

MORE THAN MELCHISEDECH  
VOLUME ONE:  
TALES OF CHICAGO

Book One:  
Early Boyhood of a Magus

We know the sign athwart the wreck  
The sign that hangs about your neck,  
Where One more than Melchisedech  
Is Dead and never dies.

G. K. Chesterton  
Ballad of the White Horse

CHAPTER I

Well, what do you think is maintaining the world on even its wobbly ways if it is not the extraordinary work of a few prodigious and special people in it? These people are known as magicians or sorcerers or magi: and this is the daily life of one of them.

He was Melchisedech Duffey. Like every magus, he arrived with many mantles of magic. Like every magus, he would lose most of them during his life. And such payments as he would receive for his losses would seem trivial or incomprehensible.

"d do not understand the value of these trifles d receive for the splendid things that d give up," another magus had complained once.

"df you are a true magus, you will understand it," one in higher authority said.

"And d go all my life in fear of assassination or even more mortal things," the magus complained.

"df you a true magus, you will not let these small things bother you," the Higher Authority said.

The True Magus Melchisedech Duffey had the golden touch. He could bang his hands together and produce graven gold or bar gold or coin gold. He was an invader of minds, moving in and out of the people with whom he was in accord as well as some with whom he was in clashing discord. To a limited extent, he was a Lord of Time, moving back and forth in the streams of it almost at will. And he commanded invisible giants.

By talismanic device, he was able to manufacture persons, or at least to put his own fabricator's mark on unfinished human clay. This was his most powerful gift.

"Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life --" -- these specifications seemed improbable for a mortal person like Duffey; and there was confusion about each of the items as applied to himself.

Duffey remembered three different childhoods in the present or twentieth century. dt was hard to reconcile them because they occupied the same years. Duffey also remembered a much older and continuing life that was always with his like a backdrop. This older backdrop contained camel's hair tents flapping in the wind in a rocky country that was green with grass and golden with sunlight. And there was a background sound that fit in imperfectly with the semi-desert atmosphere. dt was the hooting of a particular ship's horn, a strong, golden and pleasant sound that could be produced by one ship only. Other people could not hear this ship's horn however loud it sounded.

dn all other ways, Duffey was a pretty normal person. He had sorrel hair and fire-blue eyes. He would be a solid but not overly large man. He had a month that might start to grin before his eyes did. And he was constantly banging his hands together and shouting "Yes, yes, my creature,

we will do this thing right away." He might be shouting this to a clay chicken he had made with his hands, and to no one else at all.

For a very brief moment here, we dip into the latter-middle life of Duffey just before that life breaks up and moves in several directions, but mostly back in time from that latter day. For this one brief moment that we watch now, he is in his own 'Duffey's Walk-in Art Bijou' in New Orleans. He is eating and drinking with a friend there, and he is contemplating an urn full of ashes that is on his cluttered table.

The urn is old and ornate and it had once belonged to a King of Spain. There is nothing odd about keeping an urnful of ashes on one's table, perhaps, but this case was a little different, The ashes were Duffey's own.

"The people whom you make, Duffey," said Mr. X who was the friend Duffey was eating and drinking with, "you haven't any real control over them, have you?"

"Over them? It's over you, X. You're one of the people I made. No, I haven't much control over the bunch of you. You're a 'how sharper than a serpent's tooth' crew."

"And someday you'll have to settle on one of your three childhoods to be the real one, Duffey," X said.

"Yes, but I won't settle on it yet. I'll keep my options open. What kind of man I can be today or tomorrow will always depend on what kind of boy I was yesterday. I really wish that I had more than three childhoods to choose from. But beyond these three I come on only fragments.

## CHAPTER II

Melchisedech Duffey, for one of his most likely childhoods, appeared in either Harrison or Shelby or Pottawattamie County in Iowa. The seven cities that disputed the honor of being his birthplace were Minden, Underwood, Beebe Town, Neola, Crescent, Avoca, and Union Township which was not properly a city at all.

Melchisedech used to say that he arrived on the night of the turn of the century, a night that also was claimed by the Papadiabolois and Mr. X and other potent persons. Duffey may have lied about this: he may have been several years younger than the century. And X may have lied about his own case. Likely he was several years younger than Duffey even.

A fact given by all older relative or pretended relative is that Melchisedech's mother had died when he was five years old and that thereafter he had lived with cousins until finally he came to live alone. When Duffey was twelve years old, he began to go to boarding schools, and that was the beginning of his living alone.

Duffey, between the ages of five and twelve, lived with cousins in little towns and on big farms in Iowa, and he lived with kindred in a number of cities: Dubuque, Sioux City, Council Bluffs, Omaha, Kansas City, St. Louis, Chicago, and Boston. The older relative also said that Duffey, far from being without kindred, had many relatives: the Duffeys themselves, the Kellys, Byrnes, McGuires, Crooks, Bagbys, Haleys, Healeys, Haydens, Kanes, Whites, Hughes, Kennedys, Thompsons, Clancys. This older relative also said that Duffey's original name was Michael and not Melchisedech.

"She is probably remembering my twin and not myself," Melchisedech said when told about it. "Those supposed kindred that she mentions are good people, and I know some of them. But they are not my kindred, and I have no genealogy through them. I was born without father and without mother, and I was five years old when I was born."

Here is a scene when Duffey was in Council Bluffs when five years old ("The year when I was born," said Duffey). It was in a park on Lake Manawa. People there were indulging in that weirdest of all total-body masquerades, 'going swimming'. There was a high diving board over one part of the lake and people were diving off of that board and disappearing into

the water. Duffey believed that the words 'diving' and 'dying' indicated the same thing, as he had not observed either of them before.

"So thit is the way they do it," said Duffey, and he whacked his hands together. "I always thought that people died in the house, but how would you get rid of them if they died there? This is right, that the people disappear into Lake Manawa when they die."

Other people were appearing from under the water, and this was a more frightening thing. The new people were coming up out of the lake. Duffey began to count the people who disappeared and those who appeared, and he found that their numbers were almost the same. A strong man with black moustache and black hair and with a blue bathing suit dived into the water. After a very little while, a different strong man with black moustache and hair came up out of the water. This second man had an evil look, and he had flowing or blurred features. But he looked something like the first man, like a caricature or deformity of the first man. It was apparent now that the people who came up out of the water were evil people. They would have to be watched.

It went on. Those who dived in were bright and pleasant looking. Those who came out were mean, bad, twisted, with their faces half washed away or only half formed, just not shaped right. The good persons on the like shore made uneasy way for these evil persons who came up out of the water.

One of the most evil of them all climbed up the ladder to the high diving board. It was as if he himself intended to dive into the lake as the good people were doing. Did they not notice that he was one of the bad ones who had come up out of the lake and had then sneaked into the line with the good ones? It made the flesh crawl.

That 'thing' that was going out now to dive off the board was the evil strong man who had come out of the water after the first strong man had gone in. What could such an evil creature change into a second time? Why was nobody strong enough to prevent him doing it?

Then Duffey knew that he himself was strong enough to prevent it. Should the monster come up out of the water after he had dived in, Duffey would enforce the condition that he should come out of it dead. There was spirit-wrenching on Duffey's part to come to this decision to intervene.

The monster dived into the witer. Duffey prevented him from coming out of it again. There was a death struggle going on, inside the mind of the monster and inside the mind of Duffey, inside that water that was Lake Manawa and inside the water that is the oceanic matrix of everybody. Duffey kept the monster in his watery prison. He kept him there till he knew that he was dead. Then Duffey let go. "I just don't care any more," he said.

He couldn't see just what did happen afterwards. People gathered on the lake shore and in the waters of the lake itself. They were taking a great interest in a darkish form that they pulled out. People said that a man had drowned and that he looked absolutely dreadful, that he was strangled and horrifying.

Of course he was horrifying. But imagine how much more horrifying he would have been if he was alive when he came out of that water. That was the first time that Duffey ever killed.

In that park in Council Bluffs the squirrels are coal black. It is the only place in the world that has coal black squirrels.

There is another early scene. It's in Boston at about the same time. It is almost the only Boston scene in the Iowa-based childhood, though in later years, Duffey often passed himself off coming from Boston.

It was in a narrow park surrounded with buildings, and with a blue sky over it. White clouds were sliding into the blue of that sky. Melchisedech Duffey was with an older person, an uncle or cousin who called him Mikey.

"You can mke clouds disappear by pointing at them, Mikey," the older

person said. "Pick out one, the smallest one you can see till you learn how to do it. Now hate it with your whole mind, and you will make it disappear."

Melchisedech did point his finger at a little split-off fringe of cloud. He did concentrate on it in the spirit of hatred and extermination. And he did make it disappear. He was startled by his new-found power. This was the first real thing that he had ever made to disappear. Give a power like this room to operate and there was no limit to what it could do.

Melchisedech picked out a larger cloud fragment and made it disappear. And then he picked a still larger one. He could do it every time, and he felt the power standing up in him. If he picked out too large a cloud, it would leave the scene and slide behind buildings before he could finish with it. But every cloud that escaped his power was greatly diminished when it escaped.

"Is it working, Mikey?" the older person asked.

"Oh sure. Every time. Can all people do it?"

"All very smart people can do it. And some dogs can. Pointer dogs can do it best. They get rid of a lot of clouds. When you're wanting rain, then you always have to shut up the pointers in a shed where they can't see the clouds. There wouldn't be a cloud left in the sky otherwise."

Melchisedech diminished or completely destroyed about forty clouds that day. And the next day, he came back to the park again and destroyed about half that many. He had thought it would be easier the second day, but it was more difficult. The clouds were thicker and tougher that second day, and small pieces of cloud were hard to find.

The third day in the park was disaster for Duffey. The clouds covered almost the entire sky. It was hard to find small clouds to exterminate. All were rolling around and joining themselves to bigger clouds. Then Melchisedech found one and fastened onto it with pointing finger and pointing mind. He commanded it to melt and disappear. It refused.

Duffey then used a word that compels obedience. He obliterated that cloud. Then he pushed all the clouds back from the center of the sky and left a sunny interval.

"Don't do that!" came a warning from somewhere. It was the voice of a demiurge.

"I will do it!" Melchisedech Duffey insisted. But it took more and more strength to hold the clouds apart. Then a lightning eye appeared right in the middle. Lightning came out of that eye and slashed open a tree in the park and buckled the pavement on the edge of the park, this not twenty feet from Duffey.

"Oh, if you're going to do that," Duffey said, "do it to these." Duffey held up a handful of sticks that he had taken from his pocket. Then, to horrified observers, it seemed that the lightning came down and struck the little boy's hand with blinding bolts, again and again, twelve times at least.

"Now they will have some fire and juice in them," Melchisedech said. "dIwondered how I was going to get it into them."

People came and got Duffey and pulled him out of that little park and to the shelter of a nearby building. He yowled in fury at being drigged away. He wasn't beaten. He could have continued to hold the clouds apart, to push them even further apart, to destroy them all. He had just eased up on it for a moment to get the lightning to animate his sticks.

There's a sort of explanation to this. When damp and traveling air moves over dry and standing air, there will be masses and scatterings of white clouds produced. But these clouds will all melt back into the dry, standing air within minutes. You can watch the clouds fade on such a day. You can predict, when you learn the trick of it, just how rapidly they will melt. So it is no great trick, when conditions are right, to pick out a thin cloud and point a finger at it, and make it fade. Every cloud will be fading

away into the air, and new clouds will be forming and moving in, to fade in their turn.

But, on the following day, the dry standing air will have become less dry because of the clouds it has absorbed. Clouds may still fade away, but it will be a much slower process. Then (and it is usually in the night when the changeover comes) there is a dividing line after which the clouds will be growing instead of shriveling. They will grow and grow. They will swell up with lightning and noise. Then they'll break open in rain.

That is a neat explanation of the thing. It is even true, to a limited extent. And yet there were and would always be times when Melchisedech could command the winds and clouds and rains. He could do it all. But sometimes he was afraid of it, and he held back.

But an important thing had been done in that early encounter. The talisman sticks had been imbued with lightning.

On Duffey's first day in school (his first day in any school) he always found that the class was very unorganized. So he would bang his hands together and say: "It just seems that we are wasting our time here unless we introduce a little bit of system. I have some good ideas on the subject. We'll use them now."

"Oh Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, don't let there be a smart kid again this year!" Sister Mary Sabina prayed to herself out loud. This was Duffey's first day in school ever, and he was a little bit direct about things. "Why does there have to be a smart one every year?" Sister asked her heavenly friends.

"We can break the class up into mixed groups of fours," Melchisedech said, "with a responsible leader for each group. And we can --" This was insufferable from a five year old boy who shouldn't have been allowed into school for another year.

"Go ahead and organize it then," Sister said. "You will anyhow. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, remember, when I come to my last agony, that I bore these things cheerfully."

So Duffey organized his first class. He did a pretty good job of it too.

### CHAPTER III

Now here's a bit about the three slant-faced persons. Duffey saw them the first time when he was about six years old.

They were three boys who were two years older and two years bigger than himself. They had slack mouths and slant faces, and they slouched along with their hands in their pockets and with knives in their hands. This was in the big town house where Duffey was living with some of his pretended kindred. It was the second largest house in town, and was on the top of the second highest hill.

Duffey was looking out of the Prisoner John Window when he first saw those three persons. That was a little, peaked, fourth-floor or attic window that was off of the high room where Melchisedech had his domain. It was not in the main attic room as were the other three high windows that looked out in three directions. The Prisoner John Window was in a little closet or cell off the main attic room. Duffey heard the three slant-faced boys in the road down below though they thought that they moved in silence. He came to the window to watch them. He saw them come to the door, and he heard his aunt-of-that-season open the door to talk to them. "That little boy in this house, can he come out and play?" one of the slant-faces asked. And the other two slant-faces formed silent words "We want to kill him". But Duffey could read mouth.

"Oh yes, yes," said the aunt, And she came back into the house calling "Melky, Melky!" But Melchisedech Duffey was out of the opposite attic window and he swung by his vine-covered rope to a corner downspout,

and then down it to the ground like a hot-footed squirrel. He was out through the squash rows and the corn rows of the garden, and off into Mayfield's Meadow. And he stayed there for a couple of hours.

"There were three nice little boys here while you were gone. They wanted you to play with them but I couldn't find you," the aunt said when he returned.

"Oh nice little boys you nanny goat! " Melchisedech howled. "They're mean ones. They came to kill me."

"Oh Melky, what all imagination you have," the aunt exclaimed.

It was about two months later that Melchisedech saw the same slant-faced boys again. He had been for a morning walk, and he came back to the house. He looked up, and there were the three of them, inside the house, looking out of the Prisoner John Window. It was called the Prisoner John Window by Duffey if by no one else, because Prisoner John had once been held captive for twenty years in that little closet. He used to look out of that window all day. That was back in the Civil War days.

But now these three boys were inside the house itself, looking out of that high window and waiting for Duffey to come so that they might kill him.

"He sees us," one of the boys said.

"No. The sun's in his eyes. He can't see us," the second one said.

"We'll wait for him here, and we'll kill him when he comes up," the third boy mouthed. Melchisedech was still some distance off, but he could read mouth. In fear and trembling he came up to the house. They'd kill him of course, but it was better to be killed than to let any of the big people know that you were afraid of anything.

"Melky, where were you?" the aunt asked suddenly from somewhere.

"Your trunk is already in the buggy. You didn't forget that you were going to the country this morning, did you? It's time to get in the buggy now."

"I forgot it for just a little while," Melchisedech said.

"Is there anything you want to get from the attic before you leave?"

"No, there sure isn't anything I want to go up there for," he said. He got in the buggy to go and spend three months in the country, and he was chortling inside. He laughed at those boys spending all day and all night there for three months waiting for him to come back so they could kill him.

It was two months later that they heard in the country that the house in town had burned down. Everybody had gotten out of it all right, and nobody knew what had caused the fire.

"They knocked over the old wobbly lamp up there, that's what caused the fire," Melchisedech said, "and I hope that they didn't get out all right. If they rake the ashes good, they ought to find three strings of bones in them." But he was wrong.

Melchisedech hoped that he was rid of his three slant-faced enemies. And he thought that he was -- for five years.

When Melchiscdech was eight yeirs old, he was living one winter in a middle-sized Iowa town with people who pretended to be his relations. He was one of the boys who served 6:30 mass every morning. The pretended relations lived right across the road from the church, so Melchisedech was able to get there no matter how deep the snow might be or how severe the storm.

The church had an old rope-operated bell. When pulled with sufficient force or weight, the rope would rock the bell into movement to send its heavy booming voice out over the whole town. This would be heard with a wakening delight by all persons except some of the Protestants.

But if the rope was pulled with insufficient force, there was no way that the bell could be set into motion. It would not stir or move at all to a light pull. It followed a quantum law. Too little was nothing at all to it.

So the institution of the 'fat altar boy' had come about. One of the

four young boys who served every morning had to be heavy enough to set the bell into motion when he swung on the rope.

But there came a day when the fat altar boy was sick with pneumonia, and there was consternation among the other three of them. None of them was heavy enough to set the bell into motion when he swung on the rope. The other two cowards pointed at Melchisedech. So he had to be the 'fat altar boy' and he weighed only sixty-three pounds. The genuine fat altar boy had weighed a hundred and twenty pounds before he got the pneumonia.

Melchisedech said silent prayers. Then he made a mighty leap and caught the end of the rope. He dangled there and was unable to budge the mighty bell an inch. He dangled there, and he was impassioned with a golden fury. Was he a magician for nothing?

"I am the golden boy! I am the boy king!" he roared. He roared it not in sound but in some other medium. "It is mine to order. It is mine to command. I command that the hand of an invisible giant come down and help me to pull the rope."

It happened. The giant hand came down and seized the rope. The bell was rocked three times, higher and deeper each time, and then it broke into its beautiful and roaring sound. The people all over town woke with the secure feeling that it was a giant hand on the rope, and that it was the hand of a sanctioned giant. The giant was invisible, but the hand was visible. It was seen clearly by the other three boys.

"Who does the hand belong to?" they asked Duffey. "How could a hand be that big?"

"It belongs to one of my giants," Duffey told them. "They have to do anything I command them, but I'm always reasonable."

"How many of them are there?" the boys asked.

"There's about a dozen that I've used. I think there will always be as many as I need."

Well, Melchisedech was a boy magician and a boy-king, and he proved it several times. Many who saw his proofs have since died, or have forgotten about them. But several still remember.

Melchisedech was shunted from place to place quite a bit. Did he really have three separate and discrete childhoods at the same time, one of them mostly in Iowa, one of them in St. Louis, and one of them in Boston? This does not seem possible, but doubting it or denying it is not a real impediment to its having happened.

There is one explanation: that Melchisedech did have (in some context or other) a brother one year younger than himself and a sister or step-sister two years older than himself. These were living, in those years, with other kindred in other places. And the children were taken a great distance to visit each other almost every year. Some of the pretended kindred worked for railroads, and they and their families could travel free on all the lines so that there was no great expense involved on the trips.

Now the fact was that Melchisedech was an invader and ransacker and pirate of minds. He would visit with brother or sister for a week, and he could appropriate and keep every experience that brother or sister (step-sister) had had for a whole year, every touch and seeing and feeling and smell and notion and daydream. Or at least one of the three young persons could do such things, could be such a pirate as to steal all the experiences of the other two. And this one of them, whichever he was, bore the group name of Melchisedech.

This may explain some of the anomalies about the St. Louis childhood. This is the most intricate of all of them and it is wrapped in baffling symbolism and allegories. This was mainly the childhood of the sister-person, which doesn't prevent it being the authentic childhood. Everything seems to have a second meaning here: it is one rich tangle. When, in later years, Melchisedech had himself analyzed, this particular rich tangle became a prime target for the analyst. There was concatenated

strangeness in it. There were motifs of high artistry running all through it. There was sublimity of concept, and something new in transference and understanding. Yes, and there was a slightly bovine element in it that was not in Melchisedech Prime. Then, under the forceful pursuit of the analyst, the tangle quacked once, laid an addled egg, and expired.

"I do not know how it came about," the analyst said, "but at one period of your life, for half a dozen of the early years, you were a girl. I mean it. You were a girl physically and mentally and psychically. Can you fill me in on that?"

"Nah," Duffey had said. He had asked for his bill, paid it, left the analyst without another word. But he laughed a lot about it privately.

But it was true that Melchisedech was an invader and ransacker and pirate of minds. There could be forty Melchisedech-aged children in a small town, and Melchisedech would have entered the minds of all of them and appropriated the contents. He would know every detail of the insides of every one of their families, and in great fullness and feeling. He knew so much about people and places that both people and places came to fear him. Oh how he had the details!

There was a shingle-block that served as a back step for one house. There was a wooden 'crossing' on a street that he did not use (the 'Crossings' bridged the mud gutters from dirt paths to dirt roads) that was of wood a little different from its fellows, and Melchisedech would remember details of grain and color of that crossing for more than fifty years. There was a notched ear on one of the big coach horses in the livery stable; there was box-elder wood in the wood box of one of the houses, and elm wood in the wood box of the next house. Some of these things were known by acute observation and memory, and some of them were robbed from other minds. But it was all one realm to Melchisedech.

There were sacks of hazel nuts on the back porches of some houses, and sacks of walnuts on the back porches of others. But in St. Louis, sometimes, they had gunny sacks full of pecans. There were red squirrels in Iowa and gray squirrels in St. Louis. But in Boston they didn't even know what a squirrel was.

And there were the iron words of household things, many of the words stolen out of minds. There were pump handles with the iron words 'Acme Pump Company' on them, and pump handles with the words 'Rock Island Pump Company'. There were other iron letters on other handles and bodies: 'Binghampton' or 'Wisconsin' or 'Burn' or 'Cheese Factory' on covers of milk cans, 'Peerless' or 'Sears' on the handles of cream separators, 'Sturgis' or 'Curtis Improved' or 'Star Barrel' on churns, 'Armstrong's' on cheese presses, 'S.R. & Co.' or 'Peter Wright' on anvils, 'Schofleids' or 'Auto Ball Bearing' on grindstones, 'Rdd Ridge' or 'Hubbard's' or 'Jamestown' on axe heads. Melchisedech loved stolen iron words that really belonged to other households than his own. He loved everything that was noticed by anyone else, and he appropriated it to himself. In McGuire's house, they had a potty that came all the way from Philadelphia. Melchisedech could see it plainly, with the scrolled porcelain words on it. And he had never been in McGuire's house. But enough of that.

Behind all these flimsy things in the temporal world, there was a more genuine childhood in which Melchisedech was the Boy King, in which he had been the Boy King for thousands of years. This was the solid base behind all the lives. The other and later things are the shadows of it. The Boy King with the golden hands was real. His dromedary hide tents were real. His flocks and his green pastures and his silver rivers were genuine. His groves of figs and dates and olives and apricots and pomegranates were more real than were the apple trees of Iowa or the plum and peach trees of Missouri. His fields of sesame and millet were more real than the wheat and corn fields of Iowa and Nebraska. His tobacco bushes and incense bushes and coffee bushes were living reality. His grape vines were authentic, and his



silk worms were valid. His silk from camel and ass and ewe and gazelle and cow and India buffalo was milk in actuality. He had meat from all these animals, and from all harts and stags, from the swift pigs of Persia, and from a hundred sorts of fowl. He was the Boy King with the golden hands. He set out bread and wine for all visitors, sometimes more than a million of them a day, and he performed miracles without seeming to do so.

Mostly he called up giants, both visible and invisible, to effect his miracles. They could break up rocks and boulders and permit springs and rivers to flow. They also could bring about the 'Slaughter of the Kings', of rival kings. For cures of blindness and lameness, Melchisedech would place his own golden hands on the ailing parts, and the physician could then effect cures. Melchisedech could turn stories into birds and set them to flying. The world would long since have run out of birds if it had not been for this.

Mostly Melchisedech kept his powers hidden. He was always there in his full powers, but one of his powers was invisibility. Melchisedech kept his person as the Boy King invisible most of the time. The body he wore was known as the 'urchin disguise'.

And Melchisedech had talismans: nobody knows how many of them. Every time he gave one away, he somehow received or made another one to take its place. He had given the first one away when he was no more than three years old, to an Italian man who was selling little cakes out of a hokey-pokey pushcart. And this was to bring about or create the first of the persons who would make up the Duffey Nation. These talismans, which represented special gifts or blessings or graces or formations, especially to one not yet born, cannot be easily described.

"He got the first of them out of a box of crackerjacks," said Aunt Mary Ellen Hart (one of the pretended kindred), "but it's much bigger now than it was when he got it out of the box, and I just don't know how that came about. I don't know what he made all the others out of, but he made them to look quite a bit like the first one. And he keeps other things, Charles. He keeps jars full of blood and such things."

"I used to do that too," said Charles Hart, one of the pretended uncles. "There's no harm in having jars of blood. You can catch weasels if you have blood around. They'll come to it. There's no harm at all in that boy."

Melchisedech gave these talismans to various persons, mostly on sudden impulse to persons he had never seen before. They were always to powerful effect, working their way on unborn kindred of these people. This was part of the process by which Duffey actually manufactured people.

Here is a bit when Duffey was about eleven years old. For several weeks he had been visiting kindred on a farm where he had never been before. It was early summer and early morning. Melchisedech had gone out through orchards to a field of timothy hay. He lay down there, just about a rod from a fence corner and within the hay. The timothy was tall, and Melchisedech was completely hidden.

He heard several sounds. Two sounds were from the bush-grown fence-rows. One was from the extent of timothy hay toward the center of the field. These three sounds were intended to be muffled.

Then there was another sound so soft that it needed no muffling at all. It was followed by a little yelping bark that was rusty from disuse. It was a fox bark. Melchisedech knew foxes, but this one he knew in a different way from the regular foxes of the field. The yelping bark came again, more insistently.

Melchisedech sat up. Then he leapt to his feet and was running. A person may live all his life in kit-fox country and see none or maybe one of these smallest foxes. And he would have to live ten lives in kit-fox country before he heard the rusty yap of one of them. But Melchisedech saw and heard the kit-fox now. He knew what it was, for it was his totem animal.

And he knew that it had come to warn him.

The kit-fox was as sorrel of hair as was Duffey. He was as grinning of mouth and as apprehensive of eye as Duffey was. "But for size, we look about the same," Duffey took time to think as he ran and as he weighed other things with his own apprehensive eyes. Two of the slack-mouthed, slanted-faced boys were coming over the two corner jags of the fence. Another of them was coming out of the deep timothy ahead of Duffey, and Duffey was surrounded. Melchisedech Duffey had grown since he had seen these boys before, but they had grown faster. They were still quite a bit older and quite a bit bigger than he was. They intended to kill him, and they had caught him cold. Which way to go? Duffey was already going. He was going the way the kit-fox went.

The kit-fox, which avoids humans more than does any other of North America, made for one of the boys who was clearing the fence. So Duffey made for him too. Any way that Duffey should veer off, the boys would have the interceptors' angle on him, and they would hit his back or flank undefended to their knives.

The kit-fox took the slant-faced boy low to make him suitable, and Duffey took him high to bowl him over. Then Duffey cleared the fence with a leap as high as his own head, and he had all three of the boys behind him. They'd not catch him now if he could outrun his own blood loss. What blood loss? Duffey was startled to find how badly he was bleeding.

That slant-faced boy had knifed Duffey deeply, and he knew how to use a knife. He'd have killed Duffey if the kit-fox hadn't slashed him as sharply as to make him stumble and to give Duffey the edge to bowl him over.

Duffey very nearly bled to death from that one, but his fortune held. He was staunch and saved, and in ten days he was well. It had been a providential kit-fox that Duffey had seen, of course. No other kind is ever seen.

