewhere in the mysterious chambers of his synthetic body, and its cold, clicking thoughts had gone on their steely processes all the while Bradley stood there looking down in incredulous shock at the body of his—his victim?

Which was the victim and which the victor?

All functional processes had certainly stopped in the robot after decapitation. Bradley had made sure of that. No respiration, no heartbeat. But somewhere inside, perhaps the metallic brain had been clicking quietly on its cold way. So cold, Bradley thought irrationally, that not all the synthetic warmth of the synthetic blood could raise it a fraction of a degree toward human temperature.

Either Court's body had risen after Bradley left, then, and welded on the head again, or else others had come to repair the sabotage. Did each robot, in operation, send out the equivalent of a steady beam of energy which, when it ceased, brought a repair crew to the spot? If that had happened, it was lucky Bradley had not lingered too long in that room where no murder had been done, though Court's head lay so far from his motionless body. . . .

Of course I could be just as crazy as a bedbug, Bradley reminded himself sardonically. Certainly he would have a hard time convincing anyone he wasn't. And he would have to convince someone. He couldn't go on alone any farther. He had gone too far now to keep this knowledge to himself. By his very act of proof, by the cutting off of an android head, he had given himself away. Sooner or later they would track down the identity of the man behind that rubber mask. Before it happened, he would have to pass this information on.

And there he ran his second terrible risk. The androids would show him no mercy when they caught him. But how much could he expect from his own kind, when he told his fantastic tale? I'll end in a padded cell, he thought, while they go on multiplying outside until—

Until what? Until they outnumber the humans and take over control? Perhaps they already had. Perhaps they had let him go free after that harmless murder because only he was human now in the whole civilized world. . . . Perhaps he was quite harmless, really. Perhaps—

"Oh, shut up," Bradley urged himself impatiently.

"Then at least you don't suspect me of being a-an android?" Dr. Wallinger asked dourly. He was slightly nervous, as the result of having sat for ten minutes now with a gun-muzzle pointed unwaveringly at his stomach. It was, of course, ridiculous that a mysterious rubber-masked figure in a gold-braided cape whose flare concealed most of its wearer's body should be sitting here in his library forcing him to listen to psychotic nonsense.

"You have children," Bradley said, his voice a little muffled behind the mask. "That was how I could feel sure about you."

"Look," Wallinger said earnestly, "I'm a nuclear physicist. I think a psychologist could probably give you more help than—"

"A psychiatrist, you mean?"

"Not at all. Of course not. But—"

"But all the same, you think I'm crazy. All right. I expected you would. I suppose I wouldn't have trusted you very far if you hadn't. That reaction's normal. But blast you, man, open your mind! Look at the thing fairly. Isn't it conceivable that this could have happened?"

Wallinger, with a glance at the gun, put his fingertips together and pursed his lips. "Um, conceivable. . . . Well, there's no threshold, naturally. Though 1/100 roentgen per day is considered safe unless both parents are subject to gamma bombardment. You've borne in mind the normal recovery time? Even under bombardment, you know, the changed genes have less tendency to divide and are gradually supplanted by normal genes."

"You aren't telling me anything new," Bradley said with forced patience. "My point is that gamma radiations that would produce mutation in humans have no effect on robots, which are sterile to begin with. If only androids were sterile it would be simple, but gamma rays induce sterility in humans too. You have children. You're all right. But—"

"Hold on," Wallinger said. "Couldn't there be android children? If they can make adults, couldn't they put together synthetic children too?"

"No. I've thought that out carefully. Children grow too fast. They'd have to reorganize the whole android child every couple of weeks, change all its inward and outward dimensions, work over everything about it. I think that would call for too much time and effort. They can't afford it yet, if my calculations are right. There aren't enough of them. And later, when they could afford the job, it wouldn't

be necessary. You see? By the time they were able to go to all that trouble, they wouldn't need to. They'd be in the majority. They wouldn't have to deceive us. They—"

Bradley paused. His voice had been getting out of control. Above all, he would have to remain cool and calm about this.

"There's one other angle," he said. "I don't think an android child could deceive other children. Real children. They see things too directly. The android brain is coordinated to synthetic human adult thinking. They've done a good job of it, but even now, if you know the truth, you can catch them by their psychological failures of adjustment. For one thing, they aren't exhibitionists. They never try to bully or assert themselves over others. Why should they? They're perfectly functioning and efficient gadgets. They don't need to compensate. They're too well adjusted to be really human."

"Then why couldn't they adjust to a child mentality?"

"For the same reason they couldn't create a growing child physically. A child's mind is too different from an adult's, and it changes too fast. It grows. Anyhow, why should they? They don't need to. They've fooled us all up to now, and even when one man knows the truth, what can he do about it? You won't listen to me. You won't—"

"I'm listening," Wallinger said mildly. "It makes an interesting tale, anyhow. I wish you'd tell me what gave you the idea to start with."

Bradley caught himself on the verge of saying, "It was my work. I had a chance to correlate a lot of material and everything added up to an unknown factor." But he didn't say it. He meant to remain anonymous until he felt sure it was safe to reveal himself. A clue like that could be tracked down too easily.

"I figured it out," he said. "—I have friends in various jobs who kept mentioning little discrepancies they'd noticed. I got interested. It began to add up. There were accidents in which the patients should have died, sometimes did die, and then came back to life. Oh, they always covered it by talk about adrenalin shots and so forth, but it's happened too often. And always in cases involving people in influential positions. I don't know just how they work it—maybe a real person dies and his android double takes his place. They've got the recuperative powers of a machine, but a machine's handicaps, too. Cut one and it bleeds, but—"

Bradley paused, measuring Wallinger's receptiveness with a wary glance.

"All right," he said suddenly, "I'll tell you what really happened. Please try to listen without prejudice if you can. It was six months ago. I was alone in a—a laboratory—with one of my friends." It had been Arthur Court, the Director. This had been the first proof Bradley actually saw.

"He fumbled a retort and it shattered and cut his wrist to the bone. He didn't know I saw it happen. And even though I did see, for a long time I tried to argue myself out of believing it. On the surface of his wrist there was flesh, and it bled. But underneath were wires and metal. I tell you, I saw them! It wasn't an artificial arm, it was the real thing. An artificial arm wouldn't be part flesh and blood."

"What did he do?"

"That's the real give-away. He put his hand in his pocket and made some excuse to get out of the room. He didn't want me to know, because he'd have to call a doctor, and I suppose there weren't any of their men within reach. He couldn't let a human even go through the motions of bandaging him. Oh, they're vulnerable in lots of ways. But now is the time to strike, before they cut down too far on their vulnerabilities. Now—" Bradley paused again, forcing his voice under control.