#### CHAPTER IV

But childhoods, even gold or sorrel-colored childhoods, are quickly lived through. (This doesn't apply to the basic childhood which goes on for thousands of years.) There are simply not very many years to a regular childhood. When he was twelve years old, Melchisedech Duffey was sent away to the first of his boarding schools. So, by his own count at least, his young manhood had begun.

Other things being equal, it is only the difficult child-people who are sent away to boarding schools for their early high school years. And when the difficult child-people go, there is always an odd sound behind them, the sound of hands being washed. The hands are being washed, by parents, by guardians, by kindred, by (in a special case here) well-meaning pretended kindred.

The more difficult children, of course, are those who are sent away even before they reach the high school years, so Melchisedech had not been one of the outrageously difficult ones. He had never given people trouble. He had only given them unease, as being something out of the cuckoo's nest and not out of their own.

But Duffey's three new friends, with whom he now formed a conspiracy and consensus, would fall into the outrageously difficult class by this test. It had an advantage. They knew their way around boarding schools. Yet they seemed to be the three brightest and most intelligent and most pleasant persons ever. Well, Charley Murray was sleepy a lot of the time, and yet he was bright.

This Charley Murray was from St. Louis. Charley and Melchisedech discovered that they knew many of the same people there. That Melchisedech knew them only out of the mind of his sister or stepsister and not from his own encounters was something that he did not tell Murray. Murray did magic tricks. He had a dozen magic sets and a score of magic trick books. When he

discovered that Melchisedech was apt with his hands and with tools, he had him make many props for new magic acts. Melchisedech was a born carpenter and joiner and cabinet maker. He was a born machinist and pattern maker: and lathes and such were available in the Manual Training section of the school. Melchisedech was a good metal spinner and wood turner and mold caster.

There were some things that could not be made by any of the trades or techniques however. And yet they were made. They were made after Melchisedech had received Murray's request that he needed them. And they were made in the middle of the night. But there were no tools sophisticated enough to make them with, none available there.

"What do you use to make them, Melky, brownies?" Charley Murray demanded once. And this seemed to perturb Melchisedech. 'Brownie' is a vague word, but as a popular description it might have hit just what Melchisedech did use. Very large brownies, if you want to call them that.

"Why do you ask how this was made," Melchisedech growled as he gave that new-made prop to Charley Murray. "It was made to order. It was made to my order. That's how it was made. Ask no more about it."

The order by which the most extreme things were made was sometimes an order given by Melchisedech to one of those ebony giants. So a thing might have been made by giant hands that are stronger than a drill press and cannier than a mortising machine. It was only by accident that Charley Murray soon discovered that Duffey had faber-giants under his command. And it was only by accident that he discovered that as he Murray could work magic tricks, so he Duffey could work real magic that was not trickery. This discovery did not completely reverse their relationship to each other (Charley was inventive in ways that Duffey could never be, and Charley was an older boy, and he had developed early leadership qualities), but it did compel in Charley a new and permanent respect for Melchisedech Duffey.

Another of the intimates was John Rattigan from Chicago. John was a scrambler and money-maker. He, like Murray, was about two years older than Duffey. He had a witty look, and the look sufficed. You'd spot him that 'I'm-going-to-take-you' grin, and you'd be wary of him, and he'd take you anyhow. He knew every wholesaler of gadgets and sundries in town, sellers of candy and fruit and tobacco and such. He bought from them all, and he sold clandestinely to the two hundred boarding school boys and the three hundred and fifty day students of the school. He made fast and happy money out of his enterprises. He cut corners. And he sold the corner-cuts far more than the full pieces were worth.

There was Sebastian Hilton who was the first of them in so many ways. Sebastian already had fast and happy money and didn't have to make it. He was the de-luxe rich kid, he was even younger than Melchisedech, the only one out of the hundred and fifty boys in the ninth grade who was younger. And he was slight. He had what the ladies call a 'not-long-for-this-world' look. Naw, he wasn't long for this world. He had a better world on order and it was being built for him. It would be very expensive and parts of it were being brought from France and Italy. But Sebastian did look puny with his pale, greenish complexion.

Well, he was like a puny panther. You would put on the gloves with him at your peril. He was the fastest kid with his hands that you ever saw, and to fight him with gloves was suicide. To fight him bare-fisted was worse. He was a diabolical schemer and he took unfair advantage of the bullies. He had a whole assembly of come-ons, a bait box to hook the most rancid bully. He had a simper he could use when he chose. He had effeminate gestures that he could slip into. He could even go into tears at a moment's notice, and what bully-boy could resist that?

"Don't do it, Sebash, don't do it!" Charley Murray used to bet. "It's cruel and unusual." Charley had a lot of compassion, and Charley and Sebastian had previously been to school together elsewhere. "Don't do it, Sebash. He's too big and awkward. He'll get hurt."

But Sebastian would stalk his prey with simpering and tears. And

what a sickening, sissy, sleazy kid Sebastian could be when he wanted to! And the climax would always be well witnessed, for Sebastian Hilton had a perfect sense of the theatrical. He could lay almost any face open, but especially a fat face, with his fast angling fists and the sharply embossed rings that he wore on each hand. He could rack a big boy completely with body punches that were only about eight inches too low. He knew all the tricks out of the special combat books.

And a slight boy is always lionized after he takes the measure of a larger boy, after identifying that larger boy so conspicuously as a bully. "Baw, lemmy alone, you big bully!" was Sebastian's favorite squawl. It was sickening.

"I wish he'd trade that in for another line!" Charley Murray used to moan. But Sebastian knew better than to change a good line before it was worn out. Sebastian shed a lot of blood. He entrapped and scuttled a number of hulking kids before both the boarders and the day students got onto his game. And, if he ever over-matched himself, Sebastian was as fast afoot as he was with his hands.

In the gymnasium, Duffey found that he could take Sebastian with his fists, or with borrowed giant fists. But Duffey wasn't big, and Sebastian had never entrapped him. They were friends and they fought only for fun in the gym.

But there was another way that Duffey could never take Sebastian, never in this world. And it hurt. Duffey had to admit that Sebastian was smarter than himself. Duffey had never before met a boy that was smarter than himself, and he was unprepared for such a thing. This would be the only clear-cut case in Duffey's life or lives that he would find anyone absolutely smarter than himself. There would be half a dozen close ones, but no other case of clear Superiority.

John Rattigan wanted a talisman from Duffey, and Duffey won't give it to him.

"No, no, it just won't work, John," Duffey insisted. "It just isn't meant to be. Something would go wrong, I know it would. You are not one of the people I'm supposed to give a talisman to."

"But I don't believe in them," Rattigan insisted. "There is nothing can go wrong if I don't believe in them."

"I won't do it, John," Duffey still protested. "I do believe in them, and something will go wrong. They're not to play with."

Then one day Rattigan gave Duffey a wrapped package. "Hold this for a minute, Melky," he said. And Duffey held it, but he felt through the wrappings that something was wrong. Then Rattigan took it back from Duffey and unwrapped it. It was a talisman that Rattigan had made as a copy of Duffey's talismans, and it was a good copy.

"Good! It's a perfect copy," Rattigan crowed, "and I tricked you into holding it in your hands. Now your power has gone into it. It will work!"

"If it works, it will work wrong," Duffey said darkly. Rattigan understood only about half on the matter of the talismans. Duffey himself understood only about two-thirds. But Sebastian, with his quick and unearthly mind, understood it all from the beginning.

Well, where was this school that Melchisedech Duffey was now attending? And what was its name? Well, there isn't any one set of answers to those questions.

Possibly it was Creighton in Omaha. Did they not have a high school as well as a college in those years. Or it may have been Loras in Dubuque, or Rockhurst in Kansas City, or it might have been that boys' boarding school in the shadow of St. Louis University. Really, there wasn't two nickles' worth of difference in those places. And, as a matter of fact, the 'school' was at least two of the places named.

Melchisedech's four years of boarding school high school, while it

was all a single experience, did not all happen in the same place. He changed schools at least once, and possibly twice. And those other difficult boys were used to changing schools. Melchisedech Duffey and Charley Murray were together all those four years, but there was a year or so when John Rattigan turned into Delbert Dugan and when Sebastian Hilton turned into Martin Troyat, this to preserve the group of four. Sebastian reappeared in the last year, however. He'd been to school in Europe in the interval. He was with Melchisedech the first and last year of their four year experience.

The four boys, being good students who didn't have to spend a lot of extra time over books, went out a lot. They all had money. Melchisedech had some of that hand-washing money with which his false kindred had stuffed him off, and he had money that he made in ventures with John Rattigan. Rattigan had money from his own scrambling and scheming. Sebastian had money because he was a rich kid. And Charley Murray had money because he was one of the St. Louis Murrrays.

The boys would catch the movies first-run downtown. They saw every vaudeville bill that came to the city. They ate at downtown restaurants where the meals might run as high as sixty cents. And they sat on stools at that short bar between the kitchen and the long bar in Traveler's Saloon.

Traveler had no objection to serving twelve and thirteen year old boys when he knew them to be sensible. He served them small glasses of whisky at five cents a glass, and John Rattigan bought a full quart to retail to his school mates in money-making mixtures. He did this twice a week.

They ate German lunches. They rode streetcars, and went to ice cream parlors. And only when it was after ten o'clock at night and they knew that all the doors were locked at the school did they return there along California Street, or along whatever street it might be in whatever town was the scene that year.

They would climb over the walls that surrounded the school area. Then they would climb the walls of their own building within the area. John Rattigan the scrambler climbed like a monkey. Sebastian Hilton climbed like a squirrel. Melchisedech Duffey climbed like a competent and careful boy of intelligence and agility, and one who knew that he could call on giant hands for support if he needed them.

But Charley Murray climbed in nightly terror. He was the tallest of them and had the greatest reach. But sometimes, mid-way in a climb, he would freeze in fear. And yet he would force himself to it. He would make it all the way up with them, up the walls and through the windows.

Then it would be low-wick lamp time in the rooms, and stuff-the-door-crack time. The merchants Rattigan and Duffey would set out their merchandise for the ten-thirty market if it was a store night. And Charley Murray and Sebastian Hilton would fling themselves feverishly into their books, for a very little while.

Sebastian was as fast of mind and eye as he was of hand and foot. He devoured books in every tongue of the world, as he said. Really he had travelled in France and Italy, and he was far and away the best first-year French Student in the school. He was the best first-year student at everything: Latin, Greek, English Composition, Algebra, American History, Religion. And he was the best customer that Rattigan and Duffey had for their book sales.

Rattigan and Duffey bought and sold a hundred or so books, new and used every week. Rattigan had a feel for value and profit in books. Duffey didn't have it at first, but he pirated the mind and thinking fingers and eyes of Rattigan till he had a pretty good feel for money worth.

Melchisedech also ransacked and pirated the minds of Charley Murray and Sebastian Hilton. From Murray he received a great good nature and an easy honesty, and the Lace Curtain Irish elegance. He would go back and dip into that mind for the rest of his life whenever he felt himself becoming

despondent, whenever he felt himself becoming dishonest.

From Sebastian he pirated a really extensive and light-suffused intelligence and infallible taste. There was no way he could appropriate the complete swiftness of the Sebastian mind, and there were things in that mind that assumed their proper shape only under the conditions of high speed. But Duffey could handle very much of what he found there. But to the store again.

If it was a store night, the boys would come in with the merchandise about twenty minutes after ten o'clock. The boys brought stuff they wished to sell, and Rattigan and Duffey would take the things and sell them on commission. They didn't make a great amount on the commission sales: they were mostly an accommodation. But these floating items did add to the attractiveness and volume of the merchandise and they gave a good setting to the profit items.

The sales rail front ten-thirty to midnight on sale nights, about three nights a week. Candy and sandwiches were on sale every night, but not the full line of merchandise. The sales were held by candle light or by kerosene lanip. After curfew bell, at ten minutes to ten, the gas was turned off to the boys' roomns from ten o'clock at night till five o'clock in the morning. Boys were not to have gas lights available during the hours for sleep.

So it was always dim light for the sales, and Rtttigan didn't really ned his green eye shade in that faint light. But it had become his trade mark. There was lots of food for sale. There was new sheet music and new magazines as well as books. There were carbonated drinks, and there were water-mix sweet drinks. They had root beer and ginger beer, California Fruit chewing gum, coffee and tea and cocoa, candies and sweet bulls. There were the always popular pigs' feet.

At about mid-point in a sale, Charley Murray would put aside his reading and would do several new and stunning magic tricks for the customers. Candle light and low-wick kerosene light give great advantage to magic acts that might be exposed as trickery by the strong, white illumination of gaslight fixtures.

There was a whisky bar for the older boys. Thirteen year old John Rattigan was firm in his refusal to sell to anyone under sixteen years old. They sold the small glasses of watered whisky for ten cents each and seven cents of that was profit. There would be as many as a hundred boys coming to some of the sales, and as much as ten dollars profit. But when midnight rang on the ghostly bell across the area, no more transactions might begin.

"Time, gentlemen!" John Rattigan would announce. "Quickly, quickly, let us wind it up quickly. " And they would wind it up as quickly is they could. When the last of the customers was gone, the four boys who lived in the room would pray, and then they'd go to bed. Rattigan was always the last one. He would blow Out the final candle. he would undress in the dark, for he was curiously modest. He would take off his green eye shade last of all. Then he would go to bed.

So they lived out their days in enterprise and diligence and happiness and learning and purity.

## CHAPTER V

'Chastity is the lily among virtues and makes men almost equal to angels. Nothing is beautiful but what is plire, and the purity of men is chastity. Chastity is called honesty, and its possession honor. It is also called integrity, and its opposite, corruption. In short, it has its own peculiar glory of being the fair and unspotted virtue of both soul and body.'

St. Francis de Sales

Castitas, castitas, and the peculiar chastity of mind that is the

requirement of the highest intelligence! These were correct definitions and statements. Not one of the boys ever became so base as to depart from these definitions or to use words to mean their opposites. These four were good boys who had never been corrupted, and several of them would never be corrupted in any of their world or lives. Melchisedech Duffey would suffer a little corruption now and then, but he never repudiated the definitions or defended corruption as anything other than the opposite of integrity.

Everybody has lived in a golden age. Quite a number of persons continue to live in one.

As to his special state in life, Duffey had already made all the explanations possible. He had selected an older priest of the school as his confessor, and he had explained that he was a true magician and sorcerer and magus. This was accepted, and was always taken into account. Melchisedech was told that a magus was subjected to peculiar temptations in life: overweening pride and other things; and he was given much good advice.

There was, as it happened, in the neighborhood and in the acquaintance of the boys, a Lily among the virtues who was also a beauty without blemish. The boys held Sunday afternoon sales that were licit. These were allowed and approved by the Jesuit masters of the school. To the Sunday sales would come many of the day students as well as the borders. And also nonstudents would come, and students from other schools, friends, visitors, grown-up people, even girls. One of the girls who came most often was Lily Koch.

As a merchant, Lily was the counterpart of Rattigan and Duffey. She merchandised at St. Mary Major's School for Girls, a combination boarding school and day school. And Lily was a combination student. She was a boarding student when she wished to be, and she had a private room such as only the richer students had. And she was also a day student when she wished to be, for she had rich and powerful kindred who lived in a mansion that was directly across the road from the front gate of St. Mary Major's. In her room at school, she held a Wednesday night sale which was private, and in the house of her kindred she held a Saturday morning sale which was public. This Saturday morning sale was sometimes in the big living room and sometimes on the veranda, depending on the weather.

Lily lacked one item for her Wednesday night sales and she asked the boys to get it for her. Boys could go in some places where girls couldn't. So Duffey began, once a week, to buy Lily a quart of better whisky than he and Rattigan sold to their own customers. Lily could get shaved ice. She could get French bitters and such things. She served her classmates classier drinks than the boys ever knew the names of.

Lily sold art at the Saturday morning public sales. Duffey had hardly known what art was. But it came to him now like a revelation, and he would have to know all about it.

One Saturday morning, Sebastian Hilton bought a small piece of statuary from Lily Koch for one hundred dollars. He paid her in cash after finding that he had left his check book back at school. Rich kids can pay other rich kids such sums without turning the least shade green. And Melchisedech knew with furious exasperation that the statuette was really worth the hundred dollars, and that the taste of these two young persons was worth all the hammered gold in the world. There were other art things there: pictures, locketts, statues, weavings to hang on the wall, porcellain figures, iron figures, bronzes. There were also insufferably cute pieces to be sold to insufferably cute grown-up customers, and Duffey felt the laughing disdain of Lily when she sold such.

Melchisedech invaded, ransacked, and pirated the minds of Sebastian Hilton and Lily Koch for this new thing. He also ransacked the minds of several grown-up persons who came to some of Lily's sales. And Melchisedech, with what he pirated and ransacked, and with what he already possessed unknowingly, became an instant art expert. Art expert was one of the vocations to which he would be faithful all his life. The part that he

lifted from Sebastian did not have the high-speed condition of other things that he lifted from that mind. The judgments he got there on this were in absolute balance at any speed or at no speed at all.

He encountered other things in the mind of Lily Koch. She knew when he was there. She came and talked with him there in an old way that is closer than words. She told him to come any time he wished, that she would put up a pavilion for him there, and that he should put up a dromedary-hide tent for her there. But would she remember in the world what she told him in her mind? Yes, she would and she did. She was very friendly and very easy with Melchisedech.

At her sales, Lily did not use a green eye shade as John Rattigan did. For her trademark as merchant, she used to snap on celluloid cuffs or gauntlets. They were more common than they are now. And when high noon struck on Saturday, she would cry, "Time, ladies and gentlemen! Quicckly, quickly!" And after the customers were all gone, she would put away her things and unsnap her celluloid cuffs until next Saturday.

One Saturday morning, Melchisedech Duffey brought one of his talismans and gave it to Lily Koch.

"It is for you," he said simply, and then he attempted to bolt out of the room. Lily hooked him by the collar and jerked him back. "Wait, wait, wait!" she cried. "This can't be for sale. It isn't allowed to sell them. This is real. Anyone can see that this is something special and cannot be sold."

"No, it's not to sell, Lily. I want to give it to you so you can give it to somebody else someday. Take it. I have to leave now."

"Wait, wait!" she jerked him back. "But this is genuine. Who is it from?"

"It's from myself, Lily. You will give it to someone. I don't know how to say it, and you don't know what I mean."

"Oh, I know what you mean. Sebastian told me that you were one of the magi, and I had already about guessed it. They are the only ones who could give something shaped like this. One could form an extraordinary person with one of these. One could pour almost everything into such a person. But there's nothing that I can do with it, Melky. I'm already born and, beyond that, I'm already finished. And I will never have any children of my own."

"I thought that you might give it, well, to --"

"Oh, to her? I didn't know you even knew about her. Why couldn't it have been me instead? I don't think that it'll work, but we'll try it if you wish. She is already born, but she sure is empty-headed. So this is what she's been waiting for! I love her, and you will also. Trust me. I'll do what I can. It may work. Sure it'll work."

"You do what you can with it, Lily," Melchisedech said. "I guess they might not work every time."

"Why couldn't it have been you and I, Melky?" Lily asked. Two twelve year old persons, and they were asking, 'Why couldn't it have been you and I' as if something were irrevocable. And it was irrevocable.

Lily looked at Melchisedech with level eyes and then kissed him on the mouth.

"You get out of here now," she said. "You hand out magic like that, and you don't even know what it is."

No, Duffey didn't yet understand very much about his own talismans. He was glad that Lily Koch seemed to understand part of it at least.

#### CHAPTER VI

In one thing and by latter standards, the four boys were not very precocious. Forty or fifty years later, it would be a case that baseball and sex and kindred subjects were organized and regimented and made compulsory from the third grade of school on. The things have backfired, but the failures have not been recognized. "I tell you," a man said just the other



day, "they organize it all too early. I tell you that early regimentation turned me against both baseball and sex forever." That was a double ruin. In the childhood of Duffey, it was not quite so organized as it later became, and yet it was organized.

Even in those old decades the compulsion had begun. A series of dances was arranged every year and attendance was compulsory. Duffey and Rattigan and Murray knew girls, but they didn't know 'girls'. Sebastian, who had been in France and Italy, knew a little bit more about 'girls'. He had, in fact, had an affair with a countess, he said. And affairs with countesses are closely regimented. This claim was something for the other boys to hoot at him for, and they hooted. But Sebastian wasn't at all abashed. It was true, he insisted. And yes, he admitted it had been funny. He wished that he was at liberty to tell just how funny it really was.

And Duffey, dipping into the Sebastian mind, found that there really was a countess and that she was now twelve years old. Duffey even extracted the information (not from Sebastian -- he couldn't have known it -- but from the fates somewhere) that he Duffey would someday make the acquaintance of this Countess and that she would be his close friend.

But that didn't solve the problem of the dances. The first of the series was to be held in the fine home of Lily Koch's kindred as this was a very large house and very handy to the girls' school, and as the family was very pushy about such things. Twenty-five of the boarding boys of Duffey's school were to escort twenty-five girls from St. Mary Major's.

"Oh, there has to be a way out of it," Charley Murray would mutter, and he would chew off all his fingernails and half of his fingers.

"They can't make me do it. They can't make me go," Duffey would growl.

"If we're going to our doom, then let us go elegantly," Sebastian Hilton offered. "And sharpen up a little bit, boys. Wear gloves if you have any. And scarves. You've hired a carriage for this evening. We'll do it in style."

It was early October and still warm, and they really didn't need either gloves or scarves.

"It's only three blocks to the girls' school," said Rattigan who was Parsimonious. But the others jeered him down. If they had any chance at all, it would be to go in style. One other rich kid in school had hired an automobile and driver to take himself and his party, but what possible style was there in an automobile?

So Sebastian's hired carriage with liveried driver pulled up for them that night. The carriage had style and the coachman had style. It even had a post-boy's horn on which Charley Murray blew rousing notes. The horses were Cleveland Bays, and there were no more stylish horses in the world. The carriage and the jouncing ride in it were enough to lift the spirits of any condemned persons.

Even at St. Mary Mtjors where they arrived with their style drooping only a little bit, the situation was eased by their friend Lily Koch being one of the four girls the boys were to pick up.

"Who will squire whom?" Sebastian asked out of his orderly mind.

"Nobody will squire anybody," Lily stated. "They think they can make us do it that way, but they can't. We will all be together, and nobody will be with anyone else."

That was like new life being given to dying people. They went out, and the four girls got into the carriage. What, got into the carriage just to go across the street? Sure, to ride around a dozen blocks and then to end up across the street. The carriage was made to hold four, and there were eight of them. The four guys piled in too, and they went for a happy and whopping ride. Charley Murray was very good on that post-horn, and he gave them some hectic tunes. They were fox-hunting tunes. The boys were only with girls on that carriage ride. They were not yet with 'girls'.

The fun remained till they made their circuit of quite a few blocks

and arrived at their destination across the road from the girls' school and dismounted and entered the big house. And then, in the face of the arrangements and formality and scrutiny, it all shriveled.

Oh flushing horror, they were going to make them pair off! And they were going to make the boys shake hands with the girls. The boys had sat on the girls' laps in the carriage, but they were too flustered to shake hands with them in public. And some of the girls were even more shook.

"I'm going to write my mother to take me out of this school," Mary Anne Michaels said. "I'm going to tell her that I'll kill myself if I can't get out of this school and go home. And I will kill myself if she says no. But how will that help tonight?"

"I know how I can get out of it," said the girl named Sedalia Schoefeld. "I know a trick so I can vomit whenever I want to. I'll play real sick. Then they'll have to let me go back across the road and go to bed."

"Wait! Turn this way. Get some on me!" Lily Koch cried. "Then they'll have to let me go across the road to change my dress, and I won't come back." But Lily was laughing.

"Wait kids," she said. "There's better ways. Follow me. I know places to go."

Lily knew that house. They went through big rooms and down long hallways. They went up back stairways. Somehow they were up in the sound-proofed billiard room in the attic. (The sound of ivory balls striking against each other affected the lady of that house perishingly, so this was the most sound-proof room in town.)

They had a good time up there, the eight of them. They played Kelly pool and rotation. They had two victrolas there, one with the old cylinder records, one with the new disc records. They played rag music and they danced rag dances. But they sure wouldn't have endured the formalized horror of dancing at the dance downstairs. There was food and drink there, from Lily's stock from across the street and from a couple of stores and pickic houses and confectioners in Germantown. And just from the big kitchen downstairs. It was good eating. All the boys and girls had been too nervous and upset in the stomachs to eat before coming to the dance.

There was some of that Germantown wine. There was rag music and jazz music and even honey-bunny music on the victrolas, and they had a fine time of it.

But why, persons of a cruder era might ask, could they not have had a fine time at the formalized dance downstairs? Oh, such people don't know anything, not anything.

Mary Anne Michaels became very friendly with Charley Murray. Sedalia Schoefeld became very friendly with Rattigan. Edith O'Dwyer made conversation with Duffey but Lily Koch teased about Duffey really being her boy. Sebastian shot the best pool, but perhaps it wouldn't always be so. It was just that he had shot more of it. Duffey felt the talent for that table rising in him, and Charley Murray said that they would have a pool table put in their house at home for Christmas of that year.

Oh, the hours went by pleasantly enough. And when their sense of time started to come around (Sebastian had a gold watch, but the cover on it was stuck and wouldn't open, so they didn't know for sure what time it was), they cracked the door of the sound-proof room so they could hear the break-ups and departures.

When that turmoil had crested but was not quite completed, the eight young persons went down the back stairs and out the back door and then around to their carriage, and piled in it, and were away again. Duffey had the post-horn this time, and he blew it with vigor.

"Stay with it, Melky," said Lily who held him on her knees and who was very fond of him. "Enthusiasm beats talent every time. Blow dear, blow." They went around another dozen blocks with singing and squealing and horn-blowing, and they stopped right across the road from where they had started, in front of the big iron front gate of St. Mary Major's.

They all kissed in the carriage. Then, when they came through the gate and through the door, they could truthfully say that they had already done it. Their words were accepted and that was good. None of them could have done it under scrutiny.

It wasn't too fearsome going to dances, if only you could avoid going to the dances, themselves.

#### CHAPTER VII

That was only in the first part of the first year. But things got better afterwards till they reached a thousand-tentacled perfection. And there was a lot of educating going on at the school or schools. It was all high quality. It was a great success and a great pleasure. Yes education is, like sex, an ultimate thing, and nobody will ever speak or write the details of it. That would be an uneducated aberration. But education is one of the great and passionate things, and there can hardly be enough of it.

There were lots of encounters going on and about the schools, encounters between persons and groups of persons, between persons and events, between persons and surroundings, between persons and memories and premonitions and ideas. There were encounters between different areas of the same person. Duffey even had an encounter with some soupe aux grenouilles in France.

Melchisedech, once, just before he reached his thirteenth birthday, ate soupe aux grenouilles in France. He had ordered the soup in genuinely throaty and proper French and he had not disgraced himself in any way. This was at Colmar in Alsace. That was not properly in France at that time, and yet it was France. The chances are that he was staying at the Hotel du Champ de Mars at 2, Avenue de la Marna. He ate this soup at the Rotisserie Schillinger. He also ate Tournedos au Poivre Vert. He felt pleasant and worldly about the whole thing.

That's really all there is to the episode. Two elder persons whom he did not know were approaching him. He didn't know them because they hadn't been in any dipperful that he had dipped out of other minds or other environments. He could have dipped them up fresh at that moment and known them, but he didn't. And, since he accepted the fact that he didn't know these older persons, the scene faded and was gone.

Duffey, of course, had stolen this scene from the mind and memory of Sebastian Hilton. But it was a valid scene. He could savor every flick of salt in the soupe aux grenouilles. He could see and smell every grain of pepper on the peppercorns. The scene became a part of Duffey. It was an item in the Melchisedech memory forever.

Melchisedech gave a talisman to Charley Murray, and he gave one to Sebastian.

"But I will never have a son," Charley said.

"Nor I," Sebastian said. "But there is some one for each of us to give our talisman to, or Duff would not have given them to us. Art-in-life, like art-in-art, must be planned for a long time before it is born. And the most rational way, if one is a magician and a magus, is to give a talisman. I believe that one of these will work, Duffey, and one of them will half work. Murray's will work. But the one I give my talisman for will never be completely your man, or anybody's."

Sebastian Hilton met Duffey at dusk one evening outside the main gate of the school. It was the last day but one of their last year in school. The next morning they were to leave. But Sebastian was white and shaking, and his dark eyes had purgatorial gleams. And this was the boy who was not scared of anything,

"Melchisedech, they've found their way here," he said. "They came within a little of killing me. And if they had killed me, there would have been no one to prevent their killing you too. They've gone for double here. The only ones they could be after are myself and yourself. We are their only

possible prey, their only authentic targets. I have been absolutely careful. Have you?

"Have I what, Sebastian?" Duffey asked. But he knew. It was the three slack-mouthed and slanted-faced young men who were here. They were the ones who had haunted Duffey from his early childhood. Had they found this place because Duffey had somehow been careless? Duffey saw them on the roof then. He hadn't seen them before, but he had sensed that they were here. The three saw Duffey, and they fastened their eyes on him and on Sebastian. They were still about two years older and two years larger than Melchisedech was, but likely they didn't age or grow in an ordinary way.

School friends were climbing up the walls after the menacing three. These friends were going fearlessly up the stippled bricks and castellated window corbels to catch the three slanty youths on the roof and deal with them. They had the school boy sense that the three were unmitigated enemies.

"You know who they are, don't you?" Sebastian asked with the sharp tone that implied that Melchisedech should know, though of course the other boys wouldn't.

"I suppose so," Duffey said. But he didn't, not the names for them, not in words. He would never know that. Duffey could have found out from Sebastian at that moment if he had asked. But he was too proud. "It's dangerous for the two of us to be together ever," Sebastian said. "They can use the two of us as a base line and triangulate in on us. There are fewer than a hundred of us targets in the world, and two of us in one place will register too strongly on their receptors. We attract talent too much, and they'd kill us both. I have been careful, and I know that you have been. But I knew that you were one. And you didn't know that I was. So you have not been as careful as I have. And yet we will be together very much, however dangerous it is. The greater thing should never give in to the lesser."

The last of those slant-faces disappeared from the edge of the high roof. The face left an after-image of absolute malevolence and a promise of blood still to be spilled. Half a dozen of the school mates were up there on the roof then, and they should have surrounded the slant-faced youths somewhere in the steeps and valleys of the roof. The school mates hunted fearlessly. They knew out of their intuitions that the knife-wielding slant-faces could kill only those they were sent to kill.

"Well, they didn't find us for several years," Sebastian said. "They didn't find us till our last day but one at this school. Tomorrow we'll go from here. You know that they won't be caught on the roof though."

"I know it," Duffey said. But why wouldn't they be caught. The three sleazy youths couldn't be found on that twilight roof at all. And there was no way they could have gotten off of it.

Book Two:

Late Boyhood of a Magus

"Then Melchisedech, the king of Salem, brought out bread and wine..."

Genesis: 14-18

This is not leaving those earlier years forever. Neither those years nor the accounts of them are complete. Only a little bit of one of them and a hint of the other three have been given, but there was never any reason for these years to stand in strict sequence.

Melchisedech one day had the feeling of coming to himself in an obscure place where the clear way was lost. He was in a large city, on a street that bordered a green park, and he was burdened with a very heavy suitcase. He was without instructions, but this was his case:

Melchisedech had been told that everything had been done for him that could be expected. With all fine wishes and recommendations, he was on

his own now. He had been given, in a final act of the hand-washing ceremony, one hundred dollars. This was quite a bit of money then. One could live on that for three or four months. It had also been pointed out to him that a willing worker could find a job without much trouble. This was true.

Melchisedech Duffey was fifteen years old and he had just finished a good high school education. He came to this crossroads of life a little earlier than did many boys. He had a big suitcase full of clothes and tools, and he had six hundred and fifty dollars in money (this included the hundred dollars given him by the well-wishing kindred). Melchisedech had been a good merchant during his boarding school days, and he had sold out all those businesses to a consortium of other boys.

It was the last day of May of the Year of the Lord 1915. It was on this day also that Melchisedech began to grow the first of his beards to make himself look older. He had an uncontrollable urge to travel, to go to one or another of his cities, to go to Chicago, to go to Boston, to go to New York. He began to snap his fingers, and golden sparks cascaded from them. This really happened. Melchisedech had the golden touch at his fullest then. A sturdy little girl saw it and ran over to him out of the park.

"How do you do it?" she asked. "I'm a fan of yours, you know." "I'm magic," Duffey said, "but I haven't any fans." He snapped his fingers once more and made another shower of gold sparks. From this he knew that he would have good fortune in all his enterprises for a while.

"If I was magic I'd make a golden coin instead of golden sparks," the sturdy little girl said. "I think you need a manager. You can make coins, you know."

"I love a practical woman," Duffey said, and he kissed her. He snapped his fingers again, and a gold coin danced in the air and rang on the sidewalk. There is nothing that has so mellow a tone as a gold coin ringing its signature. "It's yours," Duffey said, and the little girl picked up the five dollar gold piece. "You are my luck, you are my love," Duffey said, and he kissed her again.

"Why don't you do it all the time if you can do it?" she asked.

"Because I forgot that I can do it. I am always forgetting the wonderful things that I can do. It's nice to have one fan in the world."

"I'm Gretchen Sisler," the girl said. "I'm almost nine. My mother works in restaurants, but she's just been fired. We can live for a while on this though."

"I'm almost sixteen," Duffey grinned. "We will meet again, Gretchen."

"We certainly will," she agreed. "I'll see to that."

Duffey set out traveling, on foot, with his suitcase that weighed a hundred pounds. He went downtown. He could have taken a street car, but there were certain thoughts and speculations that he could only experience while walking. He walked around for half a day with that heavy suitcase. This was to give fortune a chance to arrange things for him, to shift the scenery where needed, and to marshal the prospects and strike the tone. He went into the Dublin and had cheese and black bread and beer. He had tricked himself out of his traveling urge by his long walking, so he had saved train fare. He needn't go anywhere. He was already there, in one of his half dozen cities. He was a very strong boy, but he was tired now.

One of the Dublin girls (she was named Evelyn London) came and sat with him. Oh, she was probably young. About ten years older than Duffey. What she really was was Duffey's second fan of that day, and both of them would be forever.

"You are my boy, you are my love, you are my prince," this Evelyn said as she played with Melchisedech's sorrel hair. "You are a gold star."

"Do you know anybody with a building to sell, Evelyn?" he asked her.

"The building just across the street and down a block," she said. "I will write down the name of the man who owns it, and where he is. And I will

walk to it with you. It's just what you want. I knew you would come today to buy it."

The building was a large and rickety horse barn or livery stable, and it was empty. This was on Walnut Street downtown in St. Louis, Missouri.

"It's just what you want," Evelyn told him again. "It is big enough for you, and you can get it cheap. Oh you can get rich and glorious here, Melky! It will fit every one of your needs perfectly. To anyone else it looks like old horse manure there. It looks like that stable that Hercules had to clean. But for you it will be gold dust."

Duffey didn't quite know what his needs were. He was operating somewhere between impulse and intuition. The prospects were churning around in his head, but he couldn't see the answers yet.

"You are my boy, you are my love," Evelyn London said. She kissed him and left him for a while. And Duffey gazed at the horse barn, knowing that horse barns were not red hot items right then.

The decline in horses had already begun in deep downtown. The streetcars had contributed to the decline in horses, and now the automobiles were contributing to it. Oh, there were still twelve thousand horses for hire downtown, but once there had been eighteen thousand.

Duffey found the owner of the building. They made up a contract and a bill of sale and a deed. The price of the building was two thousand dollars. It was five hundred dollars now, and five hundred in six, twelve, and eighteen months. Melchisedech moved into the building by putting his suitcase on the slate-stone floor inside. He had a hundred and fifty dollars left after making the down payment, and there were people in St. Louis that he could have money from if he needed it. He wouldn't need it, but he wasn't friendless. Nobody who can snap his fingers and make gold sparks and golden coins shower out will ever be friendless.

Duffey got the gas turned on, and he bought twelve mantles for gas fixtures, three for the torch-like post lamps in the horse barn itself, nine for the nine ramshackle rooms that were upstairs. He bought himself a cigar and he smoked it till he let it go out. He went to a junk store to buy an iron bed with mattress. They were so cheap that he bought three of each. He bought a table and a gas cook stove, a gallon can of red paints, and a swivel stool. He had a drayman bring the things to the building.

There were several long loafers benches both outside and inside the building. Such benches were common around livery stables. There were fifty-five stalls and mangers in the horse barn, and twelve carriage bays. There was a lot of lumber in all that. Melchisedech plumbed up the cook store. A small vise, a hack saw, and a pipe die were among the tools that weighted down his suitcase.

He went out and bought a five gallon jar of pigs feet, a five gallon jar of spiced polish sausage, a five gallon jar of apple butter, ten pounds of cheese, ten loaves of black bread, a hundred pounds of potatoes, a dozen cups, a dozen glasses, a dozen plates, a gallon of whisky, five gallons of wine, a thirty gallon keg of beer. The same drayman brought these things to Duffey's place. Then Duffey painted a sign in red letters on a board he took from a horse stall. Paint brush and turpentine were other things that he carried in his suitcase.

"Ten thousand items at reduced prices!" the sign read. "Food and lodging. Whisky, wine, and beer in convivial surroundings. Shaves, haircuts, and baths. Entertainment around the clock. A quality gentlemen's bar and club. Melchisedech Duffey Proprietor." It was a well-lettered sign. Duffey was perfect on lettering.

There was a cistern hand-pump that worked after a little priming. There were a few old buckets and pots and hand basins around. Duffey set potatoes to bake in the oven, and he set potato soup to simmer on top of the stove. There were old horse shoes and horse collars and various pieces of harness. There were two broken carriages that did not need to remain broken.

There was probably five tons of livery stable junk around there. It couldn't be classified, it couldn't be described, but there were surely ten thousand items of it.

Melchisedech Duffey was a fifteen year old man with a good start on a red or sorrel beard. He had his own residence and his own store and establishment. He was in business, though he could not say for certain what business it was. He had his prime stock already bought, and he had a little more than sixty dollars left in his pocket.

A monster came in. He was the first customer, and he turned out to be a monster instead of a man. The monster might not have been much older than Melchisedech, or he might have been three thousand years old. But then so might Melchisedech have been three thousand years old. The monster was very dark and powerful, but he was put together carelessly. He wasn't completely ugly, but nobody else had ever looked like that. His shoes were serviceable though. They were very wide. Monsters have wider feet than do people. His pants and jacket were rough stuff in rivermans-blue, and they were sound.

"Do you need something, sir?" Duffey called ringingly, for this was his first customer in his establishment.

"Oh yes, I need so many things, so many!" the monster said.

"A shave and a haircut?"

"No, things like that don't do me any good."

"Something to eat and drink?"

"Yes. And a place to take a bath. And a place to sleep," the monster said.

Melchisedech gave the monster coffee, whisky, cheese, bread with apple butter, Polish sausage, pigs feet, and a plate of baked potatoes. And, while the monster was eating and drinking, Duffey began to heat buckets of water on the cook stove. He had selected the biggest of the horse troughs (livery stables always had such large and sectioned water troughs), and he spread old horse blankets on the stones around it. He would get the city water turned on tomorrow. The cistern pump was helpful but it would not be sufficient. He would buy a gas heater tomorrow and install it. He would have hot and cold running water. But for now he pumped and heated bucket after bucket of water, and began to fill one of the big sections of the watering trough with it.

He set out his own white soap, almost a new bar of it, and a very big glob of the yellow, harness-and-horse soap that was already in the building. He put the cleanest of the horse blankets on the best of the iron beds with the best of the mattresses.

The monster finished eating. He asked for more whisky, and Duffey gave him a full water glass of it. He asked for a cigar.

"All I have is a cigar that is half-smoked," Duffey said and he pulled it from his pocket.

"That will be fine," the monster said. He sipped whisky and smoked, and he seemed to find some peace there.

"I am Melchisedech Duffey and I would like to make your acquaintance."

"I'm Giulio," the monster said. "I work on the river boats sometimes. And other times I work on the ocean ships. Or on the docks. I don't know at what hour I will rise from my bed. How much is the count? I pay it all now."

"A dollar," Duffey said.

The monster paid Duffey a silver dollar. Then he went, taking whisky and cigar with him, to the watering trough where he took off his shoes and clothes. He dropped his clothes to the horse-blanketed floor, and he hung his brown scapulars on a peg on the wall there. He climbed into the warm water of the horse trough with a sigh of relief and pleasure.

Another man came in. He looked familiar. Oh, he was an Irishman. Duffey remembered the saying, "The Irish haven't handsome faces, but they

have memorable faces: it's hard to forget one." This man had a memorable face, but whom was it remindful of?

"I intended to buy this building," the man said. "I was playing with that man who owned it. I didn't think there was another person in the city who was fool enough to pay eight hundred dollars for this building."

"Nah, man, man, be good," Duffey chided him. "There was no eight hundred dollar price. There was never anything except the two thousand dollar price. And we were the only two persons in the city wise enough to see what an outstanding bargain it was. How can I serve you, sir?"

"Shave and a haircut," the man said. He was a humorously rough-looking man with beetling brows and a beetling belly. Young Duffey pulled up the swivel stool that he had bought that day, and he flapped a huge bib in the air in preparation for tying it around the man's neck.

"Haven't you a proper barber chair?"

"No. I'll get one soon," Duffey said.

"I have one," the man told him. "I'll bring it over tomorrow. I'm Bagby."

"I'm Melchisedech Duffey."

"There can't be too many of that name. I believe that I knew your father."

"I had none."

"Can you be sure that you hadn't? What is your entertainment around the clock?"

"Pitching horse shoes. And I also do magic."

"Magic tricks?"

"No. Real magic."

"Oh yes. I know who you are now. You don't have a pool table?" "No, not yet. I'll get one soon perhaps."

"I have one. I'll bring it over tomorrow. Have you only three beds?"

Duffey was shearing the rough hair off of Bagby and turning him into a dude. Other people were in the doorways sizing up the place.

"Yes," Duffey said. "I'll get more beds as trade improves."

People had seen the sign, and the word had already gone out that a new man in the block was selling whisky in both nickle and dime shots. One of the loafer benches soon had eight drinking gentlemen of the shabby sort. They sipped very slowly, and they talked low and pleasantly. There would be no loneliness in the establishment from now on. Those men could sit there and drink almost forever.

"The man who last used this horse barn for a flop house, he didn't use beds at all," Bagby began to unflex his tongue for this new proprietor. But Duffey knew oil-of-the-tongee better than most boys of his age. This man was a loose one. "What did he use?" Duffey asked.

"See those rafters running to the tops of the horse stalls from the front wall," Bagby pointed. "There are fifty-five of them. Calculate the length of them now. Would you not say that each of them was a ten-man rafter? Notice the several hooks hanging from some of them by leather thongs. See where the other hooks might have hung before they were taken down or lost. Allowing ten of them to a rafter, there would have been five hundred and fifty of those hooks dangling overhead."

"That's right," said Duffey, and he lathered Bagby. The monster had now got out of the horse trough bath tub. He had rolled his clothes and shoes into a pillow and had stretched out on the bed and pulled the clean horse blanket over him. This was for modesty, not for the cold.

"Now see those several padded leather straps in your junk pile," Bagby said to Duffey. "Be advised that there were once five hundred and fifty of them. Are they not padded nicely? There is no way that they could hurt anything with such fine padding. And have they not fine adjustable buckles? They would never creep. They would never slip. Simplicity is the answer. Do you understand how they were used, Duffey?"



Say, this man was a ruddy kidder! Well, what were those several padded leather straps for anyhow? They were some part of horse harness or rigging, but Duffey had harnessed lots of horses and he had never used any straps like that. He cut Bagby gently on the cheek with the razor just to keep the man from getting too far ahead of him.

"Oh sure," Duffey said as a hint of an answer was whispered to him by an ebony giant. "Right around a man's neck would one of them go. They are too well padded to give injury and too well buckled to slip. They wouldn't strangle a man all the way, but they'd insure that he slept deeply. Strap their necks into the straps and then hang the gentlemen up on hooks for the night. And five hundred and fifty men could be accommodated in this comparatively small area in that manner. What did he get for each one, Bagby? Is ten cents too much?"

"He got ten cents each per ordinary, but he never slept more than about two hundred a night at that.

"That isn't bad: twenty dollars a night almost clear. All, but then there were the Wednesday Night Specials! That was nickle night in the old horse barn: and I tell you, Duffey, there was always a sell-out. There was never an empty berth on Wednesday night. Ah, it was a beautiful sight to gaze at five hundred and fifty snoring gentlemen each hanging on his hook! And that nickle potato whisky that he sold them for each slumber was three cents profit a shot."

Duffey had finished shaving and haircutting Bagby. He untied the big bib and snapped and popped it like a pistol. "Twenty cents sir," he said briskly. Bagby paid promptly and in cash. How else can one make so much money so easily and so quickly?

Duffey picked up one of those padded leather straps and whicked it across the palm of his hand several times as he walked past the bemused drinkers on the loafers bench.

"Nay, boy, nay," they said. "It was a joke. It wasn't really that way."

Most of them knew Bagby, and they knew his jokes. But bemused drinkers always have the worry that such jokes might take a turn to their peril. One of those drinkers on the bench said that the leather straps went with Greely Pack Saddles. Pack horses and pick mules used to be rented out of the livery stable to people who wanted to pack into the hills and woods for a few days to get away from it all. And the former proprietor had provided Greely Pack Saddles which were the best kind, the aristocrats of the field. He rented these to go with his pack horses and mules.

But another man said that the padded leather straps were what were called California Bucking Rolls, and that they could be put onto any saddle to make a horse-breaking saddle out of it.

Duffey had driven long steel stakes between the slab stones at two places in the room. Several men had then filled buckets with dirt and with fine old manure from the stable yard. They brought in the friable mixture to build up horseshoe pitching pits. And soon there was the clang of metal on metal.

"Have you a trade, Duffey?" Bagby asked.

"I have. I'm the best carpenter in St. Louis."

"No you're not. I am. But I need an assistant. My cabinet shop is in the building right next to this. There is a boarded-up door between the two, and it can be unboarded. You could put a big clang-for-service bell here and come back through the door whenever you had a customer. And you could be busy in my place whenever you weren't busy in your own. Or you could set up a twin of my own workbench here on your side and work on furniture and cabinets and such. I am the best joiner and cabinet man in St. Louis."

"No you're not. I am," Duffey grinned back at him. This Bagby wasn't a very old man for all his comic swagger and swank. Duffey had cut and shaved ten years off him and now he was a young dude. He was no more than

five or six years older than Duffey, twenty or twenty-one or twenty-two years old. He did have a fine building and shop next door. What walls! What walls, what ceilings, what rafters! They were all of walnut. Both Bagby's and Duffey's buildings were built entirely of fine walnut wood.

"The buildings were built a hundred and twenty-five years ago," Bagby said. "This was a walnut grove before Walnut Street was laid out and named. All the buildings of this block were built of the wood from that felled grove, but all except our two buildings have been replaced. A very little cleaning and polishing will wake up the hidden walnut splendor of your own walls and ceilings and stair-ways."

The afternoon was gone and evening come while Duffey had been busy establishing his business.

"You'll have to learn to delegate, Duffey," Bagby slid. "All men who are big in business have learned to delegate. There's no success without it. Pick out a likely man and hire him to tend your business for the night. Then we will go out and celebrate. Often, when a man does not take the time and effort to celebrate his success, God will believe that such a man does not deserve that success, and he will take that success away from him." Duffey picked out a man and gave him fifty cents to work the twelve hours till full dawn. The man said he would need a dozen beer mugs and some more whisky if he were to run the business properly through the night. Duffey went out and bought a dozen quality mugs for a dollar. He bought more whisky, and brought the purchases back to his establishment. He lit the three big gas torches: the torch at the front door, the torch at the back door which led to the old stable yard. (Duffey already saw that old stable yard as a beer garden and courtyard cafe and an open air market), and the big torch in the middle of the main area of the old horse barn.

And Duffey and Bagby went out to celebrate Duffey's success in business. They went to Meinkmueller's French Restaurant and had zwiebelsuppe and rinerbrater and all such things as one gets at the top French restaurants in St. Louis. Then walnuts and brandy and cigars.

They went to a burlesque show at the Star and Garter. Then they went to the Bavarian Club to drink and sing, where those strong laughing blonde girls, all in peasant costume, would give gentlemen rides on their backs. You had but to ask. Duffey made friends with one of them named Helen. They went to the Dublin where Evelyn London had already spread the word about Duffey and his new place. Then back to that place.

Things were going nicely there, but the monster was roaring and asleep.

"He's a troubled creature," Bagby said. "I know him a bit. He works on the river boats, and he comes around here about once a year."

Two other customers were sleeping in the other two iron beds, and a dozen were sleeping on horse blankets on the floor. Others were sleeping or half-sleeping on the loafers benches, all still holding drinks. But there were lively customers also, wining and dining and horseshoe patching customers. They had set up two more horseshoe courses. Duffey's first night in the new business looked like a good one.

The monster rose from sleep still roaring. He flung on clothes and shoe as if pursued, and he came to Duffey. "Have you not something to give me?" asked this monster who was named Giulio, "something for one of my unborn sons that he be not as I have been?"

"Yes, yes, my creature, I give that thing right now," Duffey said. "It's so hard to recognize one of the right ones when he comes."

"I guess I am a little bit unlikely," monster Giulio said. Duffey got a talisman and gave it to him. The monster took it and bolted out into the night. He was a pursued person, and what sleep he had got at Duffey's he had stolen from his pursuers. But he would sleep no more that night.

Bagby whistled a curious tune after the monster. It was cruel and comical at once. It was bristly. It had the clatter of hooves in it, but they weren't horses' hooves.

"What is the tune?" Duffey asked him.

"I made it. I'm still making it," Bagby said. "I started it some months ago when your monster was last in the neighborhood. It's the Gadarene Swine Song. Your monster is one of the Gadarene Swine, and he'll be pursued till he drowns himself in the water."

"No, I think he's a good man," Duffey said.

"Some of the Gadarenes are good, but their lineage is against them. But how did you know he was a person to give a talisman to? Is that how you have your luck so quickly, Duffey? Have you a talisman for this building also?"

"Yes, I have a talisman for this building. And I have giants for helpers." Bagby shuffled out into the night singing the Swine Song.

The monster is accursed by fate!

Hi ho!

The monster's saving comes too late.

Hi ho!

Perhaps fate changes yet, or worps.

Make hymns for him on golden horps

With rangle-tang of flats and shorps...

... You'll save him not," the death bird chorps,

He'll drown until he is a corpse.

Hi ho the gollie wol!

That was one of the numerous verses of the Gadarene Swine Song.

## CHAPTER II

But while Melchisedech was establishing his business in one afternoon and night, it took him several weeks to stabilize it and institute it property. Even with invisible giants for helpers, it took him several weeks. But all went well for him, and he knew that he was in the years of luck that could never return. This King, this Melchisedech, had never known defeat. He already had the surety that he would not know either total nor eternal defeat. But he saw, by both pre-vision and post-vision device, that he would suffer a few paralyzing catastrophes before he finally came to port, catastrophes such as ordinary people have no idea of.

(Ordinary people have more grubby, and often more severe catastrophes.)

But now, as he came to his sixteenth birthday, it was all well. He owned the "Rounders' Club)" ("For Gentlemen Rounders of the World"). This was, as the sign said "Restaurant, Bar, Resident Club, with Horse Carriages and Automobiles for Rent. Games on the Elegant Riverboat Deck. Tuxedos for hire. Rounders' String Band playing in the main dining room every night except Tuesday. Patrons become Automatic Members of the Famous Steeplechase Club. The House of Ten Thousand Duty-Fre Bargains. Raquets. Whist. Poker. Horseshoes."

Lucille Sisler, the mother of young Gretchen, had gone to work for Duffey at Rounder's. People began to call Lucille Duffey's mother-in-law, though she was only twenty-eight years old and cute. But Gretchen had told everybody that Duffey belonged to her. And Olga Sanchez of the torchy shoulders had come to work there. Oh, Olga! Duffey brought horses back into the horse barn again. Yes, he brought horses into the great central room itself, into a divided-off part of it. Really elegant people do not mind the smell of truly superior horses while they dine. They were the most noble horses in town, with red and gold harnesses, and incredible carriages. The place grew to fast opulence. Duffey added import items and art items to his ten thousand bargains. He added whole groups of entertainments and elegances. But other things must go on while this was going on.

Duffey couldn't allow the summer to run away and leave him. He was already educated by most standards, but he was not yet up to Duffey

standards. He enrolled for courses at several institutions and colleges and universities, for there was not any one of them that was big enough to hold him by itself. In that summer of 1915, he took courses at St. Louis University from the familiar Jesuits, at Washington University, and at Concordia. He took classes at a school of pharmacy and at a school of music. He was busy. He totalled off the hours of his activity one day and found that it came to twenty-eight hours, without hours of sleep. But he knew tricks with time already.

For such sleep as he took, he slept on the wonderful streetcars. He rode them all over town to his various destinations, and he slept (though sometimes he read or studied instead) for several hours every day. He also had several sparky and elegant trolley car romances, for there is nothing like a streetcar for meeting girls. Early elegance was in the air for him that summer. For that summer, and fitftilly for ever after.

Oh, time had to be found for other things! One evening a week was devoted to attending the Star and Garter. And Duffey also went to legitimate drama theatres. Then there was pugilism and the whole nimbus that surrounded it.

Bagby was a prize fighter and he fought about once a month. His success had slowed a little towards the end of summer when he had grown into the heavyweight class. They hit a lot harder among the heavyweights. But he was still one of the most promising young fighters of the city. And he knew that publicity, high and flamboyant publicity, was one of the names of boxing. Whether or not he could whip an opponent in the ring, Bagby could almost always whip that opponent in the newspapers before they came into the ring. He always composed ringing battle statements and sent them to those Heavenly Twins, the St. Louis Post Dispatch and the St. Louis Globe.

"How long has this been going on?" Duffey asked. "I could whip almost anyone the ring way, and I could absolutely whip anyone the newspaper way."

Bagby took Duffey to Hammerschmidt's Gymnasium and got a few of the canny managers and promoters to watch the boy as he worked out. Duffey was now a heavy middleweight and still growing. He had the large and powerful hands of a much bigger man. He had the telling shoulder slope that wise men always talk about when judging the fighting potential of a lad. Duffey had boxed in school and he was handy in the ring.

They scheduled Duffey for the third preliminary fight on the Monday Night bill. He would get nine dollars if he won, six dollars if he lost but made a good fight of it, and only three dollars if he lost miserably or was knocked out. It was a four rounder he fought and his opponent was Dandy Dan Dillard. Melchisedech put himself into a state of mind that would insure victory. He summoned invisible giants to aid him if he should need aid. He ransacked the distant mind and movements of his talented friend Sebastian Hilton who was so fast of foot and hand and heart, and he felt the high-speed moves and mentality come into him. He understood all the tricks of getting the jump on the other boy and drawing first blood. He rushed out at the clang of the bell for the first round.

And Dandy Dan began to give him an unmerciful beating.