"What do you suggest, then?" Wallinger asked in his mild voice. It was impossible to guess whether Bradley had succeeded in touching the man's mind with conviction, or even the beginnings of it.

"I don't know." Under the flared cape Bradley's shoulders sagged. "That's why I came to you. I thought— well, look. Here's one possibility. I need an infallible way of locating them. Psychology's all right up to a point, but it's too slow. I've got to know so much about the subject's life and habit patterns. If the factor of mechanical logic and efficiency's too accurate, that's a double check. But—"

"But there's the mechanical factor itself," Wallinger offered unexpectedly. "Have you thought of that? It might—" He paused and grinned a little sheepishly. "Go on," he said.

Behind the rubber mask Bradley's face creased in a broad, exultant smile. That was the opening

wedge. He had succeeded in presenting the physicist with a hypothetical problem that had struck a spark of momentary interest. It was still in the realm of theory, but Wallinger had responded. That was all that mattered now. He went on with increased enthusiasm.

“That’s it exactly. A machine has to be operated.

There must be a power source somewhere. Maybe it’s in them, or maybe they pick it up from some broadcasting source. But it should be possible to detect it. Something like a thiatron recorder hidden in places they frequent, or a Geiger counter, or—”

“You think they could be trapped because of ionizing radiations?”

“Oh, I don’t know what I think. It could be nuclear fission that works the things. It could be anything. That’s why I need help from someone like you. Someone who could make closer guesses than I can.”

Wallinger regarded his fingertips. “I couldn’t, you know,” he said. “Not without much more information than you can give me. You’ve asked me to hear you with an open mind. Now you listen to me. If our positions were reversed, wouldn’t you demand more proof than a stranger’s say-so? It would take almost unlimited time and experiment to make a theoretical gadget to detect these theoretical androids of yours, especially since you can’t even guess yet what their functional principle is. Have you thought of trying it from some more practical angle—x-rays, for instance? The human organism is a tremendously complicated structure. I doubt if it could be perfectly duplicated.”

Bradley shrugged beneath the flaring cape. “All an x-ray shows is light and shadow. The—things—are constructed internally to register normally on a fluoroscope. The only way to be certain would be by using surgery—and how could you do that? They never get sick. If you’d seen what I have—”

He paused. He couldn’t say, “If you’d cut off Arthur Court’s head and knew what I know about the wires and the plastic tubes, the vertebrae that aren’t bone—” But if he admitted how far he had gone to get his certain proof, it would sound to Wallinger like proof of his own madness.

“They’re part flesh and blood, and part machine,” he said carefully. “Maybe the mechanical parts are necessary to keep the living tissues functioning normally. But we’ll never prove it except by force. They’re all adults, in high positions. You’d need their consent to perform an operation, and they naturally won’t give it. Unless—” He paused. The idea that had flashed through his mind blotted out Wallinger’s face for a moment. Perhaps there was a way, after all. Perhaps—

“Now listen to me,” Wallinger was saying patiently, his eyes on the gun. “I’m not unreasonable. You’ve got an interesting idea here, but you aren’t ready yet to prove anything. Why don’t you go back to your job, whatever it is, and gather some more data? Then when you—”

“I’m afraid to go back,” Bradley said in a thin voice.

A knock, low down on the closed door, interrupted Wallinger’s reply. Before he could turn, the door opened a small crack and through it bounded a half-grown cat closely followed by a small girl and a much smaller boy. The cat hurtled across the carpet in the stiff-legged, high-tailed gallop which is a cat’s idea of humor. The girl paused when she saw Bradley, but the boy was too intent on the animal to notice anything.

Wallinger said in a voice that did not sound at all like his own, “Children, go back upstairs! Now!” His face was suddenly grey. He did not glance at Bradley.

The cat had fallen over heavily and lay lashing its tail and making clawless boxing motions at the small boy. Its rough, imperfect purring filled the sudden silence in the room.

“Jerry,” Wallinger said, “take the kitten and go back upstairs. Do you hear me? Sue, you know you mustn’t come into my study without knocking. Go on upstairs.”

“We knocked,” the girl said, her eyes on Bradley, who had slipped the gun under a fold of his cloak. He was trying to analyze a thought that had flashed through his mind as soon as he saw the children. There was something here he could use, but it would take time to work the idea out.

He stood up, seeing Wallinger’s tense start as he moved. The man was terrified. Bradley knew why, suddenly.

The girl watched the stranger with round, interested eyes. The boy and the cat had simultaneously

noticed him now and both were stricken with shyness. The cat scrambled to its feet and prepared to sell its life dearly, and the boy looked around for something to hide behind. The little girl, however, exhibited unmistakable signs of intending to show off. She was around seven, Bradley guessed. He glanced from face to face of the Wallinger family, and then grinned.

"It's all right," he said. "I won't keep you any longer, Doctor. You'll hear from me."

"By all means," Wallinger said, too heartily. He was only interested now in getting his children away from the dangerous proximity of his guest. He followed Bradley into the hall, pushing the children behind him and closing the door.

"I—" He started to stammer a little.

"Forget it," Bradley said. "What do you think I am? They're nice kids."

Wallinger sighed. "Where can I get in touch with you?"

"You can't. I'm going to bring you proof of what I've told you. Those things are half machines under their skins, and I'll find some way to make you believe it. I suppose you'll call the police as soon as I'm gone. I can't help that."

"No, no, of course I won't," Wallinger lied soothingly.

"All right. One more thing, though. I said I was afraid to go back. I meant it. I've done—well, some things that may have given me away. Things I had to do, to make sure. . . . It's a toss-up now whether they or I find the proof we're after first. Dr. Wallinger, I'm going to write down names and facts on this case—things I don't dare tell you now. If you receive that information, you'll know the androids got their proof first. And that in itself ought to be your proof all this is true. I won't be around any more, if that happens. It will all depend on you then."

"Don't worry about that," Wallinger said. "I'm sure—"

"All right, all right," Bradley cut him off. "Wait and see. Good-by, Doctor. You'll hear from me."

He watched the house over his shoulder as he went down the street. No one came out. When he reached the corner he turned it, entered a drugstore and made his way back through the crowded aisles to the telephone booths beside a window. Through the window he could see far away the corner of the Wallinger house, and the library window where Wallinger's desk was. At the desk a distant man sat telephoning, making quick, excited gestures as he talked.

Bradley sighed. At least, Wallinger didn't know his face or name. He could give the police only a circumstantial tale almost too wild for belief. Bradley would have to walk a knife-edged path now, balancing like a tight-rope walker. Both sides were against him.