Four rounds of that. It was the just equivalent of four hours of Hell itself. Once Duffey thought that he might have it all ended by one lucky stroke, but even the fastest feet and hands in the world weren't enough to finish it. Duffey called on every device, but Dandy Dan sent Duffey's invisible giants whimpering away like beaten puppies. Or like giggling goofs, it really seemed. Duffey thought "Strong Victory", but he found it very hard to maintain any sort of thought with his head being hammered like that.

Then it was over with, and Duffey had gone the distance, though that last round seemed mercifully shortened. Duffey simply didn't understand how he had survived the thing. He was quite surprised to find then that he had won, that he had taken the first three rounds by wide margins and was far

ahead in the fourth. And that fourth round had been mercifully shortened. The fight had been stopped because Dandy Dan had been out on his feet and in danger of grave injury. Duffey was unmerked, and he had his breath back within seconds. The memory of the terrible beating that he thought he was getting faded away. Dandy Dan was a livid hulk, and Duffey was hooked forever on the high sport. He had rosin and alum in his blood now and henceforth, and he was scheduled for another fight the next Monday night.

Well, Duffey was hooked on it, but not on the fighting end. He could count a house, and he could figure. He would have a few more fights, but he already knew where the success was. Within six months, Duffey was promoting his own fight bills and doing well. Duffey discovered music late that summer, or possibly it was the summer after that one. Now he became a banjo man in a straw-hatted string band. Duffey had been studying musical theory in one of the schools, and notation and harmony and construction, and the history of all of them. And he played the piano. Everybody who took any of the courses in musical theory has to take some instrument at the same time.

In the Rounders' String Band, to which he was paying good money, Duffey had a banjo player from whom he wasn't getting optimum.

"Here, let me show you how it ought to be done," Duffey said once, and he took the banjo. It was the first time he had ever held a banjo. Duffey achieved a few extra effects on it, and then he gave it back to the man. But, a very little bit later, there was wide-open opportunity for other extra effects, and the man did not take that opportunity. He did not even know it was there.

"Here, let me have it," Duffey said. He took it and he kept it, and he played till evening. He played all the evenings thereafter unless he was busy with something else. And, whenever that was the case, one of the bemused drinking men off the loafers' bench would play. Some of them were pretty good banjo players. And that first slimmer, or possibly it was the summer after that, the Rounders' String Band received an award for being the third best string band in the city. Playing the banjo was one of the things that Melchisedech continued for the rest of his life. He realized from the first the correlation between wearing one of those flat straw hats and playing the banjo. Can you imagine a person playing a banjo while wearing some other kind of head covering? Can you imagine a person playing a banjo while bare-headed?

Can you imagine gloomy music-picking from a banjo? From a mandolin, yes. From a guitar, yes. Almost all guitar music is gloomy. But no note of gloom can ever be picked from a banjo.

Ah, the songs and tunes that the Rounders' String Band used to play. "Rock Island Rag", "Cincinnati Zoo Rag", "Missouri Valley Shuffle", "Gadarene Swine Song" (that was adapted from a tune that Bagby used to whistle and sing), "Whistle Stop Jump", "Morgan County Fair Strut", "The King Shall Ride", "Show Boat Shuffle", "Honeysuckle Hop", "River Road", "Gloria! Gloria!", "Sawdust Trail Drag", "Startime Trolley Car". Those were the sweet old songs, and no other string band in town played them all.

"The King Shall Ride" became Duffey's instant favorite one night when Duffey became the King and he did ride. Olga Sanchez took him up on her torchy shoulders for a ride all around the big main room. And thereafter, whenever that tune was played, she took him on her shoulders to ride, or else Lucille Sisler took him on hers. Duffey was King to these two. They were very intense partisans of his.

Charley Murray, the old friend, lived there in St. Louis. He lived in the west end and attended St. Louis University as a day student. He was not in any of Duffey's classes, but the two saw a lot of each other. About once a week, Charley would come downtown to the Rounders' Club and perform some of his magic tricks. Duffey knew that he was a better magic man than was Charley, and with real magic, not with tricks, but wild horses tearing him apart would not get him to let Charley know that. Besides, he didn't yet

have such an entertaining patter as Charley had.

Wild horses! Duffey had now, in his head, achieved the ultimate in a magic act, The magician is torn apart literally by eight wild horses, and his torn-off limbs and gurgling trunk are offered to all for examination. And, a little later, many of the non-essential difficulties being worked out, the magician will appear whole and unsundered again.

Duffey didn't know how the trick could be effected by even real magic. But one of the magic trick books said that any trick that could be conceived of could be performed, whether by trumpery or illusion or trick prop or whatever. It was certainly a challenge. Duffey still ponders this trick sometimes. He'll figure a way to do it yet. Charley Murray came up with a sum of money and became half owner of Rounders' Club. This would give Duffey freedom to travel to other places and to other metiers, and it would bring intelligent direction to the next stage of growth. Duffey was better at originating things and getting them going than he was at carrying them to their higher stages. And as soon as Charley was out of college, Duffey would be able to take up really serious wandering without leaving ventures behind him to fall to riiin.

That autumn, or anyhow one of those autumns in one of those years, Duffey added attendance at art school to his other activities. It may have been at this time that he dropped his classes at the school of pharmacy. No one can do everything.

Duffey was good at all crafts. There was no better carpenter or machinist to be found. Now he came quickly to all the art techniques. He learned to draw in pencil and ink and dry brush and charcoal. He learned the crayons and pastels. He took to oil paint like a ducklings to pond water. As a rock sculptor, he was a natural. He had cast metals before. Now he became an excellent caster of bronze statuary.

He was good at everything. He excelled at everything. But there is something that comes after excellence. It can't be named, but one will know it when he meets it. And Duffey wasn't meeting it very often in his own work. He ordered his invisible giants to assist him with their hands. He could not feel their hands, and he ordered them still more loudly.

"We are here, we are here," they answered, but he could hardly tell where the answers were coming from. These art giants were of a different and more exterior sort than other giants that he called up. He followed their voices to various places. And, in each case, he did find the thing that comes after excellence. It was always there with them, and he could always touch it. But it was something that had already been done by other hands than his.

So Duffey knew that he must always be more of an art dealer than an artist. He would be an artist for the love of it, but only a few times in his life would he touch in his own work that something that is beyond excellence. But he knew it when he saw it.

Bagby said that Duffey cheated on himself though. He had divined that there was much more money in being an art dealer than in being an artist, and he had suppressed his slim money proclivities.

Duffey won seven of his first nine fights in those his palniy days as a fighter. He was pretty good and he worked up to where he was making as much as a hundred dollars a fight. But here also he would be a better dealer than an artist.

### CHAPTER III

Duffey sometimes saw his sister, if she were indeed his sister, there in St. Louis. It is almost certain that she was his step-sister and had always been. At these new encounters she was a flaming stranger to him. Yet he had already, some years before this, absorbed her personality and the continuing flow of her memories and her life. That being so, it seemed that

her person itself should be somehow superfluous to him. Duffey told her that she was superfluous, and she laughed. She was two years older than he was, and she tried to deal with him as if he were still a child. But not even this new flame-top, false kindred could deal with Melchisedech as if he were a child.

She was a likeable person. Duffey knew that she was very much like himself, and he counted this as totally in her favor. She was his own anima made animate. She was the flame-red part of his own soul. She had fire-red hair, redder than his own. She had fire-blue eyes that were his exactly. He could see out of them without distortion. With all other eyes that Duffey looked out of during his personality ransacking, there was distortion. She gave the impression of body strength beyond her size, and she wasn't small. She had the very large and strong hands and the swinging shoulders of Duffey himself. And she had a strong touch of the bovine. This might be counted against some persons. It couldn't be counted against this Mary Louise. This was the royal bovine, this was the sacred cow that all chthonic goddesses become and are and pass through at some stage of their story.

Mary Louise was intelligent and proud and friendly. She was very ghostly; yes, that was the word. She was much in the manner of an apparition.

"What if she is the prime and she has made me superfluous?" Duffey worried in one of his flashes. You'd shiver to behold her every time, and there would be awe and fear as well as deligit at her appearance. One does not meet one's own personality pieces without some trepidation.

Duffey's sister now bore the name of Mary Louise Byrne. She had been given the surname of the kindred or pretended kindred who raised her. Duffey now loved her with a suddenness that scared him. He realized that she was the near perfect person, and at the same time he realized that she was a fit portion of himself. She was himself without the abysses. And no, she should never have been exteriorized. But that direction of thought ran into a vortex. If none of the parts of him should be exteriorized, then there wouldn't be any world. Everything in the world was to some extent a part of Melchisedech.

"If this be arrogance, let it be so," he said resolutely. He made jolly and kidding and hilarious love to Mary Louise much of the time, but sometimes...

"I will have to get me a handmaid," Mary Louise said. "I think it's cheating, but the sisterly wives of the patriarchs always had handmaids for the diversion of their consorts."

"We are a royal family," Melchisedech said, "and besides that, I have never been sure that you were my real sister. The Kings of Egypt had their sisters to wife, and I'm not sure that the Kings of Judah did not. Should not the King of Salem have his? There's a love between us that is a plain outrage, but should it be bridied?"

"It should be, yes. It will be. Oh, Melky, stop that! I will get me a handmaid."

Mary Louise had a close girl friend that she decided to bestow on Duffey. But could Mary Louise be trusted? And could any handmaid of hers be trusted? The almost perfect Mary Louise had slanted humor, and the handmaid was sure to echo it. This handmaid was Elizabeth Keegan. At first meetings Beth Keegin came into Duffey's room ahead of Mary Louise. She came with arms wide open and she gave Duffey a large kiss.

"I love him. I'll keep him," she said to Mary Louise as that royal sister entered. This Keegan girl was so handsome that one felt she had to be kidding. Nobody could be that pretty. It had to be a joke. It was, of course.

Beth had the blackest hair ever, and the lightest ivory skin. No one could be built as she was. It was architecturally impossible. It was a beautiful burlesque, a pleasant fraud. Even the ideas of such a form can only be found in cartoons, or dugged up from under five thousand years of

soil deposit in some illicit part of the world. But time stopped when she came. All the observation of her took place in a fragment of an instant.

She was small. She had child's feet. But there was more than full contour to her calves and thighs. The waist of the girl was so small that it seemed unsafe for her to be walking about, but her hips were ample and her breasts were superb. Her neck and shoulders and arms passed belief. "How did the ancients make them so?" one wanted to ask. But Beth wasn't an ancient. Duffey discovered that he was looking at her as at a work of art. He also realized that he had been more excited by works of art than he had ever been by live people, a situation that was perhaps temporary with him.

Duffey had to know something. He put his hands upon her. She was cold to the touch. He had to know something else. He put all his weight on her. She scarcely swayed. She was unbreakable. She was a piece of ivory statuary. She was not real. She would always have this elegant coldness of body and strength of grained ivory, for all of her clowning and her torrid behavior.

No one could be dressed as Beth was. Duffey found out later, about three minutes later, that she was wearing a costume for a play she was in. But she had made it herself, and nobody else could have filled it that way. And what passion was the voice of Beth Keegan when she cried out:

"Oh my love, my prince, my boy, be with me forever!" Real passion, yes. But there was a strong touch of something else. And then, at that first meeting between the dumbfounded Duffey and the confounding Keegan, Beth broke up into total laughter and was joined by Mary Louise. Beth Keegan didn't really have any such passion voice as that. She didn't have any such walk as that. (Her walk had seemed to be a thing that hadn't happened in thirty centuries, not since the fall of Tarshish: her walk was unfair enticement.) And she almost didn't look like that.

Her shattering beauty was only something that she put on for a lark, as though it were a funny hat. The voice and walk were put-ons. They were among the things that she was practicing for the school play. But if she had really been like that, and no put-on, then she would have been one of the great ones of the ages. She would have been the great love of Duffey's life, if he could have won her. And if he could not have won her, she would have been the great lost love of his life.

Somebody (herself and a consortium of friends) had contrived the whole of her. Someone had made her up. Almost the only words that she ever said were lines taken out of plays, but she had her own superbness. "If only she were real flesh and blood," Duffey said sometimes. "If only she were real ivory," he said other times. She flustered Duffey so much that he would never get over it. She scared him. The stories of living statues are all really ghost stories.

Duffey would play it brash and showy with her sometimes, and then he would fall into confusion again. He, a man of the world, was confounded by this little figurine that somebody had created for fun, and perhaps he became her final creator. But what to do with her when she was created?

Often Duffey would kiss her or fumble with her or sit on her lap because he didn't know what to say to her. And what he did say was always trivial stuff, and he would flush hotly at the shallowness of it as soon as it was out. He was afraid to be alone with her, he a successful businessman and a practitioner of all the arts. And this was a big joke with Beth herself and with Mary Louise.

"She is solid ivory," Mary Louise would say. "Why are you afraid of an ivory doll?"

"She is solid artifact, yes," Duffey answered.

"Think how many billiard balls you could cut me up into," Beth said. "You could be rich, honey. And I cut so easily."

But when they were gone that time, Duffey said a curious thing.

"If only she weren't alive! If only she weren't alive she would be worth a million and a half dollars." His art-dealing eye was appraising her



correctly as a life-sized ivory statuette. Sometimes Duffey with another young man, Charley Murray, or Edward Ranwick of the art school, or Philip Manford of the school of music, would pick up Mary Louise and Beth at the little college they attended and take them for rides or to dinner and theatre. They would go in one of Duffey's own rigs, a carriage or a buggy. Or sometimes they would go in Philip Manford's overland automobile. There was real pride in being with such handsome girls. Mary Louise was large and red-headed and of a sandy serenity, and she was lightly freckled. And Elizabeth Keegin was small and statuesque, and she was all ivory and midnight in her coloration. Oh, they did make an animated tableau when they swung around the town!

They would dine at Meinkmueller's French Restaurant. Or at Duffey's own Rounders' Club "Golden Buffet", or at his small "Bread and Wine Room". For class combined with rowdiness, there was nothing like Rounders in all St. Louis. Or they would eat at Schotts, or at Kelly's Steak House. Then they would go to the Roxie or the Music Hall or the Broadway Theatre or the Star and Garter. Beth and Mary Louise would often go up on the stage at the Star and Garter and mix in the skits. Piccone, the little Italian who ran the S & G, said that he would give them both jobs there any time. He had known Beth and her family forever.

"I will do my thesis in innovative stagecraft at the Star and Garter," Beth told him in her stagey voice.

"Just walk like that, just talk like that, just look like that," Piccone would say. "You yourself are innovation enough."

Later the party might go to the Bavarian Club to drink and sing. Oh, those chubby, breasty, costumed, Germanish blonde girls at the Bavarian Club. Duffey was very good friends with one of them, Helen Platner.

"Like brewery horses!" Edward Ranwick used to laugh at the sturdy girls at the Bavarian. Aw, that wasn't true. They were powerful but trim young girls, not like brewery horses at all. This Edward Ranwick had already made quite a name for himself at the art school, but his art didn't impress art expert Duffey. It was "skinny art", as Duffey called it, and there were things lacking in it.

Or they might go to the Dublin where Evelyn London would chide Duffey for leaving her for this new girl Beth.

"Oh my love, my prince, my boy," Evelyn would say. "You have left me for this little figurine who isn't even real flesh. She is Dresden China. She is crockery. Come back to me, love."

Evelyn and Beth used to take each other off, and both did good imitations. They achieved a sort of blending of styles.

The party would often go back to Schott's or Kelly's late. Those places had fine music bars that adjoined their restaurants. And sometimes they would go back to Duffey's own Rounders' Club which was really the most entertaining place in town. Where else could one pitch horseshoes in a music bar? Where else did they have live horses and circuses in the divided-off part of the main dining room? Where else did they have a flea market with ten thousand import-free bargains in an old stable yard? Where else was there an Olga Sanchez with her torchy shoulders. She mixed drinks at the main bar.

And sometimes they would gather in Duffey's own rich walnut rooms upstairs and lie on the sofas and on the floor before the old fireplace.

But once Duffey came on Beth, alone and crying. She was never alone, and it would be impossible that she would cry.

"It's that bird," she said. "Hear what it sings? 'The year is almost over with.' That's what."

"What bird, Beth?"

"Don't you know anything? The catbird, the one that didn't go south. It's in a draft corner of your own fireplace chimney here."

"I use a calendar myself. Yes, I know that the year is almost over with. What is that to thee and to me?"

"It means that my youth has fled," Beth sniffled. "There's no way to slow things down." "I know a hundred ways to slow time down," Duffey told her, and I'll show some of them to you. But, Beth, you're only seventeen."

"I will be eighteen in another month, and you will still be sixteen. I think you cheat at it somehow. It's going, Melky, it's going, it's almost gone."

Beth Keegan had made the most horrifying of discoveries, that it isn't going to last forever.

"We haven't had much 'family' together, Melky," Mary Louise said once, "and we should have." I am your sister, in some respect anyhow. Oh sure, I am your passionate consort also, and yet we hardly know each other. There is, of course, that other life in which you know me completely, but we will keep that below the threshold. I insist that we have these party evenings together for the sake of the 'family' that we comprise. And they are fun. We all love each other. I love Beth, and also all the boy and girl friends who make up our set. And if Beth will not love you, I will pull all her hair out. And if you will not love her, then I will kill you and strew your limbs for the buzzards to play with. She is the prettiest girl I can find or make and the most exciting. Make love to her more, romp on her more, kiss her more." Well, the Keegan loved to be kissed and romped on and ridden on. But it was all joke-romps and joke-rides and joke-kisses. And it wasn't true that everything that Beth said was lines out of a play. A lot of it was lines out of comic magazines.

"This is my telephone operator's kiss," she would say. "Smooch, smooch, smooch, your three minutes are up, please." Or...

"This is my watermelon-eater's kiss," and she'd give slurping kisses overflowing with sweet juice to Duffey, and then break up in laughter. Beth could never help laughing when she was being kissed. It ruined some kisses but it improved others. Or she would say "This is my schoolteacher's role. We're going to get this right if it takes all night."

Or she might call out "Pony Express" and bend her statuesque back to be ridden. Duffey liked to ride her. But Beth was not real. She was a piece of ivory statuary that laughed. She was Etruscan, she was Cretan with all that three-thousand-year-old color and freshness. The living statue is one of the archetypes of the deep universal unconscious. It is one of the primordial dreams, and so was Beth Keegan. Duffey modeled one of his talismans on Beth. It was already authentic and lightning-struck. Now it would be Beth Keegan-struck, for she carried it with her for six months. To whom would Duffey give that one?

The slightly changing group of young people held together in season and out of season, swimming in the summertime and sledding in the winter, touring and celebrating at all seasons. All of these young people (there were other girls, Dorothy Tarkington, Mary Marinoni, and there were other fellows) were delighted with each other. They were young -- it is easy to forget just how young -- and talented. Some of them were successful far beyond their years. And they all saw each other, correctly, as brighter than life.

"Now that the April of your youth adorns..." as the poet said.

Sometimes it seemed as though Bagby were a part of Duffey's person, a part of his grosser future person. A few people in the Rounders' Club neighborhood on Walnut Street had always believed that Bagby and Duffey were brothers, and there was no persuading them out of it. And Duffey's sister Mary Louise was already acquainted with Bagby before Duffey ever created the Rounders' Club. How, in a city as large as St. Louis, could such different kinds of people as Mary Louise and Bagby, living in such different parts of town, maintaining such different kinds of lives, have become acquainted? This was something that neither of them would ever tell Duffey. And just how well had they been acquainted? "But I know everyone just as you know everyone, Melky," Mary Louise said once. "I'm as royal as you are, and I

also have my attributes and talismans. Mine cannot bring about the creation of persons as easily as yours can, but mine can bring about the coincidence of persons and things. Do you believe that it was an accident that you met the old horse barn and that you met Bagby? And I can create. Who do you think it was who made Beth Keegan? But don't you know that Bagby is a part of our own person? Oh, there are some gross ones who share it with us!" How would Bagby and Duffey be taken for brothers? They didn't look alike. Bagby was black of hair and whiskers and swarthy of skin. Duffey was russet-haired and red-bearded and freckled and blue-eyed. Both were a little broad for their height, but Bagby was a bit the bigger man. Oh, they both had oversized hands and swinging quite shoulders; they both had that swigger stride. They both had that voice that was strong and of good range, clear and high sometimes, bulky and broad often; theirs were muscular voices if you want to call them that. Duffey could invade and ransack the mind of Bagby as he could that of everyone he encountered. But often he had the feeling that Bagby was growling in the Duffey mind, and that Bagby held at least a faintly scribbled permit to be there.

Well, there were whole shanty notions in Bagby's mind, that's what it was. The Bagby mind couldn't be despoiled in quick raids as could most other minds. One couldn't carry that loot away in the hands or in a suitcase. It would take drays, it would take trucks, it would take box cars and whole trains, it would take barges and flat-boats, it would take ships to haul away the Bagby mind-freight. It was mostly shanty stuff, but it was of immense bulk.

How could Bagby have devoured and become possessed of this living population, this extensiveness of whole nations, in his short years? He wasn't eternal nor extensible. He didn't even have the thin golden dust of touched-eternity that Duffey and Mary Louise had, that Sebastian Hilton and others had. How could he have known the interiors of eighty thousand houses in St. Louis itself. Oh, Duffey had free entry into the big and shabby warehouses of Bagby's mind, but he hadn't the means of hauling the material away. He hadn't the depots to store it in. He had magic methods of handling materials, but here was a bulk that defied his magic.

Bagby was a baroque, a flawed pearl. The pearly sickness was all over him. He was a friend and a sort of business associate of Melchisedech Duffey. He was a person of surpassing depth and scope. But he was a slob. He frequented the fleshpots of Chestnut Street, and he brawled in every section of town. There is always room in the world for a royal brawler, but Bagby missed the royalty by a bit. He had a bad name in many places.

Art critic Duffey said that Bagby's St. Louis was a series of Dore drawings. All views of the physical world are the subjective views of somebody, and Duffey could watch even the subjective views of Bagby and others. He loved these ink drawings that made up the Bagby City, those black and white and gray sketches (due to technical difficulties there were no colors in Bagby's mind), and he loved the Bagby-esque shape of the people and the town.

Bagby's battling had sometimes been of a murderous and evil sort. There are men who love to battle even to death. In that era, there was a sort of shanty deuling ground by the river, on a lone patch of sandy clay under the bluffs and edged in by a sand bog. There were vicious bare-hand and rough-shod fights there, fights for the sake of fighting, and to finish. Bagby had once left a man for dead in such a fight. And Bagby had once been left for dead himself.

"It's those three slanted-faced men that he brawls with the most," Mary Louise told Duffey once.

"Oh my God!" Duffey said.

Bagby had violent ideas on politics and economics and religion. He believed that all the parishes in the city, including the cathedral parish, had lost their orthodoxy. He believed that most of the pastors and all the assistants were it bunch of Judas Priests. He went to mass at St. Malachy's

clear across town, this being the church that came nearest to preserving the true faith.

Bagby was a mess. If he were indeed a part of Duffey, then perhaps it was best that that part was externalized and that it could be segregated.

Mary Louise liked Bagby pretty well in spite of all this. She ran around with him a little bit. She said that he was usually right in his opinions, but that he was so rock-headedly right that he defeated himself.

"Oh really, I wouldn't mind Bagby so much," she said once, "if only he didn't work so hard it being Bagby."

And Bagby was to Duffey, and to Mary Louise also, a sullen and magnificent piece of shanty, monochrome art.

#### CHAPTER IV

And then there was the ballooning. Duffey joined (according to one version, he founded it) The World-Wide Argonauts Argo Balloon Club. This was a club of very rich sportsmen. and the entry fee paid to join the club was three thousand dollars. Well, Duffey had three thousand dollars and quite a bit more of loose money at that time, but he may not have paid it for his membership. Bagby said years later (and Bagby was the only one who could remember the balloon adventures in detail in later years) that Duffey did not pay anything at all for his membership, that he rather collected three thousand dollars from each one of twenty three sportsmen, he acting as North American Bursar of the World-Wide Argonauts Argo Balloon Club. Duffey was supposed to transmit this money to the World Headquarters at Geneva. So he would have done, but the World Headquarters at Geneva did not then exist and would not ever exist. So Duffey was stuck with the money.

Duffey paid twice three thousand dollars for a custom-made balloon, and that was more money then than it has ever been since. It was a large silk-bag balloon. It ran on hydrogen gas and sand bags. The great silk-bag would be inflated with hydrogen, and at about the same time four thousand pounds weight would be loaded into the basket or gondola. With this balance, the balloon would rise resolutely but not too swiftly as soon as it was uncabled from its mooring. Part of this weight always consisted of hundred-pound sand bags, and part of it was people and supplies for them. Duffey would sometimes take as many as nine or ten persons up on an ascension. With them and with water and food for them, that would be more than two thousand pounds of the four thousand pounds ballast.

The balloon would descend when Duffey would let part of the hydrogen out of the bag. It ascended again when Duffey threw some of the sand bags out; or, in extreme case, when he threw some of the people out. It went, generally, where the wind went. Duffey did have it sort of tacking sail rigged up by which, in theory, he could depart from the direction of the wind somewhat. In practice though, that tacking sail merely made the wind angry, and it would tear the sail to pieces and then blow the balloon where it had intended to blow it originally. And Duffey also installed a gasoline engine and a propeller, but it would influence the balloon only about five miles an hour. But Duffey, and Bagby even more, learned to select winds by ascending and descending and by controlled drift. They learned to see the different winds, to know their speeds and strengths and directions. They learned to sidle into them.

Duffey first named his magnificent balloon "The Argo Twelve" for a reason that he was not able to explain to any of his companions. Then a misty person of great power and status came to him and told him that the Argo Twelve was currently active, that he Duffey should have known that it was, and that Duffey would not be able to use the name Argo Twelve for his balloon. But this person told him that the balloon might sometimes be used its a pinnacle or ship's boat for the Argo of the Twelfth Voyage. Duffey thereupon changed the name of his balloon to "The Argo Twelve and Half", a

name still harder to explain than the original name.

Duffey used to ascend with Bagby, with Mary Louise, with Charley Murray, with Beth Keegan, with Dorothy Tarkington, with other friends and acquaintances and employees, with young Gretchen Sisler, with Papa Piccone, with Evelyn London. At first they would go up only in the sunny daytime. They had not yet settled on proper lighting for "Argo Twelve and a Half". Duffey was all for electric lights to be powered by well-cell electric batteries. Charley Murray thought they should use kerosene lights or compressed gas lights. Bagby was in favor of carbide lights or lime lights. Duffey finally won when he showed them reports on other balloonists.

Other balloonist sportmen had been blown to Kingdom Come when using nonelectric lights on their balloons. Balloon descent involved releasing large amounts of hydrogen gas right out of the bottom of the balloon sack, right into and around the balloon gondola.

Duffey and his friends would go about two miles high and would fly as much as two hundred miles on the long days; and they had good luck it coming back to their starting point. They were lucky in leaving such a starting point. The prevailing westerlies blew above St. Louis, and the Gulf southerlies blew there; and local 'river winds' were generated by the Mississippi itself, by the Missouri River that spilled into it from the west a little above the town, by the Ohio River that merged with it from the east a few miles below the town. St. Louis was not the windiest city in the country (though it was one of the five windiest), but it had the best selection of winds of any town in the country.

There is just no touring like touring in a balloon. It is open, it is fresh, but it isn't unpleasantly windy: you go generally at the same speed as the wind goes. It is cloud cruising. Sometimes it is storm cruising. It was the highest and most classy sporting activity that had ever been.

Beth Keegan proposed a balloon dinner party. She insisted on it, and it was brought about. There were four couples of them at the dinner party, and a serving man to wait on tables. There were Duffey and Beth, Mary Louise and Bagby, Charley Murray and a girl named Monica, and Cyrus and Edith Summerfield. The serving man was off one of the loafers' benches at the Rounders' Club, but he looked splendid in livery; and he had served elegant persons before, counts, earls, a duchess, barons, even the late Duke of Kent. The Summerfields were members of St. Louis high society as well as commentators on that same high society in both the Globe and the Post Dispatch. They were a young couple full of glitter; Edith was a sort of cousin of Beth Keegan, and they responded readily to the invitation to attend a formal dinner party in the gondola of a balloon two miles high.

A little modification of the gondola was necessary for it to carry an eight-place table, and another bulky object, but the modification was made. The supper itself was catered from Duffey's own kitchen at the Rounders' to the balloon at ascension time. Then they dined high in the sky, in candle-lit splendor, as the late-ish darkness settled first on the earth below them and then above to enfold them on high. Listen, that was only part of it! Another thing they had with them in the gondola was a player piano. The serving man pumped it after he had served dinner to them. And Beth herself pumped it when it was time for the serving man to serve the after-dinner wine. It was all excellent Rag Time on the player piano.

"The next time we have formal dinner up here, we will have a small but sufficient dance floor installed," Beth said. That part, somehow, never came to pass. Even so, we ask you, did you yourself ever dine in conditions of such unusual elegance? And Cyrus and Edith Summerfield would give it elegant treatment in the press.

Duffey, however, was a little bit worried about their candle-lit splendor when it came time to descend. He put the roll "Black Midnight Rag"

into the player piano, blew out the candles, accidentally knocked Charley Murray's cigar overboard, and opened the gate valve to let the hydrogen gas whoof out and the balloon come down.

That was not the last time they went up in the wonderful balloon, but it was the most memorable time.

In later years, when Duffey had left St. Louis and Bagby was the custodian of the balloon, Bagby several times wrote to Duffey that ghosts had inflated the balloon and taken it up for nonscheduled voyages.

"It is all right," Duffey would write back. "I know who they are."

#### CHAPTER V

So things went for some months (most of two years anyhow) after Duffey had exploded into enterprises and affairs in St. Louis. And then it ended.

What ended? Oh, only the world. The world that we have now isn't the same as the world that we had then. Or it may have been only the multitudinous, golden-touch world of Melchisedech-in-St.-Louis that ended.

"I'm freudian now," Beth Keegan announced one evening. "All of us superior persons have become freudians. I want superior dreams from all of you right now. Mary Louise, you stuffy sister of the King, do you dream?"

"I dream passionately about every one of you here, though Melky says that my passions are bovine," Mary Louise said. "My dreams are superior, and all of you here are in them, and I'll not reveal them."

"Charley," Beth said to the Murray, "tell me one of your dreams. You are my second love. You are my second passion and pride. Please do not disappoint me. Come up with something good."

"No I won't," Charley Murray said. "You have no business analyzing my dreams, since they are mostly about you. Sometimes you are a pea-hen, sometimes you are a talking statue, sometimes you are a bicycle. I won't tell you my dreams. I won't be uncovered before you."

"Melchisedech, my king and my concupiscence, tell me a dream."

"Yes. Here's the just-before-morning dream of today. I was in my own person as the Boy King or Boy Magician. I was making birds, which isn't difficult if you're a Boy Magician. I was making them out of clay and setting them in the sun to dry. Then I would transmute them to the color of living gold and I'd set them to flying. Other colors would come to them as they rose in the air. They were brilliant Paradise Birds. Then someone began to shoot them down.

"I called the royal game warden to stop the depredations. He notched an arrow to his bow-string and came along with me to kill anyone who was transgressing against the bird law. And we found the transgressors immediately.

"'They are killing Birds of Paradise,' I said. 'Explain to them that it's against the law to kill them.' 'It's against the bird law,' the game warden told one of the rough men who were shooting the birds down. 'They're Birds of Paradise.' 'Birds of Paradise, my slanted face!' one of the rough men cried. 'These are clay pigeons and I can prove it. Here! Look what's raining down from the sky from the last ones we shot!'

He was right. It was clay. My birds had turned from Birds of Paradise into clay pigeons, and clay pigeons were always in season. The game warden shot the rough men and killed them, but he wasn't happy about it. 'I don't care whether you are the king,' he told me. 'You call me out on one more clay pigeon chase and you're going to get shot with my next arrows.'"

"Oh, that's an easy dream," Beth said. "It means that you're beginning to doubt your own powers and your own creations. Yes, I know that you do make people, and you put some pretty fine features on them. But you have to make them out of clay. There's nothing else to make them out of. What really happens is that you collect people like you collect pictures or

statues. Then why will it shock you when some of your brightest people turn out to be forgeries? But that wasn't your main dream for last night. Tell me the real one now, since you tried dishonestly to hide it."

"There was a big division in my central dream of last night," Duffey said then, "and I believe that it will prove to be a watershed of my life. It was at first a conventional apocalyptical dream. A pythoiness voice was giving explanation of it in a running narration as it went along; and I believe that it was you, Beth Keegan, who were taking the pythoiness role..."

"A chasm opened up and began to undercut all the tall structures and all the towns also. I went down into the chasm to halt this attrition, for it was eating up everything. Multitudes of people were filling into the hole, and especially children and young people. 'It's lucky that I'm on the spot here,' I said.

'For this requires deep magic.' But I found that my magic was paralyzed. I was helpless and I could not find any bottom to the chasm. But I was able to cross the bottomless ditch to the other side. I'm on this other side now, and the rest of you are on the other side where you were, and there's a veil between us."

"I called on my giants to impose a stasis on the chasm and prevent its spreading. I called for giant's hands to come and perform prodigies. They came, but they were severed hands, lopped off bloodily at the forearms, and with their strength dead. They were joined together with manacles.

"Then I saw that they weren't giant's hands at all. They were a pair of little boy's mittens, and the manacles that fastened them together were only the drawstring of the mittens. Then I heard a voice (and it was your own exaggerated voice practicing for the pythoiness role, Beth) 'These are the years that the cows have eaten'. That is it, Beth. Do you know what it means?"

"Of course. When are you going away, Melchisedech, tonight or in the morning?"

"I didn't know that I was going away. Does the dream say that I will?"

"Of course. You can't impose a stasis on a chasm from here."

"Then you will have to take over the Rounders' Club, Charley," Duffey said.

"All right. When will you be back, Melchisedech?"

"When will I be back, Beth?" Melchisedech asked her.

"In seven years, I suppose. That's a common period. And the 'years that the cows have eaten' are almost certainly the seven sheaves of grain. Will you be all right for seven years? I can't wait for you, you know. I love you a lot, but not for seven years' absence. No, no, not me to wait for seven years."

"Will I get my magic back after the seven years, Beth? Will I be able to command the hands again?"

"I think so. But you haven't lost much of your magic. Only a part of it." They went to Meinkmuellers for a good supper, and both friends and strangers came to Duffey and sad that they had heard that he was going away. But Duffey hadn't told anybody; nobody had told anybody.

At Meinkmuellers, Charley Murray and the rest of them were joined by the two Monicas, Monica Drexel who was sometimes Charley's girl, and Monica Murray who was Charley's sister. Both of them said that they had come there because they wanted to see Melchisedech for the last time. And yet nobody had told them that Duffey was going away, and nobody had told them that the group was going to Meinkmuellers for supper.

It was there that Melchisedech give a talisman to one of the Monicas, to the wrong one it first, apparently. He was confused by these two since they were named alike and ran around together and looked alike.

"I don't know what this thing is," said the Monica to whom Duffey first gave the talisman. "I don't understand it at all. I never saw anything like that before."

"On, I think it's for me," the other Monica said. "I think I know wheat it is. Thank you, Duffey."

The bunch of them went to the Star and Garter after that, and the skits there seemed to be better than usual. Duffey was called up onto the stage, and the proprietor Papa Piccone announced that their good friend was going away on a seven year assignment. Some of the burlesque girls came out and kissed Duffey.

The bunch of them went to Schotts and to Kelly's and to the Bavarian Club. Everybody told Duffey that he would be missed, and he was treated like a king everywhere.

They went to the Dublin. All the men shook Duffey's hand there and all the women kissed him. They said that they would miss him, but they knew that it was a grand opportunity he was accepting, secret though the details were; and then it's a great thing just to travel and see the world. But neither Duffey nor Beth nor any of them had told that he was going away. Really, none of them except Beth believed it yet.

"You are my boy, you are my love," Evelyn London said, "and you are going away."

When it was quite late, they went back to Duffey's own Rounders' Club, and the string band begin to play "The King Shall Ride". Olga Sanchez took Duffey through all the rooms of the club, and out into the streets, and into the club again. Many people gathered to see Melchisedech in his club then, musicians and artists and dealers, politicians and monsignori and parish priests, show people and club people, bookish people. A dozen of Duffey's ladies came in, Francis O'Brien and Mary Marinoni, that slim Chinese girl Angela Ching, Gretchen Sisler and Gabriella O'Conner who were young grade-school girls, Dorothy Tarkinggtron, Helen Platner from the Bavarian Club, two of the girl acrobats from the Star and Garter. They all kissed Duffey goodbye.

And the men came in to shake his hand and wish him well, almost everyone who had ever sat on the loafers' benches, Bagby and his shanty sort, straight businessmen of the neigliborhood, priests and levites, young men from the different colleges in town, prize fighters and newspaper guys. There were a lot of drinks around till very late, and a lot of singing.

#### CHAPTER VI

There were those, mostly from among Melchisedech's pretended kindred, who said that the St. Louis adventures could not have happened, that there was no room in the years of his life for those adventures. The only unaccountable years, they said, were the seven hidden years that came later; and it was agreed by everybody that Duffey was not in St. Louis (not for any conspicuous time anyhow) during the hidden years. But the Duffey-St.-Louis adventures had to have happened.

"It's a little bit dreamy," Beth Keegan would say in later years, "but I surely knew him then. I knew him later, of course, and I know him now. But yes, I remember him in those earlier years also. Those are like years separated off from others and put away in a box somewhere. But they are still there when you get the box down and open it."

"Of course I remember him then," Mary Louise said years later. "He is my brother. But those were royal years, and they will not be rememered completely about him by non-royal persons. They happened; it all happened; but I can understand why the 'relatives' don't believe that they happened. They have, to them, clear evidence that Melchisedech was still in high school in Omaha in the years 1915 and 1916."

"There are certain unholy persons or beings who want it to be that these things never happened," Bagby said. "Sometimes I don't understand the workings of unholy minds. Sure, he was here for right at two years. I remember him every day of that time. He happened. Those times happened. This is the business that started here. It is still thriving."

And there are old men still sitting on the same loafers' benches who



remember it all and can verify it. But there are un-royal persons who still maintain that there were no years when those things could have happened, that Duffey could not have been a thriving businessman in St. Louis at age of sixteen. He was still in boarding school in either Omaha or Kansas City at that age.

Oh well, back to the night of the great leave-taking and to the next morning. Well, how was it the next morning?

Oh, Duffey was gone in the morning, of course, and he was gone for seven years. There were a few second-hand rumors picked up as to his whereabouts, but nothing more. He had disappeared. But, from his own point of view, he couldn't have disappeared, Could he?

Do not be so sure of that. Apparently the later Duffey either did not know or did not want to know where he had been in those years. There was something the matter with his own point of view. For him, there was some change made in earth and sky. He had gone out of normal places.

In another codicil of the circular log of the Melchisedech voyages, this is given: "There had been one very early morning in Melchisedech's youth, in his fifth or sixth youth really, when Melchisedech had walked out on the river shore in St. Louis, just below the Eads Bridge, and had walked right onto a low-lying boat; and it had been the Ship Argo in disguise.

"Melchisedech had then traveled in that ship for seven years, but not all of them in consecutive time. There was much time out for land adventures. The land adventures do not count in the Seven Lost Years. Neither are they deducted from the years of the life."

Well, there are many entries in the logs of the Ship Argo that have to be taken with a pinch of iodine. Beth Keegan had visions of a boy killed by a boar. Oh, there was mythological basis for such a death, and many things are hoary in mythology before they happen in fact. But, with Beth, it may have been the case of not knowing where her own mythology began and ended.

There is precedent, of course, for losing seven years out of a life, or for having seven years hidden. There are a number of persons with seven hidden or dark years in their lives: Caesar and Diocletian, Boethus and Carl the Great, Wellington and Lincoln and Sam Houston. George Barrow had a seven year hiatus, and Hans Schultz would have such an hiatus a few years after this time. Inconvincing details can be invented to fill the holes in every one of those lives.

And inconvincing details are invented to fill the hole in Duffey's life. Some of those details were invented by Duffey himself, and some of them were invented by other people.

Was Duffey ever in the war? Was he ever in the army in World War One? He later said that he had been. And he also said that, before he was old enough to get into the A.E.F., he had been an ambulance driver in Italy with Hemingway and in France with E.E. Cummings. He said that he returned to the United States from France, and then went overseas again, with the army in 1917. He may have been in a New England army camp very briefly in 1917, but even this is doubtful. Of course, everything that Duffey claimed as happening to him did happen to somebody with whom he was in accord. That is nearly the same as it happening to him.

Duffey's young friend Sebastian Hilton was an ambulance driver in France and in Italy in those early years. And he was the companion of high-ranking persons, in spite of his youth. Duffey may have lifted these scenes from Sebastian's mind where he always had entree. But they were valid scenes, and Duffey lived to the full every scene that he ever lifted from anybody.

And yet there were several persons of repute who said that they had seen Duffey in Belgium and France and Italy in those years. "He was with an international organization named ARGO," one person said. "It was a little bit like the Red Cross. He worked off a ship that -- well, I don't know

exactly what they did. I thought that everybody would remember about the ARGO group, but hardly anybody seems to recall it now."

And so it may have been with seven years full of scenes, some lifted, some stolen, all vivid, covering those years threefold and four-fold deep. (There wasn't room in seven years nor in seventy for all the scenes that Duffey assigned to them.) Some of them had been genuine Duffey scenes, but not all. But he made them all his own. And part of this mystery may not have been so mysterious as that. "Duffey, my beloved brother, is near as phoney as I am myself," Bagby once said about the interval. "If he can't remember those times, it's because he doesn't want to remember them. If he recalls them in wrong form, it's because there was a different wrong form about the originals. If he won't say what he was doing, maybe he was doing something he shouldn't have been doing."

Eleven of the prime creations of Duffey, eleven of the twelve human persons that he made, were conceived and born during those seven hidden years. Had Duffey something further to provide to the talismanic clay? Was his presence in various places a series of necessities?

Part of the mystery of the years will be revealed later, but only a minor part of it. And no human person, not even Duffey himself, will know the whole of that interval until the afternoon of judgment day.

#### CHAPTER VII

After seven years, Duffey came back. It was in the year 1923 that he reappeared. He didn't come to St. Louis at first, but the St. Louis people began to hear from him again. He was wandering around the other cities of his old territory, Dubuque and Sioux City and Omaha and Kansas City. He would visit some of his pretended kindred for a week or two, and then he would not be seen for several months. It was said that he had money, but he was in an unsettled state.

He came to St. Louis finally. He found that his sister Mary Louise had married. Who would believe it? She was married to Bagby! That was a little bit like a goddess being married to an earthling or a mortal. That was exactly what it was.

"Bagby is my dark object, he is my uncleansed stables, he is the lower part of me," Duffey said, "and I sincerely love the shanty freak. But what's this about him being married to my sister?"

Duffey found that his old girl Beth Keegan was married. And Charley Murray had done well for himself as well as for Duffey at the Rounders' Club. No, Duffey didn't want to take an active role in the club again, Duffey said, not just yet.

"My love, my boy my prince, you are back!" Olga Sanchez of the torchy shoulders said. She still worked at the Rounders' Club. She was now married to a beautiful Mexican man who had become high chef of the Rounders' Club Main Dining Room. "But, my love, you are not quite all back," Olga said to Duffey.

Duffey stayed with Mary Louise and Bagby while he was in St. Louis.

"Where were you really, Melky?" Mary Louise asked him. "I get only murky glimpses of it. It seems to be a valley you were in."

"I think it was the 'Valley of Lost Boyhood'," he said.

"All well, you kept yours longer than most do. What are you listening for, Melky?"

"For wings, I think, Mary Louise."

"And what kind of wings are they?"

"I'm not sure, Mary Louise. Not quite butterfly wings. I'm not sure at all."

Duffey went to visit Beth Keegan and her family. She was now Beth Erlenbaum. On come on, Beth, you had to get a name like that out of a play. You had to get a husband like that out of a play. Indeed, Beth was now in

plays, of a sort. She really worked at the Star and Garter now. She wrote many of the skits that Piccone put on, and she played comic roles in some of them.

Duffey still loved her, and she still loved him almost as much as she used to. And she still flustered him unaccountably. She had her husband and two daughters, and they did not know what to make of Melchisedech. Beth said that she had a recent goddaughter who would understand him though. This was the infant of Piccone at the Star and Garter. But Duffey did not meet that infant for another twenty-three years.

Duffey did not, at this time or ever, realize that Beth, though a little bit on the pretty side, was quite an ordinary person. He wouldn't have believed it even if it were explained to him. "What are you listening for, Duff, my prince, my love?" Beth asked him just as Mary Louise had asked him.

"Wings, I think, Beth."

"And what kind of wings?" "Moth wings, it seems. Can one hear moth wings for three hundred or four hundred miles?"

"Oh sure. I do it all the time."

Book Three:

Hog-Butcher & Gadarene Swine

#### CHAPTER I

Tu Melchisedech secundum  
Surgens nimis nunc jucundum  
Deus tam dilexit mundum

Henri Salvatore. Archipelago.

Giovanni A. Solli (Finnegan) had been born June 1, 1919 in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Vincent J. Stranahan had been born April 5, 1921 in St. Louis, Missouri.

Henry Francis Salvatore was born December 8, 1920 in Morgan City, Louisiana.

Kasimir W. Szymansky (Casey) was born October 7, 1921 in Chicago, Illinois.

John Gottfried Schultz (Hans) was born January 2, 1915 at St. Gallen, Wisconsin.

What had these persons in common? How was it destined, even before they were born, that they should be companions? And then there were these:

Absalom Stein

Dotty Yekouris

Teresa Piccone

Mary Virginia Schaeffer

Mary Catheriie Carruthers

Marie Monaghan.

These latter six were born in approximately the same years as the first five, in Chicago, in New Orleans, in St. Louis, in Galveston, in Chicago again, and in Sydney Australia. Yes, all this information is pertinent.

Eleven of them named there. In all, there should be twelve in that caanon, but there is some dispute over who the twelfth one was.

How are things done in this world and in other worlds like it? Does God indeed create and effect through deiniurges and giants and magi and such creatures? Yes, from one point of view that is what happens. And from a dozen other points of view it may appear that a dozen different things happen.

The complete truth of it is many dimensions beyond us, and yet every one of these different points of view may be authentic. From one of the dozen, or the billion points of view, demiurges and giants and magi do indeed create and effect. Not one of these viewpoints, not even the extravagant magi-creators view, may be subtracted from the world affair. The world would not be authentic without it.

Yes, Melchisedech Duffey was a Magus. And, yes, he created people. We will come back to this subject many times.

After the missing years, after his reappearance, Duffey had been around his circuit of midwest cities for a year or more. He started three separate businesses, and he sold them one after the other when he got them going. He made money out of every deal, but there was something that he missed getting from the deals. He had become an entertaining and interesting man, and he was still a good man. He had the savor of a man who had retained virtue, by however chancy a margin.

But he still had the air of a man listening intently for something that was just over the edge.

It was in Omaha, in the year 1925, that Duffey felt a powerful directional urge and call. Someone was requiring or compelling his presence over a distance of four or five hundred miles. It was urgent. It was a moth call, and it had plenty of flame to it. It was the moth wings that he had been listening to for many months, and now he had the direction and distance of them.

Duffey took a night train to Chicago. He sat in a day coach all night, when he was not wandering up and down the aisles of the train. He had only a suitcase with him. He had left his trunks and heavier possessions to be sent to him from various towns when he should finally find a destination. He had a quart bottle of good Canadian in his coat pocket and another one in his suitcase, for the dry years were on the country then.

A chubby little girl in the day coach kept flirting with him. But Duffey was looking at the mother of the little girl. "I wonder whether she knows that she has a terminal illness?" he asked himself. "A very, very terminal illness. I wonder what it is?" Duffey had these scrippy intuitions sometimes, and they were always correct as far as they went.

Still and all, the little girl was more interesting than her mother, in spite of the death mystery on the mother.

"My daughter is so awful," said the mother of the little girl. "I just don't know what to do with her. What can anybody do with a little girl who loves the men so much?"

"They can sit down and play cards with me," the little girl said. She was playing some kind of solitaire: Duffey sat down and began to play two-handed cards with her. She said that her name was Charlotte Mullens and that she was nine years old. That flirty little girl knew how to handle cards, and she knew how to handle men. She played footsie and kneesie and kissie with Duffey while they played cards.

"I don't know what to do with my little daughter," the mother said. "She is so forward." These two suddenly reminded Duffey of Gretchen Sister and her mother Lucille in St. Louis. Gretchen manipulated her mother into going to work for Duffey. She manipulated her into having dates with Duffey: but they always ended with Duffey and Gretchen carrying on together on the old Sister living room sofa. The little girl Charlotte was the manipulator here, and her mother was her puppet. So Duffey and Charlotte played cards and they kissed for games. And no nine year old girl kisses like that.

Mrs. Mullens had big quantities of lunch with her, and the three of them ate between hands. She had paper cups and they drank Duffey's good Canadian whisky out of them and got mellow. The mother was a little bit sparing of it, but Charlotte was into it like an old toper.

"I am in love with you, Charlotte," Duffey said, and he kissed her specially.

"Do you always fall in love with nine year old girls?" Mrs. Mullens asked.

Always Duffey said, "and sometimes with their mothers." He kissed Mrs. Mullens and she seemed pleased enough with it, but she just hadn't the style of Charlotte in these things. After a while, they played some sort of three-handed cards with kisses for stakes. "It's more fun when you play for something," Mrs. Mullens said. Mrs. Mullens had a certain brisk way with the cards. Duffey was glad that they were not playing for money. Mrs. Mullens (well, her name was Gloria) had a certain brisk way of kissing also: friendly and full of value her kisses were, but brisk nevertheless. Kissing her was like biting into an apple, cool and juicy and flavorsome. Yes, but Charlotte had her beat.

"We're completely destitute," Gloria Mullens said as if she were reciting a lesson. "Our husband and father died two months ago and he seems to have left nothing but debts. He was always a fast man with the buck. He was a grasshopper; he was a butterfly; but he had to have left something, he handled so much money. He never ran out of tricks. I'm still not sure that his dying wasn't a trick. I expect him to come in grinning one day with his hands full of money and him crowing about the way he took those insurance folks."

A youngish man who had been popping around the coach for a long while now approached as if to join their party. Nine year old Charlotte turned him aside with an imperious gesture, but surely the Mullenses knew the man.

"He also has the terminal illness," Duffey told himself. "Strange, strange."

"But I found that my husband had borrowed double and even triple on what insurance he had," Gloria Mullens was continuing. "And the insurance is attached where I can't touch it. He had borrowed double on the house and on everything. There are more debts of his turning up every day. I'll never clear them all. And I found that I had co-signed with him on a dozen notes, things that I had never paid any attention to at the time. They attached my salary where I worked, so Charlotte and I are skipping. Aren't you kissing Charlotte more than that last score called for? I still think that my good man left a stash of money somewhere and that he is trying to tell me where it is. His voice comes to me, but faintly. I am a psychic, but nobody is psychic as to his own closest affairs."

"Are you a professional psychic, Gloria?" Melchisedech asked.

"Yes, sometimes. You also are a psychic, as I divine, Mr. Duffey, and you may be able to help us. We're running blind and we're about broke. I'll have to get a job in Chicago for a while, and I'm not even sure that that's where the stash is. My man used to take a lot of quick trips to Chicago. He would get stuff off the boats and bring it to Omaha and other places. Oh, we both love him so and we miss him so much, terribly! But how can you back track on a butterfly?"

"I don't quite know," Duffey said. "Me, I'm on the trail of a moth."

They played another hand of cards, and Duffey kissed Charlotte quite a bit. She was no little girl. She was something else.

"What kind of moth?" Charlotte asked him.

"Oh, I believe that it is the tinea evocata, the evoking moth," Duffey said, "or it is the indignatio, the seeking moth. Or maybe it will happen to be the tinea letitia, the joyful moth."

"Sum etiam erudita ipse", Charlotte said, and Duffey's suspicions were confirmed that this creature wasn't a little girl at all. "I'm educated myself", she had said, and she hadn't got that way in nine years. And now and then she set her little girl's voice aside, especially when she whispered to Duffey, and used a woman's voice. "We'll find her for you, Duffey," she said now. "Evoking moths are always female, and we'll find her for you."

"She misses her father so much," Gloria said. "He had red whiskers too. I believe that she has fastened on you is a father image."

"Father image, my eye!" Charlotte scoffed. "Duffey is my sweetheart."

"How old are you really, Charlotte?" Duffey asked her. "Sometimes you don't talk quite like a nine year old girl."

"Sometimes I get damned tired of talking like a nine year old girl," she said. "You told Gloria that you were Melchisedech and that you had never had any father or mother. Well, I have my mystery and paradox too. I am older than my father and I am older than my mother, and that is as much as I will tell you. Possibly I am old enough to have been your mother, Duffey. I'm precocious about things like that, having sons and such."

"How old are you, Charlotte?"

"Oh, thirty-eight. That isn't really very old. And, as Gloria says, what can anybody do with a little girl who loves the men so much."

"What's Gloria?"

"My sister. That's usually the part I give to the other woman, after it's found out that she isn't my mother."

"And the man who was about to join us when you gestured him off?"

"He's my son. But by the time he came by accident to take a fourth hand at cards, I had come to like you and didn't want to fleece you."

"Do the bunch of you live by playing cards?" "Oh no, but it helps. We make a lot from it, but we make a lot from everything. There really is a stash in Chicago though. All the psychics we know are on the other side now. He's hired them against us. We need a good psychic, a mind-prober, to find the stash for us, We're too close to do it ourselves, though I'm a strong psychic. Duffey, find this butterfly nest for us, and we'll find your moth for you. I can find her for you, Duffey."

A little later in the night, Duffey taught Charlotte and her mother the Gadarene Swine Song. They sang it resoundingly, and Charlotte was particularly apt at inventing verses for it. She was smart. Some of the people in the day coach were trying to sleep and they protested the loud singing. But the Mullenses, and Duffey under the influence of Charlotte Mullens, were rude and just didn't care whether they kept those people awake or not.

## CHAPTER II

In Chicago, Duffey said that he was going to a little north-side hotel that he knew.

"That's as good a place as any," Charlotte said. "If they look for us in our old haunts, maybe they won't be finding us in a north-side hideaway. Charlotte and her sister Gloria and her son Manolo went with Duffey in a taxi to the little north-side hotel. It was bright morning.

Duffey did several things that day while he listened to the sound of wings that were close. He was not a total stranger to Chicago. He had surely been there several times for a week or more. Once he had spent a Christmas vacation there in the rich home of Sebastian Hilton. Once he had lived there for a month or so with false kindred who shucked him off to other false kindred when they found out just how unsettling a boy he was. Several times he had been there looking into business deals, possibly in the hidden years, certainly in the subsequent years.

He went to see Gabriel Szymansky who was a businessman who lacked the personality to get along with the public. Gabriel had two shops back to back, with a foot passage under the alley between them. The shops faced on two different streets. On the rich street, Gabriel was an antique dealer. On the poor street he was a pawnbroker. This man Gabriel had made big sums of money, but he always used associates to maintain the confidence of the public. There was never a more honest nor a more upright man than Gabriel, but the public can never accept an absolutely honest man as really honest.