He drew a deep breath, squared his shoulders and turned back toward the office where Arthur Court would be waiting for him.

"Two of them stood at Court's desk, their backs to him. Bradley paused in the door. Something was wrong. Instinct warned him—a feeling in the air, the poise of the two before him—intangibles that still seemed to shriek an alarm to nerves tense enough to catch their message.

Of the two at the desk, one was not human. The other went by the name of Johnson, and he might not be human either. It was hard to tell.

Bradley had to try twice before his voice would come normally from a suddenly dry throat. "You want me, sir?"

Court turned, smiling. His high collar hid the line where head and neck had been welded back in place. His smile was perfectly normal, but Bradley imagined now he could hear the tiny, soundless clicking of infinitesimal gears as the android's jaw moved and its inhuman muscles drew up.

"Look here, Bradley," Court said. "Ever see this before?"

Bradley looked. Then for an instant the blood drained from his head and the room went grey with his sudden giddiness. But this time he did not dare to drop anything or even to pause while he got control of himself again. They were both watching. He made a tremendous effort and forced the greyness back, forced the quiver out of his voice, forced his hands to stop shaking.

"See what?" he asked in a perfectly normal voice. But he knew well enough.

Court held up the razor-edged blade that had struck his head from his neck forty-eight hours ago. It was unmistakably the same heavy weapon Bradley had bought at a second-hand shop two days

before he used it on the Director. He knew it by the carving on the handle, by the nick in the blade where some inhumanly durable metal in Arthur Court's neck had bitten into the honed edge of the steel. When Bradley saw it last, it lay beside the headless android body, red with unreal android blood.

"Ever see it before?" Court asked again.

"I don't think so," Bradley heard himself saying, with just the right amount of impersonal interest. "Not to remember, anyhow. Why?"

They looked thoughtfully at him. And by that single look, identical in both faces, he was suddenly quite sure that neither was human. It was something about the quality of the stare. He realized after a moment that it was the same look he had seen in the Wallinger kitten's eyes—remote, wild, speculative, not inimical but wary. One species looking at another species, measuring possible danger. The kitten had seen him from quite another angle, from low down, in sharp perspective, and probably not in colors, but in tones of grey. It was extraordinary, suddenly, to think how strange he might have looked to the small, wild, wary creature. If he could see himself as it saw him, he might not recognize that looming figure as himself at all. And it occurred to him now that to the androids he must look equally strange and alien. In what colors beyond spectrum-range did they see him? And what a soft, vulnerable structure of flesh and bone he must look to these creatures of steel and synthetics.

They let him wait a long moment before either spoke or moved. Then that cold-lensed stare dropped from his face, both androids acting as simultaneously as if they moved on a single shaft. It was a mistake, Bradley thought—they shouldn't let me realize how mechanically they operate. And the second thought, close behind the first, warned him that perhaps now they didn't care. They knew what he knew. They had nothing more to hide. . . .

Deliberately Court turned and made a note on his desk-pad.

"All right, Bradley, thanks. Oh—wait a minute. Be in your office for the next half-hour, will you? I want to talk to you again."

Bradley nodded. He didn't trust himself to speak. He was suddenly filled with a deep and bitter humiliation that he must accept the orders of this—this machine.

It was the reversal of all normal things, for a man to say "sir" to a thing of gears and wiring.

He looked down at his own hands lying clenched before him on his desk. Ten minutes had ticked by. Before the next twenty were gone he would have to act. They knew. It had been no accident that they called him in to see the nicked steel blade. How they had traced it to him he could not imagine, but their cold, concise brains worked on theories of logic he could not even guess at. They had outwitted him, apparently, without effort. For all his precautions, his careful hiding of everything that might lead back to his identity, they knew. Or if they did not, they were too definitely suspicious to ignore. In the next five minutes, ten at most, he would have to make up his mind. He would have to act.

He couldn't. All that filled his mind was the bitterness of premature defeat. How could he combat them, when even his own kind dismissed him as psychotic? It was doubtful, he told himself, if the whole human race, rousing at this moment to realization and activity, could defeat them now. How far had their preparations gone? How many of them were there? Too many for one man to fight.

He thought of the whole long history of the race of man, struggling up through countless milleniums of unrecorded time, through five thousand years of slowly increasing knowledge and maturity to this hour. To the laying in iron android hands, gloved with synthetic flesh, of that priceless heritage. What would they do with the gift? Why were they taking over this culture mankind had been so painfully long in building? Would it mean anything at all to them, or would they cast aside the heritage of all those milleniums and build up their own soulless civilization on a foundation that did not even spare a glance for all man's wasted centuries?

"How did it start?" he asked himself. "Why? Why?" And out of the human logic of his own mind came the glimmer of an answer. "When the first man made the first successful android, the human race was doomed."

For a successful android meant one indistinguishable from man, one capable of creating others in its own image, one capable of independent motion and reasoning. And what purpose moved in the brain of that first of its metal kind? Had its human creator implanted there some command which

led—knowingly or unknowingly—to all that followed? Had the order been one which the android could achieve only by duplicating itself until the human race was infected through and through with the robot cells of the androids?

It was quite possible. Perhaps the original creator still lived, perhaps he was dead of age, of accident, or murder at the hands of his own Frankensteinian creations. And paradoxically, perhaps the android race moved on and on along the outward fanning lines of that first command, following toward infinity, toward the last decimal place, some impossible goal which no human being would now ever know....

“They’ll finish me,” Bradley told himself, almost without emotion. “If they don’t suspect me yet, they will. And there’s nothing I can do to stop them. Wallinger didn’t believe me. No one else will. And the androids will follow me until they catch me no matter how far I run. When they finish me off, they’ll probably set to work to make their disguise so perfect not even I could have penetrated it, knowing what I know. They could do that. They could reason out every point where I suspected them, and stop every gap with humanoid behavior. They’re machines. That’s part of their problem. They can work it out if they set themselves the job. Maybe they’re working on it now. By the time they finish me, maybe....”

He slammed both fists hard upon the desk. “No!” he told himself fiercely, and rose.

There were fifteen minutes left.

The telephone on Arthur Court’s desk buzzed. The android put out a metallic hand and machine spoke into machine. Out of the mouthpiece Bradley’s voice sounded small and clear.

“Hello. Hello, sir. This is Bradley. Look, are you busy? Something very odd has just turned up and I thought you ought to be the first to know. I-I’m not sure what to do.”

“What is it? What are you talking about?”

“I’d rather not say on the phone.”

“Where are you?”

“Across the street. You know the Green Door Grille?”

“I thought I told you to wait in your office, Bradley.”