There is nothing in the absolutely honest man that the public can relate to. The public insists on an open man who is at least one-third rogue and one-third blow-mouth. Duffey could always force himself to be such a person.

About six months previously, Duffey had talked to this man Szymansky about coming into business with him and adding a book store and an art store. Duffey had also talked to Szymansky about six years previously, apparently during the hidden years, and he had given him a talisman. Six months ago, Duffey had hesitated on the deal of going into business with the man. Now he wanted it.

"I'll start today, Gabriel," Duffey said. "I can throw in the first ten thousand today and the second half of it within six months." Duffey could have thrown it all in that day, but he liked double-jointed deals. "I will take the full six rooms over the back shop, and I will be available day and night. I myself will move in tomorrow, and my wife will move in within a week."

"Duffey, I didn't know that you had a wife."

"I haven't. But within a week, I will have. She is a wonderful woman, I am sure of that. And ours will be a long and steady life together."

"Is she a Chicago girl?"

"She presently resides in Chicago."

They closed the deal. Duffey didn't have any wife, and he had no idea whom he would marry. He hadn't seen her. He had no notion what she was like. He only felt an overriding compulsion to find her somewhere nearby. For that, he had been called to Chicago over the miles.

"What is she like, Duffey?" Gabriel asked. "What are her outstanding qualities?"

"Fire and finesse," Duffey said. And he left Szymansky satisfied with what he had done so far.

There was a girl living in Chicago, Lily Koch, who had used to be the girl merchant at the school near Duffey's own school. Duffey phoned for her, and he was told by a pleasantly haunting voice that she was not in, but that she would get in contact with him, or he could call again, or they would both call, or anyhow they would get together, God willing. Duffey loved that pleasantly haunting voice on the phone.

He called for Sebastian Hilton who still maintained one of his several residences in Chicago. Sebastian was not in, but he would be at his club at one o'clock the following day. Yes, he would absolutely be there, though at present he was out of town. Yes, he would surely see Melchisedech Duffey there. Mr. Duffey was on the list of people who Mr. Hilton would always see. It was quite a short list, the voice said.

Out and about, a little girl was skipping circles around him on the sidewalk with a skipping rope. No, he was wrong. It wasn't a little girl. It was Charlotte Mullens.

"Are you finding the butterfly nest for me, Duffey?" she asked him, and they went over and sat on a bench where one waited for street cars.

"Yes, yes, my little creature, we will find this thing for you right away," Duffey said, and he popped his hands together.

"About your creatures, my dear," Charlotte said. "Oh yes, I know about your creatures. They are almost the most interesting things that I find in your mind. I make creatures also, or figures, but I use a different process. Your figures, your creatures, dear, you need lessons in stagecraft. Your people, while you are making them, are static. You have not put them into motion at all.

"They are quite young," Duffey said.

"It's getting time that you devised scenes and scenarios for them. I will help you with it in a few years if we are both still around. The world has too many static people now. Do not add to them. My own, while they are often short-lived, are always quite kinetic."

"What do you use, Charlotte?" Duffey asked her. "I already had the idea that your sister and your son were projections of you, that they were ventriloquist's figures that you had made, or that they were mere lumps of your aura. Are they?"

"Oh, I use flesh and blood people, Duffey, but I select rather empty and pliable ones, usually actors. Then I do make them into compliant figures yes, and I do make them into lumps of my own aura. But there is nothing beyond nature in my creations. Is there in yours?"

"I don't know," Duffey said. "Well, I'm having more luck at finding the butterfly's nest than at finding the moth. The stash doesn't belong to you, Charlotte, but it did not belong to the man who put it there either. That man is away in durance, but he expected the stash to be inviolable in his absence."

"That man is coming out of durance today or tomorrow," Charlotte said. "That is what makes it so edgy."

"I want to know his name, Charlotte. I can't psyche this unless I know his name."

"Aga Gonof is his name, and his son is Orestes Gonof. He has boats. He brings liquor from Canada to Chicago and Detroit and Cleveland. I had a husband who was involved with him, and part of the stash does belong to me, a small part of it, Duffey, but you don't need the details. I'll take the other ninety-five percent for interest on the five percent that's been withheld from me."

"Does Gonof know what you look like?"

"No. Nobody knows what I look like. He called me the 'Disembodied Brain', so I have heard. I used to play the role of my own daughter. But even as my own daughter, I'd have to be quite a bit older and larger now than I was whenever he might possibly have seen me. And I'm still the same age and size. Work on it, darling. You won't have to tell me what you find. It will all be open to me. But I love to talk to you at every opportunity."

That little girl skipped away with her skipping rope.

Well, there was a key to unlock the box where the stash was, and Duffey got (from what mind he did not know) a figure replica of the key. Duffey knew about keys. He had made keys and matched them. And keys can be number coded for their reproduction. Duffey was able to write down the base or stock number of that key just by looking at it with his inner eye. And he was able to write down the several cluster numbers that define the modification of that basic stock, the little notches and kerfs and dips. It was a typical safety deposit box key, if only he knew the number and location of the box. That was the crux, of course. Boxes can be strong-opened without keys, but they can't be found without data to go on.

"And the location and number of the box will come to me," Duffey said.

"Of course it will," Charlotte told him. She wasn't physically present just then, but that didn't prevent them from communicating. "And I'll be right there when it comes to you. But you missed your moth for today. We'll have to get her early in the morning, I believe."

"Where?"

"Not more than two blocks from our hotel. She is at a place very early in the mornings, and then she goes somewhere else. We got to town too late for her this morning. We'll catch her tomorrow sure. There is no moth that can escape Charlotte and Melchisedech. I'll go get the key made now."

It was easy, since they were in accord and since they were both full of powers, to talk to each other out of presence. Except that Charlotte had such a fund of pleasure and carnality accoinpyning her presence.

### CHAPTER III

Very late that night, after Duffey had gone to bed in his hotel room, Charlotte visited him there. Whether this visit was in the body or out of it is not certain, but most likely it was an out-of-the-bocly interlude.



Duffey had been juggling the names and numbers while he slept and woke and slept again. He was in a wasteland. The sky and soil were much different from those of ordinary earth. They were more in the conditions that had prevailed in the seven-year land, during the dark years or the lost years.

It was a shore, but the ocean at that place was empty. There were bales on a dock, but they could not be loaded until a ship could find water to come by. A stevedore and his two brothers were guarding the bales, but they were nervous and pacing as if they had something else on their minds. They made sudden decisions. They left the bales abruptly and strode rapidly to the place where the wheels of three gate valves came out of the ground. And that is where they made their mistake.

Duffey was onto those bales as soon as the stevedores had gone a little distance. He broke several of the bales open and let them scatter. They were bales of numbers and letters, and Duffey fumbled feverishly into their bulk for the right numbers and letters.

The stevedores turned the three gate valves that came out of the ground. This turned on the ocean and harbor and let the water flow in and fill things up. A ship on the other side of a hill or promontory blew its whistle as a signal that it was coming for the bales. Then the three slant-faced stevedores turned back toward their bales and saw that they had been broken open. The foremost of them came at Duffey murderously with a boat hook to kill him. "These will have to do," Duffey cried as he backed off with a handful of numbers and letters that he had selected. "The right ones have to be among these, or all is lost." The three Mullens people were there together then, though Charlotte had been there all the time.

"Stop the one with the hook!" little Charlotte Mullens cried out. "Gloria, Manolo my son, divert him, throw him down, stop him even if he kills you! Here, give me those, Duffey!" Charlotte swept the numbers and letters into her hands and arranged them like a hand of cards. "Perfect," she cried then, "absolutely perfect. This will tell me everything I need to know. Split, Duffey! Split, everybody! But divert him for a moment, Gloria and Manolo, and watch out for the other two. Maybe they won't really use the hooks on you. Oh, it spells it all out, and numbers it all out so perfectly: the bank building, the deposit box number, everything! Wonderful! Aw, ugh! It always sickens me to hear a boat hook crunch a skull like that."

"Will you be all right, Charlotte?" Duffey cried in a fleeting moment, knowing that they had to get away, knowing that Gloria and Manolo were already dead.

"Oh sure. I know how to go to ground, Duff," little girl Charlotte said. "In Chicago, I always take refuge in St. Angela Orba Orphanage. All but two of the sisters there think that I'm a little girl. And those two who know what I am, they will always provide me with commitment papers and love. You and your moth come out sometime and adopt me if you want to."

Duffey was running through Dead Man's Meadow then. It was a notorious stretch of seven-year land. But he felt the anguish of the three slanted-faced stevedores behind him. The ship was already at the dock for their bales. But some of the bales had been broken open, and some of them had blood on them.

Duffey's phone rang then. He was in bed in his hotel room. It was Charlotte who was piloting. "Get up, Duffey," she was singing. "We go moth hunting in just five minutes. Who'd have thought that moths got up so early, but I know where she is now. You have located the butterfly's nest for me and have given me the key to it, and you have given me its location and number just now. So I will find your moth for you."

"Ah, Charlotte, I was just dreaming about --"

"Dreaming my nine year old fanny! Don't you know the difference between a dream and a psychosomatic trance? We used to use the tranccs a lot when we did our mentalist acts. They almost always worked. And yours worked,

Duffey! Why, all I needed was the name of the bank and the number of the safety deposit box. Box? It's a walk-in, isn't it? I'll make the pick-up today. I'm worried about those stevedores with the boat hooks though. They're killers."

"How did you enter my dream literally?"

"I told you that it was a psychosomatic trance, not a dream. I opened the door and walked into it, of course. This isn't getting you up and dressed. I'll be at your door in two minutes." She hung up.

But she was at his door in half a minute and into his room.

"Does it always take you that long to put your pants on?" she asked. "Your moth will be at that little stone church just two blocks from here north. I want to go to confession before mass. It's an even flip whether I'll get murdered on the swipe I'm on today, and I want to be prepared for death. On come on! You don't need to wash this morning. Lots of people don't wash any more. It's kind of out."

"What do nine year old con women have to confess?" Duffey asked. He was tickled over the affair.

"Oh, robbing widows and orphans, things like that," Charlotte said. "Whenever I get a likely gentleman, I ask him whether he's a widow or an orphan. If he is, I go easy on him. I fleece him, of course, but I leave a few tufts. But sometimes we get greedy. And then I always have a lot of carnality to confess; and there's a few of our badger games that go over the line. Mama Gloria will have a gentleman in at night, and I will come out of the bathroom towelling myself in the buff. "Oh my little girl, she never remembers," Gloria says. "She is so artless. She is so guileless. She comes out of her bath at night just as natural as that. You'd think that a nine year old girl would begin to be aware of things." And the man is very heated and he doesn't know why. Then he fondles me, and Gloria goes out of the room for a while. She comes back with witnesses. Oh, you can scare a lot of money out of a man when you catch him in something like that! This is a form of the badger game that always works. There are lots of laws to protect us little nine year old girls from evil men; and when Mama Gloria and a couple of friends start talking that prison-bar talk to a poor man, he'll shell out all the money he has."

They were in the street now and going north towards the stone Church. The sign said that it was St. Malachy's Church. Duffey knew about St. Malachy's in St. Louis where Bagby used to go, but he hadn't even known that there was a St. Malachy's in Chicago.

Wings! There were wings all over it. The stone itself was quivering with the beat of wings. The whole south front had three spread-winged archangels, and the east and west sides each had nine big-winged angels. Who could feel a moth winging through that great wingedness?

"There's a priest in his rose garden," Charlotte said. "Oh they are red! But I'll have to call him away from them for redder things. I'll have to --" and Charlotte was gone over there --

"--to get myself straight before I do other things this day," Charlotte was still jabbering. "And when I steal that stash at the opportune moment, I will steal it with a clean and pure heart. Oh there, father, come along now. You have some high absolving to do in a hurry."

"You, little girl, you cannot have anything that requires a hurry."

"Oh 'Little Girl' your reverend wrongheadedness! There are big-girl things that I have been about. Come along, servant of the servants!" Charlotte and the priest entered the church, and other people were beginning to arrive and enter.

Yes, the moth power was very heavy around there. Ruddy St. Malachy's on the northside was catching the morning sun on its rose and winged turrets, and all the holy and giant things were working for Duffey again. But why did the moth not define itself!

Oh, maybe sixty or seventy people went in, women and men and children. There was a stunningly beautiful Italian girl who elevated

Duffey's soul. She was not the moth. Whatever her role, she was something else. If the moth must be female, why three quarters of the people who entered the church were so. These were the beautiful holy women of early morning. There was a rather chubby young woman with blond hair under a black veil, and with half-shut, smiling eyes. Duffey loved her instantly. There was a regal lady with a high fling to her head. She was either a queen or a show girl. There were Polish ladies and German ladies, and Irish and Italians and Greeks. And the moth was among them.

Half an hour later, when mass was over with, Duffey still didn't know.

"Oh, you look so anticipating!" the beautiful Italian girl said to him then. "A happy thing will come to you today."

"You will meet her today, will you?" a German lady asked him. "And you will be very happy together. Live so that you will deserve the happiness that comes to you."

"You saw your wife for the first time a half hour ago," a gypsy woman said to Duffey. "You saw her first over your left shoulder. All luck to you, red-headed man."

"What is your father looking for so hard?" the chubby young woman with the smiling eyes asked Charlotte. "Nothing is worth looking that hard for."

"He thinks she's worth it," Charlotte said. "She's a moth. And he isn't my father."

"Why how stuffy of him to be chasing moths!" the young woman said in a voice that had a familiar sound. "When you catch her, will you stick a pin through her head and hang her on the wall, man?"

"Only when she defies me," Duffey said. The chubby young woman helped herself to a red rose from the rose patch then. So did the regal lady who was either a queen or a show girl. All the people were gone soon, and the moth presence was gone with their going. But which one has she been? Duffey and Charlotte went to eat breakfast at a little cafe twist the Church and the hotel.

"By the pink stone angels of St. Malachy's, I don't know which she is!" Duffey moaned.

"Whoops, whoops, my love and my boy, I'll help you no more," Charlotte chortled. "I have brought you to her this morning and you have talked to her. I'll do no more for you. There are things that a man must do for himself."

Charlotte fell asleep over breakfast. When she went to sleep, all the orneriness went out of her face and left it sheerly beautiful: as she was then, so should she be forever. She would be one of the supreme pieces in Duffey's Uncollectable Art Collection, along with that ivory figurine Beth Keegan, along with -- well, with several others who are still to appear.

She woke up, and the orneriness came back into her face, but it could only partly displace her beauty. They made a date, to meet again at noon that day, at another little cafe that was across the street from a certain club. All the Mullenses were to be there, and Duffey was to bring the moth if he could find her by noon. Charlotte who was a mentalist assured him that he would have the moth by that time.

They kissed when they left the cafe. And there wasn't any way to take the orneriness out of Charlotte's kisses.

Duffey's phone was ringing when he got back to his hotel room. And the voice on the phone was now doubly familiar.

"Miss Lily Koch is in today," said that half-haunting voice, "and she wonders if you would like to come by her shop at once. She is most anxious to see you."

#### CHAPTER IV

The voice gave Duffey the address of the shop. Duffey went out of

his room and downstairs and out of the building, and tumbled into a cab to go there. He was excited, for he remembered Lily with almost total pleasure. He also found that the moth presence was strong as he came to the neighborhood of the shop. It wasn't far. Chicago is miles and miles, but all the places that one would want to go are within about six blocks of each other. Duffey would never find out what the rest of the city was good for. When he came to the ornate stoop and door of the shop (it was all Art-and-Elegance shop) Melchisedech knew absolutely that the evoking moth was inside it.

Was Lily herself the moth? Duffey had always loved her a little when he used to see her during his school days. He loved her a bit more in memory when he didn't see her any more. And now in his expectation he loved her almost totally. Well, almost...

And it was Lily who met him in the doorway. She threw her arms wide for him and gave him the biggest kiss in town.

"Oh, it's my bashful schoolboy!" she cried. "Melky, Melky, I love you. I was always so fond of you, and I still am. Oh come in, conic in. I almost hate to give you up."

"Don't ever give me up, Lily. I've just found you again."

"Oh, l'Ill not the one, dumbhead. Our magic wouldn't mesh together, don't you remember? Letzy, look what a fine lout we have here! Ah c'mon Melky, why couldn't it have been me? Why do guys always have to go further and do better? Oh, you came all the way to Chicago on a signal that went out over the sly media, and now you don't know who she is! Don't you remember that one of your talismans was rib-shaped and that you gave it to me? Don't you remember that we said it might not work very well? Now you've even come to the right shop, and you still don't know it when you've found her. What do you think of him, Letzy?"

"Are you the moth, Lily?" Melchisedech asked her. There was a puzzle here.

Me? A moth? Do you think it's a motli who's called you to Chicago? Oh, Duffey, she's a butterfly who's exploded into the next stage, Psyche herself. You really are, Letzy!"

Duffey had known that some laughing person was watching them there, someone with a half-haunting voice, someone who was chubby and had smiling eyes and a dazzling soul. He wouldn't look, but he felt the whole world enhanced by that watchful presence.

"What sort of moth were you looking for, Duffey my love?" Lily asked.

"Tinea Evocata, the evoking moth," he said as he had said once before. "Tinea Indagatio, the seeking moth. Tinea Letitia, the joyful moth. Where is she? Lily, why aren't you the moth?"

"Letitia!" Lily howled. "Oh, oh, what a name! Letzy, don't you think that Letitia is the silliest name in the world?"

"My name is Letitia Koch," said that chubby girl Letzy who had been looking at them and laughing at them. "Why won't I do? Why can't I be your moth?"

And that is the way that Melchisedech Duffey met his wife.

Oh, all the details had been at hand for anyone to recognize them. Letitia was the chubby young woman with the smiling eyes who, that morning, had asked Charlotte "What is your father looking for so hard?" Charlotte had known who she was. Why hadn't Duffey known it? Letitia was the half-haunting voice that Duffey had spoken to on the telephone several times. Well, she was Lily's partner and sister. Why shouldn't she have answered the phone there?

"Do you remember when you gave me that talisiman when we were kids?" Lily was asking. "But I couldn't use it myself. It wouldn't work that way. We have things here in our elegant shop that people look at and see nothing to them. Why is it priced so high when it's crooked?' they ask me about that talisman. 'Why is it priced even higher than the beautiful pieces?' 'It is

because God will not allow me to put the PRICELESS tag on it,' I say sometimes, but it is priceless. And it isn't crooked. It's rib-shaped. Oh Melky, Sebastian and I both used to try to awaken the art sense in you, and you already had it. How incredible of you to have selected Letzy a dozen years before you saw her! How discerning of you to know that she was really priceless!"

"Will we live over the bookstore?" Letitia asked Duffey.

"Yes. We can start moving things in today," Duffey said. Things were going very fast for him, for them all. "Do you know about the bookstore?"

"Yes. It isn't a bookstore yet, but I used to walk by there often and I knew that it would be a bookstore. And last week I had Gabriel show me through all the shops and all those upstairs roou where we will live. I've made sketches of how things should be arranged there, and I'm sure that they will fit in exactly with your plans. I felt your suggestions several times while I was making the sketches last week. We will be marricd the day after tomorrow. I've already made most of the arrangements at St. Malachy's."

"It's magic," said Lily Koch, "and it belongs to you dumb bums. It doesn't come to smarty people like me. You came five hundred miles to her, Duffey, and then you didn't know her when you were three feet from her. And Letzy won't be working for you. She'll still be working with me here. You can't afford her at your place. And she wouldn't be able to afford your inevitable follies if she didn't keep her half interest in Koch's Galleries."

"Do you always shake like that, Duffey?" Letitia was asking. "It's the delayed action shakes that you have. There's nothing to be afraid of. It's only me, and you already love me. Now we must get to work. I've already hired a truck. You haven't much at your hotel, but we'll move in what there is, and then we'll move in the first loads from my place. Then it will be time to meet that mendacious midget of yours. Do you know that she is pulling grand robbery at this very moment and that it runs into several millions? Duffy has a mendacious midget, Lily?"

"I shouldn't wonder."

Well, actually the whole thing was arranged by a couple of astute and invisible senescals. Royal persons can't be trusted to arrange marriages for themselves.

Duffey and Letitia left the shop then, and they began to move things into their new home up over the new book store that still hadn't any books. Letitia hadn't cut her hair as many had done in that year. She had great cascades of it, and it was somewhere between blond and scarlet and walnut in color. She had a pleasant ruddiness of complexion and a really high comedy look to her. Her chubbiness was an asset, an extra-ness, a surpassing part of her perfection. Not chubby: she was full-bodied. She was priceless, yes, but only to the very deep-seeing would she appear so at first encounter. Her eyes were somewhere between sea-green and Melchisedech blue. She was younger than Lily, and she was taller than Duffey. They moved things for a couple of hours. Then they went to be keeping their noontime date.

It wasn't the little cafe they were really going to. It was the Colony Club across the street from it. The Mullens bunch was waiting, and Duffey arrived with the two beautiful Koch sisters.

"You wouldn't have fooled me, Charlotte, not for a minute," Lily said. "Nine year old girl, not You!"

"She fooled me for a moment this morning," Letitia confessed.

The Colony was none of your little, dimly-lit clubs. It was sun-bright in the noontime with the curtains drawn back from the grand sky lights. It had splendid vulgarity in everything. There was fast money that was as good as wealth at the Colony, and there was a cheap-shot artistry that spelled success. The Colony represented Chicago noon-time beef dinners and sly-boat Canadian whisky. There were gaming rooms, and drinking lounges with loaded sideboards. The Mullenses, except Manolo who must have been a

pretty new son, were known in the Colony Club, but they were known as the Cavendishes; and they were known as show people. The Kochs were known there as art people. But the two families had not met before.

"I am a millionaire now, Duffey," Charlotte told him as she enticed him into a corner away from the others. "I pulled it off, though I believe that there was one of those mind-alarms in the walk-in, and I triggered it. No matter: that mind-alarm couldn't have known me. Oh, I've been a millionaire before, for short times, but not this big a millionaire. I am a natural-born pirate. Now I've stolen and reburied a bigger loot than any Kidd or Blackbeard ever saw. But it's become quite dangerous. There was an alarm somewhere, given to someone. It wasn't a physical alarm, but still it was given. And now I'm followed, but they don't know what I look like. The mind-alarm picked up the name Mullens somehow, but that's only a throwaway name with me. This is the last day I'll use it anywhere.

"I love your affianced wife. How could you not have known who she was this morning, since she is at least partly of your making. Don't you even recognize your own handiwork and signature? Duffey, do you know that she does not count as one of your twelve prime creations? She is a bonus. The rib-shaped talisman is extra, the once-in-a-lifetime gift to a creating magician. You're still allowed the royal twelve.

"This place is full of psychics. Your affianced is a very good one, and the skinny Countess is one. That dark-and-secret-eyed Sebastian over there is one. But Lily isn't. We have never met your friend Sebastian, though we all come to this club when we are in town. He seems to have been abroad every time we have been in town. We understand that he is very rich and that he fancies himself as a gamer. These are two things that we love in a man. He'll not miss what we take, Duffey' "

"But will you miss what he might take, Charlotte? I warn you: Sebastian is good at everything."

"How enviable. And I and mine are only good at half a dozen things, but we are very, very good at them. Ah, we kiss here, and your new wife only chuckles. Can't I even make that one jealous? She knows I'm a midget. She knows that I'm not a little girl. Oh my God, either my sister or one of your ladies has ordered the Harvesters' Dinner for everyone. Oh, I suppose that's all right in the Colony Club. After all, this is Chicago."

Roasting ears were central to the Harvesters' Dinner. There were mountains of them. And every kind of beef and potato and bread. Oh Lord save us, cabbage and kale and sauerkraut. Cheeses and sausages and Polish sausage, hot biscuits. No, that was only the beginning outline of the Harvesters' Dinner. They would keep bringing stuff in.

Sebastian Hilton was at table with them, though he was supposed to have dined earlier somewhere. He kissed the four ladies. He already knew Lily and Letitia well. Did he know that Charlotte Mullens or Cavendish was not really a nine year old girl? He must have known it from the way she kissed.

Sebastian still had the dark-and-secret-eyes and the not-long-for-this-world look. He still brought expertise and joy wherever he went. And nobody could remember, after he had dominated a conversation and after he was gone, what words he had used, though no one ever forgot the effect of him. He always spoke well and excitingly, but did he really speak in words?

Later, after the heavy Harvesters' Dinner had been put away, Sebastian came to Duffey and Letitia when they were on the roof observatory, and he added to their togetherness. He was of one mind with them both, as Duffey and Sebastian had been of one mind in their earlier years, as Duffey and Letitia were of one mind presently and forever hence.

Later still, Duffey and Sebastian were together in one of the private rooms of the club. Certainly Sebastian knew all about the wedding, more of the details than Duffey knew. Two days before this, Letitia had engaged him to be best man. Certainly he knew that Duffey was going into business with Gabriel Szymansky. It would be a good business. Oh, Duffey

would lose his golden touch some day, but his money barns should be pretty well full by that time. And of course there would be disasters. It was good that he would have the priceless Letitia. Besides, she was rich. Duffey hadn't thought of that part. Lily Koch had had the name of being a very rich girl during her school days. And Letitia was her sister. It was not a main thing, but yes, it was a good thing. Sebastian and Duffey talked together for an hour. Theirs was an exceptional friendship.

Then Letitia came to them again. She said that they must be off. There was very much to do. They found Charlotte and Gloria Mullens playing bridge against Lily Koch and a strange, ashen-haired, smiling, slim girl. Duffey was startled. He had heard her mentioned as being in the club, but he hadn't been able to spot her before. He knew who she was: the skinny countess to whom Charlotte had referred, and the earlier countess of mind-plundering encounter. Duffey knew her from Sebastian's mind. He even knew how it would be to kiss her.

"This is a friend," Sebastian said of her to Duffey. "She is someone I used to speak of, Melchisedech, and you never believed in her. But she is real. She is the Girl Countess."

Duffey kissed the Girl Countess and she kissed him. It was just as he had remembered it.

"We must go," Letitia said.

"And I must go," Lily told them. "Take my hand, Sebastian, but beware. This small Charlotte is weird beyond anything in the world."

Duffey kissed the girls: Gloria (somehow he knew it would be the last time he would ever see her), Charlotte (there would never be a last time for his seeing her), and the countess again (after all, she was special; she was the only countess that Duffey had ever kissed). And he left with his Koch girls.

But Duffey and Lily and Letitia were all in laughing wonder in the street.

"The Mullenses, that is to say the Cavendishes, make their living as card sharks," Duffey explained.

"Of course they do," Lily said.

"And Sebastian is the absolute expert at everything," Duffey added.

"Of course he is, and so is his countess," Lily said. "And she's as much a mentalist as your Mullens girls. They love each other, I can tell, but it will be bloody cutthroat. It will be the battle of the century, and we are missing out on it. Do you know what the Countess said about the two of you? She said that it was so nice when a couple share the same psychoses, especially when they're all about the belief that you can create the scenes and people who are around you. She says that the only danger is that the bottoms of both of your worlds will fall out at the same time." "Oh I know that," Letitia said, "but it's always the same world with us and the same bottom. But the Countess has her own psychotic beliefs. She believes that she's red. But Sebastian made her up a long time ago, and Duffey took her up then. And it was myself who projected her into the Chicago scene. Sebastian was clear thunderstruck when she appeared in Chicago, and he still is." "Oh Letzy," Lily worried, "sometimes you really believe in your private fancies. And Melky will not be a corrective to you. I He'll abet you. And finally you won't even know what objective truth is."

"I don't know what it is now. I only know that it isn't. There is no such thing, my gilded Lily, is objective truth or objective fact. The whole world is made out of subjective private projections. Some of them become consensus projections, but they aren't really objective even then."