“When you hear what I’ve got to tell you—” Bradley paused for an instant to swallow his own cold anger at the arrogance in the voice of the machine “—you’ll understand. Can you come?”

“Sit tight. I’ll be there in five minutes.”

Bradley sat at the wheel of his car, feeling the faint throb of the motor running softly. His eyes were on the door of the office building across the street. His fingers were clenched on the plastic of the wheel and the rhythmic beat of the car seemed an echo of the heavy beating in his chest as he waited.

Arthur Court came out of the revolving door. He looked up and down the street. He turned left and with long strides hurried down the block toward the little side-street upon which the Green Door opened. Bradley waited, watching Court, watching the traffic, biding his time.

It worked with miraculous precision. There were only three pedestrians on the side-street and all were walking the other way. Heavy trucks parked along the narrow curbing shut out all vision except the most direct. It was as if Arthur Court were dodging through a series of little private rooms between the trucks—and in the last little room he had a rendezvous with Bradley that he did not yet know about....

The car purred like a tiger under Bradley’s hands as he rolled into the quiet street where Court moved ahead of him. This would have to be gauged exactly right, Bradley reminded himself tensely. Not too little, not too much. Not before Court was in a corner where he could not escape even by the exercise of instant reflexes, impulses electron-fast moving a body that was literally steel wire and springs. Not until he was in a trap of no escape.

The car seemed to gather its haunches beneath it and spring. It roared in the quiet street and Court turned wildly around. His face was pure machine, Bradley thought, in that unguarded moment when the cold-lensed eyes met his. Bradley was part of the automobile, the two welded into one so that the car was his weapon, obedient to his hand as the steel blade had been obedient that severed Court’s head from his neck. But this time there would be no mistake.

He crouched over the wheel, sighting the car like a gun, pinning Court between fender and fender, centered beyond the radiator cap, with the blank wall of a truck behind him. Man and man-made



machine were one juggernaut weapon that crashed down upon machine-made machine and flattened it against a wall of steel. . . .

Bradley saw Court's face go blank beyond the radiator cap. He saw the machine-body crumple slowly down out of sight. He waited for an instant, ready to urge the car on if he had to....

"It's all right," Bradley said soothingly. Court stirred and mumbled on the seat beside him. "No, it's all right, Court. Just relax. You had a little accident, but don't worry, I'm not taking you to a doctor. . . ."

Court said, "No—" almost clearly. Bradley sighed and pulled over to the curb. He had hoped he wouldn't need to use the hypodermic, but it was ready against the moment when he must.

This was guesswork, of course. He couldn't be sure the android mechanisms would respond to drugs meant for the human blood stream. But the chances were they would, at least temporarily. The android was keyed to as close a likeness to humanity as possible. Its reflexes were patterned upon the human. Cut it and it bled. Decapitate it and respiration ceased, circulation stopped. Very well, then, drug it and for a while it should sleep. . . .

Court slept.

Only a body made of metal under the flesh could have stumbled in the semblance of a walk, half carried, half conscious, with that heavy a shot of sedative in its synthetic veins. Bradley guided the creature up the steps to the Wallinger house. He was not wearing his mask now. Everything must stand or fall by this single trial. If he failed now, hiding his identity would be of no use to him.

The small girl answered the door.

"Daddy's next door," she said, looking at the drugged and stumbling Court with interest and no alarm. "He'll be back in a minute. Won't you come in?" She issued the invitation with all the aplomb of one newly learned in the social graces, but it was clear that curiosity and not hospitality had prompted the words. It was clear, too, that she was so unacquainted with danger that a situation like this roused no fear in her mind.

Bradley guided his burden down the hall and into the library. On the sofa against the wall the kitten lay bonelessly asleep. Bradley eased the drugged android down onto the cushions, gently tipping the cat off to the floor. Such is the complexity of the mind that even in this intent moment it occurred to him that in a machine world the cat and the cushion would probably be indistinguishable, one from another. Only a human, and a truly mature human, would be incapable of handling any small living thing roughly. The cat yawned, woke, found itself on the floor and in the presence of two strangers, and instantly streaked for the door. Its interested ears presently reappeared around the corner.

Above them, after a moment, was seen the shy but curious face of the smallest Wallinger. Bradley made an effort and remembered his name.

"Hello, Jerry," he called, settling Court on the sofa. "Is your father back yet?"

There was no reply from the child, but the little girl came in an instant later, soon enough to answer the question. She was pushing her reluctant brother before her.

"I called Daddy," she volunteered. "He'll be right over. What's the matter with him?"

"He had a—a little accident. He'll be all right."

She considered Court with unself-conscious intentness. Court was emerging from the drug. He turned his head restlessly on the cushions, murmuring thickly. The boy, the girl and the kitten regarded him from the door, an almost terrifying remoteness in their gaze. It was obvious that to none of the three did real sympathy mean a thing yet. They could not identify themselves with adults or with suffering. All three had the cold curiosity of young animals in their eyes.

And why should they identify themselves with an android? Bradley felt the question click into place in his mind and a flash of memory illumined the thought. Children. Children, who see too clearly to be deceived by an android race. Children, without perspective and therefore without the preconceived prejudices that had blinded adults to this terrifying intrusion upon the world of humans.

Children should know the truth.

“Sue—isn’t your name Sue? Listen. I want you to tell me something very important. I-I want your opinion.” Bradley groped desperately among his memories of the seven-year-old mentality. Self-centered, scatterbrained, eager for praise, interested only in their own activities except for the briefest of excursions into the outer world. If he could only flatter her enough to hold her interest. ...

“Sue, this is something nobody but you could tell me. I want to see how much you know about—about—” He paused again. “Well, now, look. You know there are—” How could he put it? How could he ask her if she had noticed the androids among the adults whom she knew?

Had she, indeed, ever seen one before? On her answer very much would depend, then, for if she did know the truth, then there must be many more of them than Bradley had guessed. If even a sheltered child knew. . . .

“Sue, you know about people like—him?” He gestured toward the restless android. “You know there are-two kinds of men in the world?” He held his breath, waiting for her answer.

Wariness came into her eyes. You could never tell when an adult was making fun of you, her look said.

“No, I’m serious. I don’t suppose—I just want to know if you know. Not all children can tell the difference, and I—”

“Oh, all the kids know that” Contempt was in her voice.

“Know-what?”

“About them.”

Bradley drew a deep breath. All the kids know about them. ...

“Does your father know?” His voice sounded thin in his own ears.

She gave him another of those wary glances that watched to see if he were deriding her. Evidently reassured, she laughed shortly.

“Well, I guess he does. Doesn’t everybody?”

The room swam a little before Bradley’s eyes. So many of them, so many more than he had ever dreamed. . . .

“But the other kind,” he heard himself saying almost pleadingly. “The other kind of men! How many—”

There were voices in the hall. Wallinger’s, and another’s, deep and heavy.

“In here, Officer,” Wallinger was saying. “Right in here! Hurry!”

“How many in the world?” Sue finished Bradley’s question for him. And she laughed. “We learned it in school, but I don’t remember. I can tell you how many of the real kind of men in this room, though. One! One!”

“Will you tell your father that?” Bradley demanded in an agony of haste. “When he comes in, will you tell him there’s only one of the real kind of man in here? Sue, will you—”

“Susan, get back!” Wallinger was in the doorway. That grey look made his face old as he scanned the children for signs of visible harm. Behind him a uniformed man loomed, red-faced, looking into the room with grim alertness, ready for anything.

There was a little silence.

Then Court, on the sofa, groaned softly and struggled to sit up. Wallinger hurried across the room to help.

“What have you done to him?” he demanded of Bradley. “You crazy fool, how far have you gone?”

“He’s all right,” Bradley stammered. “He’s-you can’t hurt them!”

Wallinger regarded him above Court’s head.

“So that’s what you look like,” he said. “I knew you from across the street, even without your mask, but your face, of course— Will you tell us your name?”

“Bradley.” He said it defiantly. “James Philips Bradley.” The time for anonymity had passed. He hadn’t expected the policeman to be here—it would be harder to explain in that large, disbelieving presence—but if Sue repeated what she had just told him, maybe he could convince them yet.

“Ask your daughter about them,” he said urgently. “She knows. Wallinger, I tell you, she knows!”

Remember, I warned you about the children? I said they couldn't hope to deceive children? Sue says all of them know—"

"I'd better warn you, Bradley, Sue's got a wild imagination. I don't know what fables she's been telling you, but— Officer, hadn't you better—"

"Wait!" This wasn't going as he had planned at all. He threw all the persuasion he could summon up into his voice. "You promised to give me a hearing, Wallinger. Don't you remember, you promised? I know I had a gun then, but please—give me just a minute to tell you what I know. This man's one of them." He paused, running his tongue across dry lips. Wallinger looked so disbelieving. . . . "He isn't hurt. I told you I'd bring proof, and there it is. This man. I had to get him here the only way I could. I tell you, you can't hurt them! Under the skin he's nothing but wires and metal. I can prove it! I—"

He broke off, feeling the policeman's hands laid on his arms lightly, holding them down. Wallinger's face showed pity and horror. It was no use. He should have managed to make some incision in Court's synthetic skin before they came. Of course they wouldn't let him do it now. To them he was a madman, raving, eager to slash an innocent victim in proof of a madman's dream.

"Now, you just calm down, young man," the policeman rumbled soothingly behind him. "We'll take a little walk in the fresh air, and—"

"No! Wait!" Bradley's voice sounded wild even to himself. He choked back the protest, gathering himself for one tremendous last effort at the proof he had come so near to reaching.

Court watched him, lens-eyed, under lowered brows. Somewhere in that cold, inhuman body the cold inhuman brain ticked on remorselessly, not even amused at his defeat, for how could a machine know what it was like to laugh?

A machine—and so near, so near! Only a few feet of space separated them, and a fraction of an inch of synthetic skin hiding the mechanisms of the android body.

"Wait!" he said again, and he twisted around to Wallinger, trying with every ounce of energy that remained in him to project his own conviction past the barrier of prejudice that blinded the adults in this room. "Wallinger, listen! After I've gone, will you talk to your little girl? Will you give me that much chance to prove myself? She knows! It isn't imagination! All the children know. Do you think you're safe, once Court gets out of here? They won't trust you. They can't. They'll be afraid you might wake in the night and suddenly realize the truth. Think of your daughter, Wallinger! Court's listening. He knows she recognized him. Can you take the chance with her life, Wallinger? Risk your own if you want to, but think of Sue!"

A flicker of the first uneasiness Bradley had seen moved across Wallinger's face. The policeman's hands were a little slack on Bradley's arms. He shrugged impatiently, and the momentary doubt on the physicist's face must have conveyed something to the officer, or perhaps it was the desperate conviction in Bradley's voice. He made the most of his moment.

"Think of Sue!" he went on. "Court won't dare make a move—but you don't know how many others there are. You don't know! You can't even guess! Maybe the ones like Court are the real failures—the ones so imperfect they give themselves away. I think they've made others, so nearly human you'd never guess. Those are the dangerous ones, Wallinger! If there's even one of them, it will know it can't be safe until you're dead. I've told you too much to—"

"All right, Officer," Wallinger said, with a little sigh. "I'm sorry, Bradley, but you see how it is."

Bradley's eyes went back to Court. The android sat motionless on the sofa, a thing of wheels and wiring as safe behind its make-believe flesh as if it wore a coat of mail. All human laws safeguarded human flesh. They held it so sacrosanct that now they were betraying it into the iron fingers of the enemy. If only these men would let him slash once with a knife at that soft, deceptive covering which was not flesh at all.... Suddenly Bradley laughed.

Even the robot started a little at the sound, and the policeman made a growling noise in his throat, clearly thinking this the first ravings of a maniacal fit. But Bradley had his answer. He knew at last how he could convince even Wallinger.

"That automobile accident!" The car had been like a bludgeon in his hands. He knew—he

remembered. A man can tell whether his blow has grazed the enemy or gone home. Until now it hadn't mattered. There had been too much else to deal with. But Court, pinned between car and truck wall, had not escaped unscathed. He fell as a man would fall, but he sat now as no man could possibly sit, upright, breathing easily. . . .

Bradley remembered very clearly the feel of rib-structure giving, the sound of metal bending harshly where there should have been no metal. No man could sit like that, once a car had ground him against the wall as Bradley's car had ground Arthur Court.

He moved so suddenly the policeman's hands slipped from his arms. He was across the room in one leap, and tearing at Court's jacket before even the android had guessed what he intended.

The officer groaned and was upon him in a ponderous bound so fast that the heavy blue-coated body hurled Bradley aside with scarcely a half-second to spare. But Bradley had won his second. His hands were clenched in coat and shirt when the policeman's weight carried them both sidewise, and the cloth ripped in his grasp.

Court's short cape flared wide with the sudden defensive motion he made. The jacket and the shirt beneath opened and for one timeless moment there was no sound in the room, not even the drawing of breath. It seemed to

Bradley that his heart itself paused with his breathing, for until this instant of the final test, he could not have been sure....