"Oh Duffey, cut her tongue out if you can do it without scandal," Lily said. "The rest of her is priceless, but sometimes her tongue isn't worth fifteen cents a pound. You two are my treasures and you are made out of pure gold. But there are individual coins in you that are counterfeits even if they are made out of true metal. Some of those coins have the Crown and Image of 'The Royal Malarky of Salem' on them. We will eat together late

tonight, and then we will go to a late show somewhere. Oh, You don't know how much you are loved, you two!"

Lily left them then, and then went about the appointing of their new house. Duffey bought tools and lumber and good cherry wood panelling. With a few hundred deft strokes he would be able to do wonders to those upstairs rooms.

They took time off to visit City Hall, and St. Malachy's, and an insurgence company, and a bank, and a lawyer. Then they cleaned up...

"Damn it, Duffey, the hot water doesn't work," Letitia protested.

"Did I say it worked?"

...and changed clothes and went back to the old Lily/Letitia apartment...

("Oh, it will be so lonesome and desolate here," the spirit of the apartment was moaning, "Where can I get me another sister? Where can I get me a husband? How will I live alone?")

... where the spirit Lily had a candle-light supper set out for them.

It was a wonderful supper. Lily cried and blew her nose. And Letzy said that it was the most wonderful condiment spread over everything and that they should market it. "But how much can you produce a month, Lily? We have to know."

They went out to Morgenstein's Comedy Music Box on Randolph Street and saw an extravaganza. When they came out of there, a paper boy was calling the midnight edition 'Double Murder in North-Side Hotel'.

"Get me one, Duffey," Lily said. "I love murders. I so envy those whose lifestyles allow them to indulge."

"I don't love this one," said Letitia who was prescient.

"Neither do I," Duffey moaned. He got a paper from the boy. His hands shook so much that he spilled coins all over the pavement. Then Lily had to take the paper from him to read the story.

Yes, it wis Gloria and Manolo Mullens who had been murdered in that same little hotel that Duffey had moved out of that day. It was a particularly savage assault. The two had been tortured first. Then the two skulls had been crushed as though great spikes had been driven into them, but the murder weapon was not found. And there was no trace of the girl about nine years old who was believed to have been with the Mullens since their coming to town.

The Mullens were known gamblers, the paper said, and it was surmised that there might be underworld connections. Three slant-faced men had been seen about the hotel, and people said that they did not belong there.

"Do you think that Charlotte got away?" Lily asked.

"Of Course she did," Letitia said, "but she shouldn't have pulled the other two into her danger. They were tortured to get information that they didn't have. But Charlotte was already away. The killers didn't know that their target was a little girl or a little midget. To them she was only the mysterious 'brain'. They somehow had the name 'Mullens' from the mind alarm, and the name of the Mullens' hotel. Charlotte is in a pre-selected hideout, and I bet she gives the nuns there holy hell."

"Did she really steal the millions?" Lily asked her usually psychic sister.

"Yes, and she will own it all securely when the coast is clear. Then she will be the fascinating millionaire mendacious midget of our acquaintance." "What was the weapon?"

"I can't quite see that part," Letitia said. "There's a sort of sea spray that comes between. I can't tell what the cruel hooked thing is."

But Duffey recognized the destruction of the cruel hooked thing. It was the boat hook in the hands of one of the three slant-faced stevedores of Duffey's dream or psychosomatic trance of that very morning. And he recalled with nausea Charlotte's dream-or-trance words:

"Aw, ugh, it always sickens me to hear a boat hook crunch into a



skull like that."

## CHAPTER V

Melchisedech Duffey and Letitia Koch got married. It was a nice wedding.

Has there ever been on earth a true golden age, either particular or general? Yes, there have been dozens and dozens of particular golden ages. These usually involve small areas and small numbers of persons, but they can be absolutely authentic.

One of them was in a portion of North Chicago in the years 1925 to 1935. Then it continued as an electrum age (gold and silver mixed) till about 1946. There were some minor disasters in this electrum section of it, but there were none in the pure gold first section.

Some of the persons who made up that golden age were Melchisedech Duffey and his wife Letitia (they were central to it, and in a sense co-creators of it), her sister Lily Koch, their parents August and Elinore Koch. And their friends Sebastian Hilton, Margaret Hochfelsen (she was the ever-young countess), and the associate Gabriel Szymansky and his wife Miriam and his son Kasmir. This Kasmir or Casey was one of Duffey's prime 'creations'. There were the arty friends of the golden age: Hierome Groben, Nicky and Vicky Van Horn, Fanny Warneke, Mordecai and Elvira Scott, Cassius and Mona Greatheart, Bruno Schnabel, Otis and Sheryl Pentecost, Leo Ring. There were the bookish and literary friends generally, some of them being newspaper people as well: Christopher Tompkinson, Demetrio Glauch, Clarence Schrade, Leo Crowley, Tony and Evelyn Apostolo, Rollo and Josephine McSorley, Norman Shipman, Januirius and Elena O'Higgins.

There were the musical friends going from the operatics to the rag-timers and the Chicago-hots and the string-band people, composers, players, staggers: Linus Aloysia, Basil and Dorothy Noah, Rufus Weaver, Enniscorhy and Mary Sweeny, Newbold and Audery McGeehan, Andy Paige, Vitis and Emily Karger, Cletus Kenaly. All those were good people.

There were the ecclesial or vinyard or churchy people: Thomas Chroniker S.J., Tim and Gale Tuthill, Sister Mary Cornelia (Sullivan), Foster and Alma Ruch, Dan and Nan Donovan, Sister Mary Aurora (Rittenhouse), Martin and Katherine Redwine, Frantz and Elair St. Clair. It was the vinard people who kept the world turning. All other persons in the world were parasites upon the labor of the vinyard workers.

There were the theatrical people: Nemo Cobb, Anna Louise McCutcheon, Duke and Jenny Colfax, Leander Crane, Jim and Rosemary Flogan, Beverly Boyd, John and Fisher Nolan.

There was the Monster Giulio who was outside of categories.

There were the people of a scientific bent: Mark McClatchy, Cyril Holland, Catherine Quick, Morris Poor, Horatio and Mildred Burgandy, Sherman Slick, Silas and Maud Whiterice. You just don't meet people like that every day.

There were the confidence and gamine friends: Charlotte Garfield (yes, she's the millionaire mendacious midget again), Gideon Sedgewick, Mary Regina Toast, Ralph Kirby, Ira and Rebecca Spain, Victor Ryan, Homer and Evangeline Durban, Fred and Helen Batavia. These were all of the better grade of confidence people.

There were the very young friends who came into the book store or were around the neighborhood: Mary Francis Rattigan (Ah, look out for that one, she was one of Duffey's quasi-creattues created by a talisman that only half-worked), Mary Catherine Carruthers (Ah, look out there again, she was one of Duffey's true creations by a true talisman), Hugo Stone (Dann that kid anyhow!), Ethyl Ellenberger, Margaret Stone (She was not Hugo's sister as she used to brag sometimes; she was just barely his cousin).

There were the sporty people: Tom (Big Bear) Rogers, Herbert Conger, Calvin Bonner, Enos Dorn, Angelo Cato, Henry Chadwick, Mike and Peggy Conner

(golf), and Peter and Jenny Reid (tennis).

There were the college and university people: Jerome and Grace Plunkett, David and Dinah Joyce, Susan Parker, Cicero Brazil, Jasper and Jane Howe, Isaac and Mary Lightfoot, Judley and Pauline Peacock.

There were the money and commerce people, or anyhow the rich people: Adrian Hiltoh (he was an older brother of Sebastian), Shawn Mallow, Pat and Lois Tyrone, Mary Kay Pack, Julian and Bernice Edgewater, Mary Carmel Hooligan, Clement and Irene Temple, Vincent Finnerty.

And then there were the slippery people. Pleasant they were, competent they were, interesting they were. And slippery they were. Larry and Olivia Hallanah, Ben and Shirley Israel, Marjory Redfox, Elmo Sheehan, John and Alive Calumet, Hermoine (she was so slippery that nobody ever did know her last name).

The heart of the near-north side Chicago golden age was the seven rooms of Melchisedech and Letitia Duffey, and the shops below them. And the Koch's galleries two blocks down the rich street, not the poor street. Yet it was around the doorways of the poor street that the people and their interests coalesced.

Above the poor shops on the poor street there were many apartments that were fine on the inside, and many of the golden age people lived there. There were little ratty eating places on that street. There were other eating places that looked almost the same on the outside, but the rats in them picked their teeth with gold toothpicks. There were a number of sly pigs along there, for as long as prohibition lasted, and some of them were good music and good entertainment places.

The people of the Duffey nations found themselves interesting. They found their gatherings and meetings their comings and goings and entertainments, their cafes and shows and studios and saloons and open-handed houses and apartments, their small part of the city all to be highly interesting. And they set their seals forever on those streets and corners and buildings and parks. A stranger there even today will know that people of peculiar awareness were once there.

Melchisedech and Letitia designed that shanty-and-gold neighborhood as they designed other things, events and life scenarios and persons themselves. Duffey had a natural gift for creating people complete with their surroundings; and one of his creations, Letitia, had the gift even more strongly than he had.

"The purpose of life is the creation, arrangement, and staging of interesting and awareful scenes, and then entering into them to play vivid parts," Duffey said.

"Luffy Duffey, you say that all so well and you say it all so often," Letitia told him. Duffey never had a disagreement with any of the Kochs, not with father August, not with mother Elmore, not with Lily, certainly not with Letitia. Melchisedech fell in love with his mother-in-law Elinore at first sight when she threw her arms wide and give him the biggest kiss in town. This was the gesture and act that all three of the Koch ladies had. Lily would sometimes do it with walk-in customers in the Gallery. And it is always good luck to be in love with your mother-in-law. Elinore had style.

And the father-in-law August Koch had a pleasant sort of integrity and a rich competence. He also had many old European ideas, such as dowery.

"It is one of the things that we must not neglect," he told Duffey. "it is good to settle these things; it is good to make the transfers of money and property early. I am very pleased with you, Mr. Duffey. The figure I have in mind..."

"I know the figure you have in mind," Duffey said. "I'm a mentalist. Set it at one quarter of that. And set it so that we can draw only the interest on it for a period of twenty-five years." "I hate to do that," August Koch. "You will have difficulty reaching your proper station of life under those conditions, and I believe that persons should reach

their proper stations while they are still young. There are also certain pieces of art that must fall to your share. You are something of an art dealer and you may be able to make those choices by yourself."

"I will make the choices with the help of Letitia and Lily."

"Yes, of course," August said. He was an extremely muscular man in the German style. Very neat, very imposing, very proper.

"There is one other thing, Melchisedech," August said. "Let us walk in the back street and talk about it. You are the only other man in the family so you must help me decide things."

They went out and walked in the back street, the poor street that Duffey's shop opened on. There was the smell of lilacs there. Many of the poor people along the street grew lilacs. These were dust-covered bushes, and often they were broken and bruised by people coming and going. But it is the bruised bushes that have the sweetest smell.

"It's about Lily," August Koch said. "Somewhere we will have to find a husband for her. I know that she wants to marry and is pained that she has not found a husband."

"But Lily can marry anyone she wants to. She has everything."

"Prospects for a husband she does not have. Oh, she has beauty and brains and charm and goodness and wealth. It would seem that these things would be enough. They aren't. I do not know why men will marry one sort of woman and not another. It really seems that none of the women whom men marry are really of top quality, excepting my wife, and yours, of course. What do you think it will take, Melchisedech, to get a husband for Lily?"

"Only a little willingness on her part. I can think of a hundred good men who'd marry her if she'd have them."

"Think of a hundred and first man then, Melchisedech. I am sure that the one hundred are somehow rejected, by whom I do not know. I will lay out a dowry of one million dollars for a good man who will marry her. If that sounds crass, then I am a crass man. But I love that daughter. Think of the man for her, Melchisedech."

"A million dollars wouldn't matter to the one I think of, Sebastian Hilton."

"They were engaged once, in a sort of way, I believe. Possibly they still are. But they will not marry. It's the fashion of young people of their circle to believe that Sebastian will die young. But I am assured by his father and uncles that he is in near perfect health."

"Maybe he will die in near perfect health then," Melchisedech said, "but I'm one of those who believe that he will die young. I get things out of his future, up to a point, and then I do not get any more of them. That cut-off point isn't very far in the future." "Be careful of the mentalist bit, Melchisedech. You won't know your own future, and you won't know any other future effectively either. I get things out of your future. Many things that you have always depended on will collapse. There's a bridge nearby that's an allegory of you. The props will be and are being knocked out from under that bridge one by one. And the props will be knocked out from under you at the same time. You and Letitia also get your pick of the town houses, you know."

"We'll make our selection of that soon, but we won't live in it for the first few decades."

"And think about a husband for Lily, Melchisedech. As the only other man in the family, you must counsel me on these things. Oh yes, and I've brought you a Christ."

August and Melchisedech went and got it. They put it with seven other Christs in Duffey's Priceless Item Room.

"Etenim Pascha nostrum immolatus est Christus!" Duffey said in sudden amazement as he saw it there with the others, "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us."

"Yes it is powerful and it is sacrificial," August Koch said, "but you will still ask, as Kipling's devil asked 'Is it art?' Were the other

seven from the first?"

"Not all of them," Duffey said, "not at first, but all of them are now."

Among the things that Duffey had to show for the seven dark years or lost years of his life were Seven Christs. He had found them in strange places of the world and dispatched them to himself back in the more ordinary world. And now they had all arrived from the various places. Now they had all been assembled together like seven thunders; some of them joyful, some of them agonizing.

There was the Danish-bread Christ. Yes, it had been baked out of wheat and rye flour mixed. It had been made into a dough, formed into a Christ-head, baked, and then varnished. It was the case of someone making a better loaf than he knew. In some parts of Denmark such Christ-heads were baked for Corptis Christi Day. But how had this one happened to be such an ashtonishing work of art, and how had it been recognized and saved?

There was a tavern sign Christ from Hungary of the time of Bela Kun. Hungary had been communist then briefly for the first time, and Christ things were hated. But there was no hatred in this picture, only total hartiness. The Christ was drinking off a huge mug of beer, and the mug was ornamented with spinning worlds. It was a powerful and pleasant face, and it was unmistakably Christ.

There was a Christ figurehead from an old Goanese ship that had used to sail on the Indian Occan. There was no other figurehead art that could stand beside it.

There was a cigar store Christ from the island of St. Kitts. Yes, that's right. It was like a cigar store Indian of the United States of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the fingers of the right hand formed into a cone or cup to hold cigars. Some negro artist of the island had done it in imitation of that convention. It was Indian-colored. But it was bare-headed, and it had Christ's face. The artist had known that face without knowing what person it belonged to.

There was a staghorn Christ from Mesa Negra that was done in hard stone nine thousand years before Christ was born. It was of a man impaled on the antlers of a giant stag. The posture was that of a crucified man, and that man was Christ.

There was a negroid Christ from Bahr El Chazal in the Sudan. It was of a tall person with a cattle herder's crooked rod in his hand, and it was Christ without any doubt. It was a freestanding, life-sized statue in tufa stone, and it couldn't have represented anyone else.

There was a turbaned and laughing Christ from Turkish Anatolia. It was done in monumental marble, reused from some earlier thing. It was fresh painted not fifty years before, but it had been carved a thousand years before.

There was something so intricate about that laughing figure that it could be studied and laughed with for a lifetime. It was a thunder piece. All seven of them were.

All were representations of the same person, there was no doubt at all about that. And all seven of them were once-in-a-lifetime discoveries.

Together they were stunning, and there was no way that a price could be put on any of them.

The Christ of August Koch was set with the others. It was the once-in-a-lifetime discovery of August. It had cost much more than any of the others. And possibly it had less thunder in it. But it wis outstanding. Let it be there with the others for a few years. Then we will judge it. Nobody can judge such a thing immediately.

August Koch had a yacht on Lake Michigan. It was named The Argo.

"What a coincidence!" Duffey howled when he heard the name. Then he was puzzled at himself. What was Koch's yacht's name coincident with?

There was a small bridge or viaduct on the near-north side. It

didn't look a lot like the bridge that August Koch had said was an allegory to Duffey. It ran above street car tracks or perhaps train tracks, and it also ran above a trafficway that carried heavy trucks. It was wide, to carry the traffic of a busy street; but it was not much longer than it was wide. The little bridge even had a name. It was the Pont du Sable Traffic Trestle.

Someone knocked out a minor support of it only a week after Duffey began to notice it and to tie himself in with it. A heavy truck going at high speed had hit it during the night. This support was not repaired or replaced. An engineer told Duffey that it was merely ornamental, that it hadn't been a weight-carrying support. They disguised its appearance with a little bit of stone gimcrackery. And yet that support had carried weight, with Duffey anyhow.

It was five years before the next underpinning was knocked out of that bridge.

#### CHAPTER VI

Giulio the Monster came to Chicago.

Duffey had known Giulio for the first time on the night of Duffey's going into business in St. Louis. He had seen him several times since, at intervals of a year or several years. But how did Giulio find them in Chicago? Giulio was not particularly literate and might not have been able to follow the most simple directions. He did not know Duffey's name: he paid very little attention to names. But he and Duffey were weirdly in accord, and Duffey had once given him a talisman.

First off, Duffey heard a roaring on the stairway.

"Oh my God!" he cried out. "I'd know that roaring anywhere!"

It was late, about three in the morning. Duffey and Letitia had been in bed, but she was not in bed now. Where was she? And what would she make of the monster? The Monster Giulio would take some explaining, even to a person as good as Letitia was.

Duffey rose to prevent what clash there might be, though he recognized Giulio's roaring as more joyful than agonized. It was a greeting really. He also heard the yelping of a mean and demented dog receding outside. And Letitia's glad voice was heard on the stairs also:

"Giulio, is it really you? Oh, you are welcome! I've wanted so much to see you all the time. I knew you would be in town sometime and I couldn't think of any way of letting you know where we were."

Duffey, coming to the head of the stairs, saw Letitia throw her arms wide in that gesture that all the Koch ladies have, and then hug the Monster Giulio heartily and give him the biggest kiss in town. Why had Duffey worried? How could there possibly be a clash between Letitia and any good person anywhere?

"Giulio, how did you get in?" Duffey called from above them.

"By the door. Only when I'm in a savage mood do I come through the walls."

"But I'd locked the door carefully. There have been three burglaries of shops in this block this week, and I made sure I locked the door."

"Nah, man, nah, the door was not locked. Doors are not locked to Giulio when he comes to see you. It would bring on all my sickness if I found the door locked."

"Your dog, Giulio, bring your dog in," Letitia said. "We want to meet him too, and we will feed him. And we will feed you."

"Nah, woman, nah," Giulio said. "I haven't any dog. What you heard howling and growling was a devil that afflicts me. He knows that he cannot come into a house where good people live. But he growls and grumbles about it."

"Oh, Giulio, you haven't any devil," Letitia told him. They were in the kitchen now and she set out everything: coffee, whisky, cheese, bread,

sausages beef, beer and wine and pie. "Why, you can't afford a devil, Giulio."

"Nah, this is a poor guy's devil," he said, "and I haven't even got clear title to him. I'm a Gadarene Swine, as Duffey's brother used to say. It's a devil who comes to live with me when he no other place to stay. He eats my soul up, and now there are only crumbs left to me. Whenever I do throw him out, he comes back with those seven devils worse than himself. Oh, there is howling then."

"I have heard it," Duffey said. Ah, it was good to have the big fellow come and visit them, however he had found them. Duffey was whistling a tune thit Bagby used to whistle every time Giulio showed up in their neighborhood in St. Louis. Bagby, as a fact, had used to call it the Gadarene Swine Song. The tune of it was cruel and comical at the same and funny. Oh yes, there was a devil associated with big Guilio.

Giulio stiyed with the Duffeys a week that first time he came to them in Chicago. All the friends accepted him and all of them knew what he was. Mona Greatheart did him again and again in clay. Groben did dore-like engravings of him. Elena O'Higgins came to talk to him. She said that she would do a feature story on him in the Chicago Jerald and Examiner.

Sebastian and his countess came to see Giulio, and they gave him their respect. They made it seem that, if he were a monster, he was a royal monster at least. There must have been at least one of his kindred in the cellar of every castle in Transylvania, the Countess said. There was one, anyhow, in the castle in which she was raised. But the Countess said that Giulio was not a Troll, that he wis a Teras.

"Yes, I am a Teras," Giulio confirmed it.

Sebastian and the Countess Margaret and Letitia and Melchisedech sang the ballad 'Hi, Ho! The Gadarene Swine!' that was based partly on Bagby's old tune and partly on a Transylvanian stringed melody that the Countess remembered. They sang it in four voices and Giulio, who could not sing, howled a to it.

"Oh Giulio is a Teras weird.

Hi, Ho!

He raises possums in his beard.

Hi, Ho!

He works the rivers and the brine.

The way he gobbles joints of kine

I'd never have him in to dine

Except he is a friend of mine

Hi, Ho! The Gadarene Swine!"

"Have you wife or children yet?" Letitia asked him.

"We don't even know your full name, do we?" the Countess Margaret asked.

"Giulio Solli is my full name," the Monster said. "Yah, I have a wife and two sons and a daughter. And I gave the talisman, Duffey, the talisman that you gave me to give. I held it to my wife's belly at the proper times. And I put it in the son's hands at the moment of his birth, and he would not let go of it for a month."

"Which son, Giulio?" Melchisedech asked him.

"The dago son, of course. You wouldn't give a thing like that to an Irish son, would you? Ah, it's a dark and lonesome road he'll have to travel, he has so much of me in him. And who will hold a lantern for him on that road?" "I will, Teras," the Countess Margaret said.

"I will, Giulio," Sebastian Hilton said.

They sang another stanza with chorus of the Gadarene Swine Song then, and Giulio himself roared out the invention of the tenth line of it.

"The Teras had a mane and crine.

Hi, Ho!

His back is like a porcupine.  
Hi, Ho!  
His eyes have got the runny blears.  
He has such awful hairy ears  
They drive me all the way to tears.  
Hi, Ho!  
His brow it has a low incline.  
His instrument's of knotty pine.  
Hi, Ho! The Gadarene Swine!"

Then Sebastian and the Countess Margaret left the Duffeys and Giulio with an all-persons embrace.

Late one night, Giulio rose suddenly and burst out of the house. There was a defiant roaring outside in the street when he stood there. And then there was the cry of rending agony as Giulio's devil came back into him again.

Then he was gone.

Book Four:  
Tales of Chicago

"The Lord has sworn and he will not repent: You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech."

Psalms 109,4

Chicago is a lot like purgatory. Well, that is better than many cities that are a lot like hell. There is usually blessed salvation at the end of the Chicago ordeal.

Duffey lost his facility for making money. It was the first of his major facilities that he lost, and he would miss it the least. The magic of making money is, after all, a boyish trick. It hardly becomes a grown man.

Duffey's virtue had become a little bit scrappy before this, but he had never lost it. Duffey had wakened one morning knowing that he had lost his extraordinary talent for making money. He would never get it back to the full. The riddle of the camel and the needle's eye was solved. Duffey had always wondered how he was going to get to Heaven. That he might not always be rich hadn't occurred to him.

On that early morning, he walked to the Pont du Sable Traffic Trestle. It was still an hour before sunrise. Lanterns were blinking around the tracks and the trafficway below the bridge. An underpinning had been knocked out by a heavy and berserk truck during the night. So the bridge was weakened. And the golden touch was gone.

Duffey's loss-of-the-gold-touch feeling had been preceded by a dream of worms getting into his gold and eating it out, leaving the coins and bars as no more than empty shells. There had not been in the dream, and there would not be in reality, any sharp sense of loss over the devoured gold.

In the world generally, the worms had been getting into the gold pretty badly. Duffey's dream of lost gold had been illuminated by an actual mass of gold in Duffey's place several years before this. His father-in-law, August Koch, had asked if he might store a quantity of gold at Duffey's place. Duffey had reinforced the upstairs floors to take the weight of it. This had been at the beginning of the fourth quarter of the year 1929. August Koch had put something more than twenty tons of gold in Duffey's place, about twelve million dollars worth of it. Of course August Koch had other storage places. He sold pretty much everything he had and put it into gold. It would be immune to bank collapse and to the depredations of rust and moth. And, when he decided to spend it again, he would be able to buy a lot more with it. Twenty tons of gold will not like take up nearly the space

of twenty tons of wood or steel or even lead, but it made the Duffey quarters a little crowded for a while.

Of course Duffey and Letitia had known what was going to happen, and Sebastian and his brother and his countess, and Charlotte Garfield the mendacious midgct, and Mary Regina Toast and Irene Temple and Vincent Finnerty had known. These people were all mentalists as far as money was concerned. The Duffeys made a good thing out of the tricky years, and they would still have a good thing. That was why it was not too serious for Melchisedech to lose the particular facility for making money. He already had plenty of money.

As to Duffey's virtue having become scruffy, he was still as scrupulously and even offensively honest as ever. His man's courage was still strong. His charity had holes in it, but he hadn't really lost too much ground there. He had really gained a little bit in charity and understanding from his natural stite. He wasn't a boozier nor a vaunter to excess. He did not even belong to those most sulfur of people, the bores. He would still do things for strangers that he would not even undertake to do for himself. He was a firm friend to all good men and a gallant partisan of all good women. And that may have been the trouble.

Duffey loved his wife Letitia and her sister Lily and her mother Elinore. He loved them seriously and he loved them clownishly, and he may even have loved them illicitly, even Letitia. He loved his sister in St. Louis, and his old girl Beth Kegan, and Olga Sanchez of the torchy shoulders who still worked at his Rounders' Club, and Evelyn London. He still loved a younger girl there, Gretchen Sisler, though she wrote him that she wasn't as young as all that now. And he got to St. Louis at least once a year, to take care of business with his St. Louis partner Charley Murray, but also to see the ladies.

He loved many ladies from the seven hidden years of his life also, but there was no way he could return to visit them.

He loved the Countess Margaret Hochfclscn and the mendacious midget Charlotte Garfield. And Mona Greatheart and Shirley Israel ("Duffey, how could you!" the words about Shirley rang out of the future and had to do with a photograph), and Josephine McSorley and Catherine Quick and Elena O'Higgins and Beverly Boyd and Mary Lightfoot and Jenny Reid.

He also loved several younger girls, especially from that bunch who used to come into his book store. They came in from the time they were eight or nine years old: Mary Frances Rattigan, Mary Catherine Carruthers, Mary Jean (what was her name anyhow before she married Sebastian's nephew Hillary Hilton?), Margaret Stone. Ethyl Ellenberger. It was all hearty fun with the little girls, of course (hell is made out of such hearty fun), and Duffey played the funny uncle with them. There was an old, black leather sofa in the book store, and Duffey would wrestle the little girls on it. Mary Frances and Ethyl were usually in the store together, and what Duffey did to one of them he did to the other. In their double number was safety. Really, it was all right with them, but maybe it wasn't all right when Mary Francis was there by herself.

And it probably wasn't all right with Mary Jean (she was a hot little vixen from her childhood) and with Mary Catherine Carruthers who was in love with Duffey. They were very friendly little girls for about ten years, from the time they were eight or nine years old.

He felt that he was watched with them, when he could not be. In particular he felt that he was watched by that fat-faced, four-eyed little boy Hugo Stone (Damn that kid anyhow!). "Duffey, baby, how are you?" Hugo would say from the time he was a nine year old freak. Hugo often carried a camera slung around his neck. What? Was there a threat in that? Maybe, but not an immediate threat. We leave the little girls for a while.

Was this Hugo Stone the same person who turned up later as Absalom Stein? Once it wis settled without doubt that he was. But later a doubt returned



"There wasn't any Hugo Stone," Margaret Stone sad just the other day.