There was the tanned chest, smooth with android skin. But the mark of the car-grille was upon it, smashing in the android ribs. Bradley had heard the metal scream as it gave before his blow. Now he saw it. Now he saw the gleaming framework of steel where no human chest ever bore steel, and within it a jumble of interlacing wires, and small, transparent tubes through which red fluid coursed....

He saw the android brain.

Deep inside, behind walls of bent steel ribbing, a small, bright, pulsing thing lay. A continuous twinkling beat outward from it, uncannily illuminating the chest-cavern of the robot from within, so that the bright steel ribs caught points of light from that illumination, and wherever the transparent veins crossed before it the light turned glowing crimson as it shone through the blood. The fluid ran faster where the brilliance touched it, bubbles racing through the tubes. The thing might be heart and brain alike, an inward lamp burning in the broken shelter of the android chest.

Bradley did not even pause to reason. What he did was pure reflex. The incredible sight paralyzed the policeman for that one crucial second, but it galvanized Bradley to action.

He lunged forward, hands outstretched, and with one circling smash of his fist he struck the shining thing from its cradle.

There was an unbelievable instant when he saw his own hand deep in the hollow chest of the machine, saw the reflections of his blow moving in miniature in the polished ribs, saw his knuckles bathed in the tiny crimson glow of that inner light shining through transparent veins.

And then the light went out.

There was a crackle like crystal shattering. There was a sound more felt along the nerves than heard, of high, rapid humming that droned and ceased. And Arthur Court was no longer either man or android. He was not even machine.

The man-shaped thing in man's clothing pitched forward all in one piece, like metal moving, and fell solidly to the carpet, an effigy that could never conceivably have breathed or lived or spoken....

Bradley got shakily to his feet. The policeman still sprawled on the floor, Staring, making no move to rise. The face that had been so ruddy was grey-white, and the colorless mouth opened and closed soundlessly, trying in vain to put the incredible into words. Bradley wanted insanely to laugh. Not even the pure human organism, he thought, functioned very efficiently in the face of shock like this.

It was Wallinger who moved first. Bradley had one glimpse of the physicist's face, drained of all color, lined and rigid with horror. But the man was moving capably enough. At least, his limbs obeyed him. He circled Bradley with scarcely a glance, skirted the collapsed metal thing on the floor, and bent above the policeman. . . .

He lifted one arm sharply, bent at the elbow, and struck the officer a hard, expert blow with the

edge of his palm. The man collapsed without a sound.

Above him, Wallinger stared into Bradley's eyes.

"You're on their side?" Bradley forced the words out painfully, wondering why they came in a whisper. He did not dare take his eyes from Wallinger's, but his mind had stopped functioning altogether and he scarcely knew why he stared, or why this thundering of sudden terror in his chest made breathing so hard. "You're working with them?"

Wallinger straightened slowly, letting the blue-coated body slide to the floor. His gaze broke from Bradley's and he looked across the room toward the hall door. With a great effort Bradley followed the look.

The children still watched. Without alarm, interested, not comprehending, they watched as they might have watched a film at the neighborhood movie.

"Sue-Jerry-upstairs!" Wallinger's voice was firm, almost normal. "Move! And shut the door behind you."

The sound of its closing seemed to release some of the tension in the man, for he let his breath out a little and his shoulders sagged. He met Bradley's eyes, grimaced, started to speak, and then thought better of it.

"Tell me!" Bradley's voice was stronger, insistence growing in it now. "Which side are you on?"

Wallinger did not want to answer. When he spoke, it was indirectly.

"It's not on record, Bradley," he said, almost with diffidence, "but I think you ought to know—the children aren't mine."

"Not—"

"I adopted them."

"But—but then—" There was no need to finish the protest. Bradley had chosen this man for his confidences from the first, chiefly because he could be sure that here was one influential person of proved humanity—the father of other humans. No sterile machine.

Wallinger shrugged gently. He glanced down at the heavily breathing man at his feet.

"I had to do that," he said. "Now I'll have to think of some way to make him believe he dreamed all this. I hate to do it, but I can't think of any other way right now except—" He glanced at his desk. "Maybe this."

There was a bottle of whiskey in the top drawer. Moving with deliberate haste, he opened it, poured two generous portions into little metal cups from the same drawer, and then deliberately upended the bottle above the groaning policeman's chest.

Bradley reached for a cup, holding it in both hands to steady his shaking. The strong, burning liquid stuck in his throat for a moment, then spread downward with a grateful, soothing warmth.

"The story mustn't get out, you know," Wallinger said above his own cup.

"But I don't—you mean you knew, all along? Wallinger, what are you?"

"The story mustn't get out," Wallinger went on calmly, ignoring the question. "Of course I knew. But we've got to keep it quiet."

"Are you on their side or ours?" Bradley's throat felt raw with the harshness of his voice. "Are you a man or -or-"

"If they find out how much we know about them, don't you suppose they'll act? Somehow we've got to dispose of the Court mechanism, in a way they won't be able to trace. I'm sorry for this officer here, but he'll have to think he was drunk and dreamed what we all saw. I tell you, Bradley, we don't dare let them suspect we know!" Bradley let his emptied cup fall to the carpet. He walked forward six deliberate steps and put his hands heavily on Wallinger's shoulders. The flesh felt like flesh; the bone beneath was firm and hard. It could be bone or steel. You couldn't tell by looking at them. But surely you could tell by the way they behaved, by their reactions, by their thinking. By the things they put first in value-

"The children!" Bradley said urgently. "No machine would think first of children the way you do. Would it, Wallinger? Even though they aren't yours, you put them first. Why did you tell me they weren't yours? Did you mean—what did you mean, Wallinger? How do you really feel about those children?"

Wallinger smiled. His voice was mild and amused.

“‘Hath not an android eyes?’” he paraphrased with gentle irony. “‘Hath not an android hands—senses—affections? If you prick us, do we not bleed?’”

Bradley let his grip fall. He stepped back, staring as if he could pierce the too-perfect illusion of flesh and see whether bone or steel lay behind that gently smiling face.

“There was one android made,” Wallinger said, “in the perfect replica of the human. Everything that went into its mental and physical make-up was as close as their finest arts could come to human thinking.” He paused, grimaced. “Well,” he said, “they came too close. They succeeded. I-I’m rather afraid they made—a man.”

“You?”

Wallinger smiled.

“I don’t believe it,” Bradley told him wildly. “It isn’t possible.”

Wallinger gave him a speculative look. Then he opened another drawer, fumbled in it and pulled out a penknife. He flicked the blade open and with almost the same gesture drew its edge across the back of his hand.

Bradley caught his breath. He didn’t want to look, but he could not stop himself.

Wallinger, still smiling, held out his arm.

“I can stop the bleeding, you see,” he said. “That’s how Court kept from giving his injury away, at first. We can always control that, if necessary.”

There was no blood. The edges of the synthetic skin were clean and smooth as pale rubber, and beneath them steel tendons moved, transparant tubes as fine as hairs pulsed with bubbling red liquid. It was a hand of living metal. It was an android’s hand.

“Satisfied?” Wallinger withdrew his arm. With the other hand he smoothed the cut flesh together. It sealed like wax and was whole again as Bradley still gasped his incredulous protest.

“Here, you’d better have another drink,” Wallinger’s amused voice seemed to be saying from a long way off, above the ringing in his ears.

“But why didn’t you tell me? Are you sure they don’t suspect? Can we really get away with this—with destroying Court? I don’t understand, Wallinger! If you’re really an android, and working against androids what are we going to do? There must be ways they have to check up on what happens to every separate one. What about Court? Wallinger, if this is all true, why didn’t you help me against Court? You could have—”

“Hold on! One question at a time!” Wallinger’s voice broke into the almost hysterical babble of Bradley’s released tension. “First, about Court. I couldn’t work against him, Bradley. I’m a very imperfect mechanism myself, considering what I was made for, and they’ll destroy me if they find out what I’m about to do—but there are rules even I have to follow. They’re built in. I can’t injure another android. I can’t. That’s the way we’re made. I couldn’t any more than you could stop your blood from flowing if you were cut. I may be an imperfect machine, but I’m not that imperfect.”

“Then what shall we do? Why not call the police—the newspapers—”

“No! Don’t talk like a fool. Once the androids know their secret’s out, don’t you think they’ll strike hard and fast? They’ve got their plans all laid. Don’t make any mistake about that. Our only hope’s to work in the dark until we have plans too.”

“You could have told me sooner,” Bradley said with reproach. “When I first came—”

“How could I have told you? I didn’t know who you were, in that mask. You could have been from them, for all I knew. And today—I didn’t dare speak in front of Court. I had to act like a normal man—call the police—show the right reactions. It wasn’t until you attacked Court that I was sure about you.”

“Okay. We’re wasting time, then. They’ll know Court’s smashed. They’ll look for him. What are we going to do?”

“I wish I knew.” Wallinger got up abruptly and began to pace up and down the room with quick, nervous steps. It was incredible that wires, not nerves, steel springs instead of muscles, activated that perfect replica of a human. Even in his mind, the likeness was so uncannily perfect....

“Full circle,” Bradley thought, with confused triumph. “If this is true, they’ve overreached themselves. They’ve made such a perfect android—if this is true—that it’ll mean the finish of their whole kind. They can’t let him live. Once they suspect him, they’ll have to destroy him. It works both ways. When the first successful android was made, the human race was doomed—until the first successful humanoid was produced by the robots. He’s as dangerous to them as they are to us.” He looked at Wallinger thoughtfully.

“How do you feel about them—about the androids?” he asked.

“Confused.” Wallinger’s smile was wry. “This has been coming on for a long while, of course, but I’ve never had to take definite sides until now. I don’t know how I feel. Lost. Not really belonging to either side. I suppose I feel exactly as you do about the human race—part of it. I am part of it. They made me too well. But how many humans would accept me if they knew the truth? And I could never go back to the androids once I’ve failed them. I don’t belong on either side. I only know that I—” He paused, grinned suddenly and said with deliberation, “I speak as a man, I think as a man, I have put away android things. You see? When I try to tell you how a humanoid feels I put it automatically into Shakespeare’s words, or St. Paul’s. Men’s words, telling how men feel. But I still see through a glass—” He touched his eyes, which Bradley knew were lenses, not flesh. “I see through glass, darkly....”

There was a long silence between them after that.

“Well,” Wallinger said heavily, “it’s up to me. I know them. You don’t.”

“What do you want me to do?”

“Go home. Leave me your number, and stay there until I call you. Okay? I have an idea about getting rid of this—” He gestured at the man-shaped heap of wires and steel and flesh on the floor. “I’ve got to do that alone. Afterward, tomorrow, I’ll phone you. But whatever you do, Bradley, don’t leave your place until you hear from me. Don’t even open the door! And above everything, don’t go spreading the word about what’s happened. If you do—”

“If I do, I’ll wind up in a padded cell,” Bradley said. “I know. Nobody would believe me except the androids, and they’d be only too glad to get me committed. Don’t worry, I’ll keep my mouth shut. But don’t make me wait too long, will you?”

“I’ll do my best,” Wallinger promised.

Bradley glanced up as he descended the steps toward the street. In the hall the two children stood watching him. The girl was smiling. She pointed to her brother and then waved at Bradley, nodding. He had a curious feeling that she was trying to convey something. But it was a child’s knowledge behind her smile, esoteric, not communicable to the adult mind.

Bradley waved in answer and went on down the path.

When he woke it was still dark. He lay quiet, wondering for a confused instant where he was and why he should be awake. He could not see his watch, but there was a pre-dawn stillness in the air.

Then he saw the light beneath the door and heard the voices talking quietly beyond it. He lay in his own bed, and that was his own living room, but why the light burned and whose the voices were he could not guess.

He got up and went barefooted across the floor. He opened the door a narrow crack. There were five men in the room beyond. They sat comfortably there, talking softly, like men waiting for something—or someone.

The first face he saw was Arthur Court’s.

“All right, Bradley,” the Director’s familiar voice said in the very instant of recognition. “All right, it’s time now. Come in.”

Bradley never knew whether the android could actually see through the spinning atoms of the door, or whether some sound had given his own presence away. It didn’t matter. He was beyond help now. He and the race of man....

He crossed the threshold quietly and closed the door behind him. He stood there looking at the five men in his living room. They sat perfectly motionless, their eyes on his. None of them had been smoking. None of them moved. None of them lived by the tight-strung nerves of imperfect humans, so they had no need for aimless motions. None of them was a man.

When the silence had reached a pitch just this side of being unbearable, Bradley spoke.

“What happened to Wallinger?” he asked.

“Nothing.” Court smiled at him.

“Nothing? But—”

“We needed a little extra time. Wallinger got it for us. That’s all.”

A sudden upward flood of bitterness made Bradley’s vision swim for an instant. How easily Wallinger had deceived him, then! How pitifully gullible was the illogical human brain before the resourceful logic of the machine! Wallinger had known exactly what lines of reasoning would most certainly soothe Bradley’s fears to rest. And the quiet machine mind had not even lied when it spoke, for how can a machine deal in falsehood or in truth?

They needed time—for what? To repair the shattered Court, to assemble their forces, to close in. Most of all, they had needed to keep Bradley silent while they went about the business of destroying him. How? What would they do? Was there any way at all, even in this last moment, for him to outwit them? He thought there was not, but a desperate cunning made him say,

“All right, I can’t stop you. Do what you like. But please, Court—please! We’ve worked together—you can’t blame me for doing what I had to do, but we’ve worked together a long while. Do me one favor. Please don’t let them put me in an insane asylum! It would be better if you shot me—safer for you! Anything’s better than the asylum!”

He almost choked when he had to say it. No man should plead with a machine. But if it were for man’s final salvation—yes, he could bring himself even to beg favors of this thing made of steel and wire. And this was his last weapon against them, this peculiarly inverted human logic which was part of folk-lore. The logic that saved Br’er Rabbit from his foes. Don’t throw me into the briar-patch! If they committed him to an asylum, at least he would still be alive, at least he could still work against them. And the children knew. In time, someone would listen, if he could only stay alive.

“Please, Court, anything but the asylum!”

The android smiled. It was curious to think of the intricate little springs and wiring that drew up his face when it moved. It was appalling to realize that when Arthur Court spoke, the mind which dictated the words lay in the gleaming hollow of his chest where something made up of lights that twinkled was the essence and the soul of the machine.

“Forget it, Bradley,” the android said. “It won’t be the asylum.”

Bradley braced “himself against the door. There was one thing left to do, then. He had tried cunning, and cunning failed. He had tried everything a man could try, and everywhere he had failed.

But they should not kill him. That final choice still lay in his own hands, and he would not submit to this last indignity. If he must die, let it be of his own will, freely.

He measured the distance to the window, gathering his muscles for this final leap. There was so much he would never know, he thought despairingly. The fate of the race of man itself, for which he had fought so vainly, was beyond his knowledge now. He thought of Wallinger, so nearly human in his reactions, so convincingly human in his speech, despite this final betrayal. Perhaps, after all, Wallinger had spoken more truthfully than he knew. Perhaps they had made an android too nearly human. ...

But it was too late. Wallinger’s voice came back to his mind briefly, and the magnificent words of St. Paul’s that begin, “Though I speak with the tongues of men. . . .” Wallinger had spoken with the tongue of man, but for man’s destruction. There was something terrifying in the aptness of that chapter from Corinthians.

“Whether there be tongues, they shall cease, whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away—”

Blindly he thrust himself away from the door in a last desperate leap. The nearest android moved too late to intercept him. He swept the curtains aside, drew back his fist and shattered the glass that was all that parted them from the humming street twenty stories down. Man’s streets, which would so soon be man’s no longer....

He lunged through the glass. He hung vertiginously over the spinning depths below. He could see the wall of the building straight downward beneath his own knees, its lines swooping dizzily inward as he



swayed.

It was Arthur Court's voice that halted him.

"Wait, Bradley, wait! Not until you hear the truth!"

It stopped him on the brink, and beyond the brink, of the window. He would have thought no power on earth could reverse the terrible suction of gravity that had already laid hands on him and was swinging him out and down with the very swing of the earth's rotation. But he found he was stronger than he knew. . . .

Court's face was stern. Bradley stood braced against the shattered window," his knees strengthless, his head still spinning with the pull of the street below. Blank-eyed, he stared at the android across the room.

"You fool!" Arthur Court said. "Are you trying to ruin us all?"

"But I—"

"You still don't understand? You still don't know Wallinger told you the truth?"

"Wallinger told the truth?"

"Yes—in part. Think, Bradley, think!"

He could not think. His mind had suffered too many stunning shocks for reasoning now. But he did not need to think. He had had the clue many hours ago, and until this moment he had not known. The memory came back and he heard Sue Wallinger's small voice speaking again in the quiet library. He saw her at the door as he went down the path. He remembered her gesture and her smile.

"I can tell you how many of the real kind of men in this room—one, one!"

And she had smiled at him and touched her brother's shoulder.

She had not meant anyone in that room except the human male child. He had asked about men—she touched her brother's shoulder. All the children knew—all the androids knew. Only the humans were blind—and James Bradley.

"Look down," Court's voice said, almost gently.

Bradley looked. There was blood on the floor. He felt a stinging in his hand, and dully lifted his arm to see why. He had put his fist through the window. It had not mattered, then, whether he slashed his own flesh or not. It didn't matter now....

He saw, without surprise, without shock, only with a numbness of the mind, how the edges of his skin had parted cleanly. The slow blood welled into his cupped palm. He looked down with utter silence at the uncovered tendons of his hand, gleaming mirror-bright from every steel surface. He saw the fine, tiny, tight-curved springs draw up in perfect response when he clenched his fingers.

"We made you too well," Arthur Court was saying. "We made you so well you're imperfect. You must be changed, Bradley. No android must be able to attack his own kind. Our survival depends on that law. Do you see now what Wallinger was trying to tell you? The danger of a perfect humanoid is too great. And you're perfect. Answer me, Bradley—do you understand what I'm saying?"

He could not answer. He knew the truth now, but he felt exactly as he had felt before. He was a man still. His whole loyalty lay with the human kind of which he was so merciless a duplicate. Until they made that change that would alter his imperfection, he must continue this fight he had taken up for man against machine. Until they changed him from imperfect android to the perfection of the race of the machine. . . .

When that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away. St. Paul had put it all with such terrifying clarity. Though I speak with the tongues of men ... I am become as sounding brass. . . .

"We don't want to waste you, Bradley," Court said. "You're a fine machine. We need you badly. There's so much work to be done, and we need your help." "No," Bradley said. "No." And this time they could not stop him. He didn't pause to brush the curtain aside, and the glass was already shattered. He saw again the inward-leaning wall that dropped straight for twenty stories toward the street. His knee was on the sill.

Down there would be men to see. Down there in the street they must see and they might perhaps understand the meaning of this paradox that was the android body, the steel ribs and the intricate wiring

by which this flesh-clad body once had moved. . . .

Somewhere deep in his chest the little sparkling thing that at this moment thought as a man thinks knew an instant's wonder. "Is this the way a man feels who gives up his life for his own kind?" Bradley asked himself the futile question. "Or am I moving only as a machine moves, in blind obedience to the orders that were given me when I was made? They must have set me the problem of behaving like a human. And this is a thing men do ... not machines. Never machines."

He leaned out. The mighty drag of the earth's swing pulled him across the sill. It was not much he could do for the race in whose image he had been made, but it was all he could give them. Perhaps it might help. Perhaps it would not. That was something he would never know. The robots crowded to the sill to watch him fall.