"That was just a joke name."

"There was a Hugo Stone," Melchisedech Duffey insisted. "He used to come into my book store in Chicago from the time he was eight years old. I know him. And he was the same person as Absalom Stein who walked out of here only five minutes ago."

"No, no, Duffey, he was hardly ever the same person," Margaret said. "I don't believe that he was ever the same person at all. That branch of the family always used the name of Stein, though Absalom ran around quite a bit with one group of his Stone cousins. I will tell you what Stone boys there were. They were David, Hershel, Jacob, Samuel, Max, Nathan, Avram, Yosef, Stuart, Isaac, Myron, Efram, Barnard, Sidney, Joel, Robert, Milton, another David, another Nathan, another Robert, twenty boys in four famihes of first cousins. They all lived within three blocks of your old book store. I was first cousin once removed from all of them. Absalom Stein who lived half a dozen miles north was a second cousin of them all. I'm sure he was never in your place."

"But who was Hugo then?" Duffey asked.

"There wasn't any Hugo. That's just a name they made up because they knew you couldn't tell one of those kids from another. Sometimes Hugo was Nathan, sometimes he was Avram. Most of the times he was the twins Myron and Efram. They would always be in your store at the same time, and you would always think there was only one of them who got around awful fast. They could steal from you easier, there being two of them."

"But Which one of those damned little kids used to say 'Duffey, baby, how are you'?"

"I don't know who used it first," Margaret said. "There were half a dozen of them who took it up later when they found out that it bugged you."

"Margaret, I am a mentalist and perhaps I am a sorcerer," Duffey said. (All this conversation took place just the other day, many years after the Chicago era.) "I know what constitutes a person. And Hugo Stone (damn that kid anyhow!) was the same person as Absalom Stein who is present almost too often in these later years."

"Duffey, you are a moth-eaten sorcerer and I don't believe that you do know what constitutes a person," Margaret said.

"I know who he was. I made him!" Duffey insisted.

There was also the fact that Casey Szymansky insisted that he hadn't known Absalom Stein until he met him in New Guinea along about 1943 in the army, and that he hadn't known him in Chicago at all. He had heard though that Absalom Stein had been a Communist in Chicago under the name of Hugo Stone. This had always puzzled Duffey. Casey Szymansky used to be in Duffey's book store every day (after all, his father owned the building and was a sort of partner of Duffey in the businesses), and Casey had many crashes with Hugo Stone there. There had been a natural anupathy between the boys and sometimes it broke open. Twice Casey had fist fights with Hugo in the book store, and Casey lost both fights.

Would it not be a rum thing if Hugo had indeed been non-Hugo twins, and both of them had gotten their knocks in on Casey?

## CHAPTER II

Toward the end of the year 1931, about three hundred prominent citizens of Chicago began to receive a well-printed news letter named 'The Answer'. It touched on economics, it touched on ethics, it touched on municipal and federal government, it touched on education and religion and militarism. Mostly it touched on the theory of government and on the voices of the poor crying aloud to be fed. And it was very quippy. Some of the things in it were good, and even the bad ones were startling.

It gave a post office box to which comments and rebuttals might be sent. It was a north side post office box. 'The Answer' was to come out

thrice weekly, on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. That startling first issue was out on Monday morning, and it was delivered by U.S. Mail.

In those days, the more deeply populated areas of large cities, and all the downtown areas of them, received four mail deliveries a day. Less densely populated areas received only two mail deliveries a day, and this was felt by some to be an injustice. A mailing dumped into any mail box by seven o'clock in the morning would be delivered anywhere in the city by ten o'clock of the same morning. Postage was two cents for first class and one cent for second class. 'The Answer' with stenciled addresses and its one cent stamp on every publication was its morning newsletter.

Melchisedech Duffey, being one of the three hundred most prominent citizens of Chicago, received 'The Answer' in the first mail one Monday morning, and he read it with his breakfast. He gasped in wonder as he gazed at it. There was something damnably familiar about it, and yet it was a first issue, and its name 'The Answer' was not what struck a responsive cord. Melchisedech perused it.

And within one minute he was howling in wrath mixed with other things. "I have never seen such an astonishing mixture of perspicacity of a truly brilliant order mixed with double-damned-foolishness!" he roared. "Letzy, have a look at this devilish stuff! It is inflammatory, and three quarters of the time it is right! Look at it! Read it out loud! This pastiche is destined for the rise and fall of many, mostly the wrong ones."

Letitia Duffey read things out of it aloud. She had a fine scanning eye and a beautiful and haunting voice. Her voice was so good that she had recorded little time-and-temperature advertisements for the radio. People would almost cry when her voice said 'It is seven fifteen this morning, and seventy-one degrees'. Her voice could move a stone person. And now she read with astonishment and buried laughter.

"Letzy, Letzy," Melchisedech gave the left-handed voice to her recital. "How is it possible for a person to be so sage and so silly at the same time?"

"You manage that trick very well yourself, dear," Letitia said with kindness.

"I am a special case," Melchisedech clarified. "This is a mad man writing that stuff. Oh, how he will hook the unthinking! How he will latch onto followers!"

Melchisedech was slow in catching onto it, but Letzy had caught it already.

There were things out of the wisdom of Augustine and Aquinas and Pope Benedict. There were worse things out of Nietzsche and Shaw and the Webbs and Machiavelli and the old and the new Roosevelt. This was ponderous hodge-podge. "But it will catch on!" Melchisedech moaned. "See if it doesn't, Letzy." "Oh, I can stop it any time I want to," she said. "How, bride of my breast, how?" he wanted to know. But Letitia simply looked at the palm of her hand and smiled.

"The Answer is the Leader!" The Answer proclaimed. "Make yourselves worthy. The Leader will appear this very week, if you are ready for him."

Listen, that initial Monday edition was nothing compared to the second publication of Wednesday morning. It was expanded from a four page to it sixteen page journal. There were more than a hundred letters from the prominent citizens in that Wednesday morning edition. The letters were favorable. People were howling their agreement. And there was the stunning lead article 'The Quest for Leadership is Ended; the Leader has been Found: I Am the Leader!!!' That was a thumper. Why, there was something magnetic about all of this! The leader was hypnotic. He made it felt that the need for leadership was the most striking need in the city and the nation and the world, and that the need was being met. This was happening all too fast. "Why wait till next year for a leader who cannot lead. As it shapes up now, the contest will be between a good but inept man, Hoover, and an evil and even more inept man, Roosevelt. That almost turns the stomach against the

whole idea of leadership. Do not let it do that. The world is crying for leadership. Well, that cry will be answered Friday night with the 'Appearance'. First Cliicigo, then the Nation, then the World."

"Letitia!" Melchisedech cried. "Did you ever hear of such a case of ego in all your life? Did you believe that in all the world there could be such an egomaniac as the writer of this stuff? Have you ever encountered such an egotistical person in all your short life?"

"Only one," she said. "You."

"I'm a special case," Duffey said.

"You must admit, Duffey my pride, that he sounds more and more like you. He is coming to be you almost exactly --"

"Me, with the brains knocked out, yes. I've wondered why he sounded like me and still lacked my sense."

"Perhaps on some level, dear, unbeknownst to you..."

"No. I have not done this thing, Letitia, not on any level of my being, not in my conscious or in my unconscious. But there is a stunning similarity."

"It's done on your little press, you know."

"It is? Oh, of course it is. Why didn't I realize it? That's why it looked so familiar from the very first glance. Why, why, why? Who is doing this?"

"I can't answer the 'why, why, why' part of it. I'm not a good enough psychologist for that," Letitia said. "But it's quite plain who is doing it. How many confounded geniuses are there in this block anyhow?"

"Only myself, Letitia. I can't think of another one."

"Oh, you blind man!"

"But I believe that somebody has been entering the shop at night. A box of medals has been stolen."

"What medals?"

"Mostly world war medals, a residue from Gabriel's old pawn shop, and I've been selling a few of them to collectors. There are all things from congressional medals of honor to French honorifics and the German Blue Max with the old Emperor Maximillian's seal on it. There are generals' and admirals' insignia gone. Could the coming 'leader' want such things?"

"Yes, I think he could," Letitia said.

The Friday morning The Answer was a rouser. It got down to what the quippy publisher called the 'crushed louse' by which he meant the 'nitty gritty'. It gave the time and place where 'the leader' would appear that night. It would be at seven o'clock in the evening. It would be in Henry Horner Park beside the big equestrian statue. It was asked that a dozen or so bands should volunteer their services. 'It will be better, in the day of wrath, that we knew you' was a warning. It was asked that each of the recipients of The Answer should see to it that at least a thousand people of their rousing should attend the Appearance. 'Yes, ten thousand each. Three million persons will not be too many to see the great thing.' There were other exhortations, and then there were many articles of uncommonly good points.

"It worries me that he makes such good sense," Duffey said in exasperation.

"That is what has always worried me about you, dear," Letitia said.

"How can anybody be so intelligent, and then reach such irrational conclusions?"

"People ask the same thing about you, dear."

"But he is so much like me. It's weird."

"Don't worry about it, Duffey. I think he'll outgrow it," Letitia said.

There weren't any three million people in Henry Horner Park that evening, but there were about a hundred thousand of them, in the park itself and in the adjacent street. The three hundred copies of The Answer must have

been read by quite a few persons and word-of-mouth had been at work. And the Chicago daily papers had been playing the thing up for several days. There weren't any dozen bands there, but there were three of them. It would be better for those three in the Day of Wrath.

By the great equestrian statue in the park there was a live white horse. It was clothed in gold lame and such things and was beautiful. Duffey knew that horse. It lived in his own neighborhood. It had been a fire horse. It had had a proud way of holding its head 'like a Roman Emperor' as somebody had said of it. And one man had been so impressed by its dignity that he had bought it from the fire department, which was doing away with horses anyhow, and had given it a pleasant home in a double vacant lot. And there it had reigned as the pride of the whole neighborhood. It wasn't really an old horse, no more than nine or ten years old. It was large and solid. It was itself a living statue.

There were signs about there. 'When the Leader comes and mounts the horse, then the world will recover its strength'. 'At Seven O'clock the Leader Comes: Be Ye Ready for Him'. 'The High Rider of this Horse will Become the Leader of this World: Perhaps He Will Also Be An Angel Out of Heaven'. That was extravagant stuff. It was almost time for the leader to make his appearance. The three bands were playing military and inspirational music. There was an air of expectations.

"This is too much in my style to be a total hoax," Melchisedech Duffey said. "Letzy, do you think it will be a qualified hoax then? Letzy, Letzy?" But Letitia had slipped off. She intended, for reasons of her own, to intercept 'The Leader' and not allow him to arrive in full regalia.

And he was in full regalia when she blocked his path. Croix de la Legion D'honneur, Croix de Guerre, Medal of Honor, and Navy Medal of Honor, Iron Cross, Order of the Golden Fleece Medallion, Crown of St. Stephen, Star of the Ninth Fusillers, many more decorations. Some of them were nonmilitary, some of them were of Chicago lodges, but that didn't matter. He was in scarlet tunic, belted and bandoliered. He wore a shako on his head. He had a hussar sabre and his father's Knights of Columbus Fourth Degree sword belted on him. He was booted and spurred. And he was walking in a transport with nearly closed eyes. This was the leader who would take over the world as soon as he got on the noble white horse. But Letitia Duffey stood in his way.

"Oh, don't spoil it, Aunt Letitia, don't spoil it," the Leader said.

"I'm not spoiling it, I'm saving it," she told him. "After you get on the white horse, You won't have any idea what to do then, will you? You haven't thought beyond that point, have you?"

"Sure I have. Plan 'Beta' goes into effect as soon as I mount, and plan 'Alpha' becomes past history. I will take over Chicago and then America and then the world."

"Nonsense, Casey, it'd never work."

"If you stop me, Aunt Letitia, you'll be sorry in the years to come."

"How so, little Leader?"

"You'll get a look at some of the leaders who are really in line to take over the world if I don't. You'll realize in that day that you should have let me go ahead with it."

"But my opinion in this day is that I should not let you. All right, put all the medals in this paper sack, Casey. And take off that tunic and all those belts and wrap them up together."

"All right, if I can go on to the park then and see the horse. Oh he does look magnificent! And see the bands up close." All right," Letitia said. They wrapped up all the regalia so that it looked like a package of almost anything, and went to the park.

So 'The Leader' did not appear that night, and The Answer did not publish again. The bands played merry music, and many of the people lingered

in the pleasant park for several hours and bought coney islands and hot dogs and candy and pop and bevo and ice cream from the hokey pokey men. Well, it was a good outing, and perhaps it was a hoax on all of them.

Kasimir (Cisey) Szymansky was ten years old then. He was the son of Gabriel Szymansky the owner of the building where the Duffeys lived and a sort of partner of Melchisedech. And Melchisedech himself had taught Casey to print on the press in the back of the book store. He had also transmitted many of his ideas to the boy. That was Casey's first grab for universal power.

Of course he was a genius. He was one of Duffey's creations, though Duffey had pretty much neglected him so far. Now he would have to be accepted as something anyhow, as a churn in which butter of a particular flavor was churning and coagulating.

In later years, Cisey always said that the 'Leader' bit was an antic and a hoax all the way. It wasn't though. Letitia who saw his face as he came towards the park that evening knew that it was for real.

One day, it was eight or ten years after the Leader and the White Horse episode, Duffey looked at this Kasimir (Casey) Szymansky more closely than usual. He saw that Casey was a young man and no longer a boy. This was the day that Casey's father, Gabriel Szymansky, had died. Casey had already been to college, off and on, for some time.

This business of the kids growing up when Duffey wasn't looking had infected quite a few of the youngsters. In the true and non-linear accounts, there is never observed a strict sequence of the years, and all the Chicago years were non-linear. The Chicago series really ran for twenty-one years, from 1925 to 1946, but it never pretended to sequence. People change hardly at all over the years, and then in one minute, they are greatly changed. Attitudes and towns do not change gradually, and neighborhoods and people groups do not. They change suddenly after long times of changelessness. And so it was with the young people.

Duffey did not always have excellent rapport with Casey while the boy was growing up. Kasimir W. (Casey) Szymansky was born on October 7, 1921, so Duffey was about twenty years his senior. Casey thought more of Duffey than he did of his own father (Duffey had made him, and Casey was somewhat aware of that), but he still didn't think very much of him.

During Casey's college years, in and out of Notre Dame and Depaul and Northwestern and Marquette and the University of Chicago, he had always published a college magazine. This was invariably known as the 'Crock' or some variation of that name. And when Casey went no more to college, for he never finished, he moved the last of the 'Cocks' to the back room of Duffey's book store and brought it out there on the little press. It quickly reached a few dozen people around the country with eyes for issues and tendencies. It even became known, in a sort of a way, so that Casey was ticketed by recruiters for future reference. Casey, at this time, had come into money and property from his father's estate.

So much for that. But the Crock would play a part in the difficulties of Duffey as well as in the difficulties of Casey Szymansky.

Now, twas a fact that Casey was a talismanic child of Melchisedech Duffey. And just how much reality was there in this business of talismanic persons? Is there a difference between a person made out of ordinary clay and a person made out of talismanic clay? Was Duffey more than a Pate, a Kumanek, a Nonos, a Nasho, an Athair Baiste, a Sponsor, a Padrino, a Godfather? There are hints forever of non-species sponsors, fairy godmothers and such who have special power over infants. Is that of a creating sorcerer to his creatures the same relationship? God knows. But it is a relationship that is not without its effect.

Well Duffey did have, much of the time, special talents. No human

person can see the future clear and uncompromised, but many persons can see pieces of it: scenes, congruencies, cardinal happenings, particular glimpses of the minutiae of special persons, fateful crossroads, tides of persons and groups, disasters, vignettes total and detailed many years before their happening. Melchisedech Duffey had this prescient quality very strongly.

And one who can see coming happenings, even a little bit, may come to believe that he is causing those happenings. Duffey believed, somewhere in an uncensored or unaccountable part of his mind, that he had caused and was causing a certain number of people to happen and to continue to happen. These were the talisman people, and it did seem as though Duffey had some part in their creation.

Duffey was not an ordinary person. He was the Unique, the One, the Only Melchisedech. He was more than twice as old as the Wandering Jew. So he was not necessarily wrong in believing that he had special powers.

One of the faculties that Duffey would lose, for the duration of the particular episode of life that he was in, was the faculty of effectively bestowing totems or tokens or talismans. So another prop will be gone from under the bridge. Another power will be lost to him. But he was in full possession of his totemic facility when he gave out the twelve primary talismans.

The talismans were small magic objects. They were small, graven, flat, gold sticks, maybe an inch wide and eight inches long. That is one description given of a Melchisedech talisman by one designated person who said that he had seen his own talisman. But mostly, a talisman was absorbed by the small child who gripped it in his tight hand for some days until it became a part of him. And just what was graven on the talisman? "The being, the personality, the encounters, the scenario, the fate, the destiny of the person designated by the talisman, all were graven on it," so said this particular designated person.

Some time before the year 1920 or 1921, before young Casey was conceived or born, Melchisedech Duffey had given a talisman to Gabriel Szymansky for his son. This giving was within Duffey's hidden years.

Once in St. Louis, Duffey had given a talisman to his friend and associate Charley Murray to be bestowed on Charley's sister's child, a child as yet unnamed, unborn, unthought of.

It was also in St. Louis that Duffey had given a talisman to Giulio Solli the monster. Giulio, as far as can be remembered, was the only person sane enough to ask for the object, the fetish, the talisman. He was the only one who understood from the beginning just what he was supposed to do with it: hold it to his wife's belly at the time of conception and often during the months of her gestation, and put it into the hands of the special son the moment he was born.

And Duffey had once given a talisman to Lily Koch to bestow on her younger sister. This sister was already born but was not fulfilled. It was a special case. That talisman was of a different shape, and it did not count in the primary twelve.

And somewhere, sometime, in the hidden years most likely or even before them, Duffey had left a talisman for a yet unborn boy in Wisconsin, and another for an unborn boy in Morgan City, Louisiana. He had given one to a job printer in New Orleans for a daughter, and one to a truckline operator in Galveston. And he had given several in Chicago, and one to a seaman from Australia.

Duffey often wondered how all this progeny of his would get together, for it was a group that he was creating. He wasn't, so far, very good at making up scenes and scenarios for these talismanic children to play.

Abraham Stein, one of the talismanic children developed a theory about all of this. It was Steins Diminishing Theory of the Duffeys and the Groups. He said that a Melchisedech had made a group anciently, that this group had then made another Melchisedech after its own preferences, that

this new Melchisedech had made a new group, and with each step the persons involved were slightly diminished. But how far down that series are we now?, Absalom would ask. If we diminish even slightly at each step, what giants we must have been once!

### CHAPTER III

The golden melon that had been Chicago in the good years had begun to show spots of rancidness and oiliness and even rot along about the year 1933. Oh, most of that thing would be good for many years yet, but there were soft spots.

The depression began on March 6, 1933. That was the symbol and arena of the new rancidness. It was, as Tony Apostolo said, a contrived thing created by a group of crooked men playing at being crooked gods.

But hadn't the depression begun back in 1929? What, have we one of those in here. No, it didn't begin back then, not really. Here, let Tony Apostolo tell how it all went. Tony was a partisan of very many things. He was extravagant in his opinions and statements; but most often he was able to back up his extravagant statements with facts or with three-quarters facts.

"There is the black legend that the depression began in October or November of 1929. It's a manufactured legend of unsavory instigation, but today it stands almost unchallenged. I challenge the legend right now. It's astonishing that it could ever have been accepted. Here is a nation that has lived through these sharp and bright and recent years. Here is a people who should have known what happened to them in their day-to-day awareness. But then somebody conics along and tell them 'It wasn't that way at all: it was this way'. And the nation listens to the screed of false history and says 'Well, we don't remember anything like that, but if you say it happened, that way then we will have to accept it. We are wrong and you are right and our memories ere false. Who are you anyhow? Oh, we aren't allowed to know that?' The question of who these falsifiers are is still not answered, but the falsifications are accepted."

"You talk tripe!" Rollo McSorley swore savagely. Rollo was a partisan of all things opposite to Tony's things. There were about a dozen persons talking together this day at Melchisedech Duffey's. "It's said that the depression began with the stock market crash in 1929," Tony continued. "I was in New York then working for the old International News Service, and I noticed that the reports of certain persons as to what was happening did not have much point of contact with what really was happening. Oh, the market busted, but it didn't carry very much with it when it went down. In particular it didn't carry any jumpers-out-of-the-windows with it, though the window-jumping suicides remain a showy part of the legend.

"I was there. I checked out that part of it at the time. We used to get an average of about sixteen suicides a day in New York. The numbers rose and fell, and I knew why they did. People kill themselves out of boredom when it verges onto hysteria, and for no other reason. When there was something interesting going on, people did not kill themselves in great numbers. When there was not much of interest going on, people did tend to kill themselves more readily. The market bust was interesting, as a world series is interesting, as a big flood or a big fire or a big murder is interesting, or the beginning of a war.

"On October 24, 1929, the day of the market bust, there were eleven suicides in New York, none of them by jumping out of windows. The next day, October 25, when it was realized that something interesting was happening in the market, the suicides fell to four. On the 26th, there were two, on the 27th, there were three (but that was a three-way suicide pact of a personal nature), on the 28th there was one, and on the 29th and 30th, there were none at all. The first time in eleven years that the city had gone two days in a row without a suicide. On the 31st, there were five, on the first of November, there were seven, and thereafter, they rose back to normal. There

had not been any suicide that could be traced to losses on the market."

"You are going to get hurt talking like that," Rollo McSorley said.

"You're sure going to get hurt talking like that." McSorley and Apostolo were both newspapermen.

"But there is a legend of ten thousand suicides caused by the market crash in New York," Tony continued. "It's true that there were ten thousand cartoons of men suicide-jumping out of windows. And there were ten thousand cheap shot orators and politicians screaming about the suicides. But there weren't any suicides."

"You sure can get hurt talking like that," McSorley said, and he was serious. "You can get killed talking like that."

"The depression finally came on March 6 of 1933, this year," said Adrian Hilton, a banker and an older brother of Sebastian Hilton, "and were those vested interests ever glad to see it come! They had worked so hard to bring it about! The depression came with the bank moratorium of March 6th to 9th."

"You know the comic strip of the wild detective tracking down the purchasers of cans of poisoned beans to keep them from eating them. He shoots all of them through the head just in time to stop them. The purchasers are all dead then, but they aren't dead from eating poisoned beans. That's the way it was with the banks last spring.

"Some of the banks were shakey. Some of them were overloaded. A very few were in actual danger of failure. So all of the banks were forced to close. And only the political pure and amenable banks were ever allowed to open again. Quite a few thousand of the banks were looted completely; the new dynasty that had taken over the country had to get billions of sly money from somewhere. And most of the banks that were not allowed to reopen have never seen their records or assets since then. Some of the bankers objected to being robbed so summarily. Those who objected the loudest were murdered."

"You lie in your fool throat, Adrian!" Rollo McSorley howled out.

"Maybe the legend of the murdered bankers is on par with the legend of the market-bust suicides, Adrian," Melchisedech Duffcy suggested. "Were there really any cases of it?"

"Yes there were, Duffey," Hilton said. "More than four hundred such cases."

"Name one," McSorley cried out. "Name just one who was murdered for making a noise about it."

"My father," said Adrian Hilton. "They killed his favorite bank. And then they killed him. We have other banks in our family, but we haven't any other father."

"You lie again," McSorley charged. "Your father was killed by a husband who was jaalous of him. And he had a reason to be jealous."

Adrian Hilton and Rollo McSorley had a fist fight then. It was a large and free-swinging fight. Both of these men were gymnasium fighters and the fight was a whanger. And after Melchisedech and others had broken up the fight, the whole subject was dropped as being an incitement to violence. So this particular group never did arrive at a clear history of what happened to the nation in those years. And even today, there is much to be said on each side of it. The truth is on one side, and all the wordiness is on the other.

But with the coming of the depression, no matter when it began, there was one change that only the more civilized of the people noticed. One of the ancient joys had been weakened, and perhaps it was weakened forever. This was the joy of money, the joyfulness and joyousness of money. It became at least a deferred joy. And pray that it may not be deferred forever!

Joy in money is one of the primordial joys. Melchisedech had known this in his fundamental being of Boy King; and it was not entirely an evil joy. Shakespeare wrote of "Africa and golden joys". And Clough has it "How



pleasant it is to have money, heigh- ho! / How pleasant it is to have money!" And God the Father tells it "in the day of Prosperity be joyful." His crony Belloc has the version "I'm tired of life, I'm even tired of rime / But money gives me pleasure all the time."

Wealth and weal are things that are well. They are joys. And was there ever a more golden verse than, "The king was in his counting house / Counting out his money"? In the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, she is called "Tower of Ivory" and "House of Gold". These things are not allegories. They are holy and joyous wealths. Is it a vanity of God or is it a joy of God to be touched only by the gold of the gold-lined chalice?

What of Holy Poverty then? Do you still not understand, you of the leather ears? It is the best things that Holy Poverty sacrifices, and not the worst. And money is one of the best things, one of the seven joys. There is a Holy Poverty, and there is a Holy Wealth. Only devils will ever regard an unholy poverty or an unholy wealth.

"An aenemia I'll suffer if there is a dearth of gold dust in my veins," Melchisedech said once. "Well then, I'll suffer it if I must, but it will be a suffering ind a dearth."

Have we forgotten what it means to be fortunate? To be fortunated, that is one of the good things.

And yet, money wise or materiality wise, the depression wasn't important from any viewpoint. But there came a depression in immaterial and aesthetic and spiritual things that was degrading and depressing. There were other sorts of lavishness that disappeared out of the good life along with the lavishness of money. Lavishness in art was straited, and in music. The grandeur had paled. Lavishness in food and drink was lost and was not to be recovered. And even wisdom and goodness seemed to be dealt out with more miserly hands now.

"There is nothing wrong with fleshpots so long its Irish Stew is what is served in those fleshpots," Rollo McSorley used to say. There had come a time when Rollo and Josephine McSorley were forever urging Duffey to indulge in the fleshpots. There was a row of particularly gaudy fleshpots on Randolph Street. Yes, they were the opposite of grand; they were gaudy. Letitia went along with Duffey and a bunch of them a few times, and then she would refuse it.

"There is something quite a bit wrong with those places," she would say. "You can talk all you want to about the broad view and the narrow view, but those places are stifling bogs. I am going to have to take some third looks at a lot of things around here if my friends are hanging out in places like those."

"These are the green years that we're living in now, aren't they?" Duffey asked, trying to reason with himself and his wife and some of his friends. "Well then, we should provide ourselves with green places for our amusement. But are these prices 'Fiddlers' Greens'? Are they 'Thelemes'?"

"Duffey, those places are old fashioned," Shirley Israel told him. "They just aren't in it with 'Herm's' and the 'Curley Q' and 'Seven Steps Down' and 'Blow Brass' and 'The Farmer's Daughter' and the 'Dung Heap'. These places are where all the real people are going now. These, and a few other places make up 'Fleshpot Row'."

"And the only place where they still have real Chicago-Hot Jazz is on 'Fleshpot Row'," Rollo McSorley said. Rollo had wooden ears, as a matter of fact, and he didn't know one jazz from another. But there was some slight truth in his statement. Since the speakeasies had turned or closed into legal saloons (this was probably in 1934 or 1935 that Rollo and his gang used to lead Duffey to the pots) there weren't a lot of places where one could still hear really bad music. There never had been any doubt about the worthlessness of Chicago-hot: "But it's our kind of worthlessness," Elmo Sheehan used to say. The Hot had just been kicked out of the back door labeled 'To the Trash Cans' when it came back in again by another door

labeled 'Nostalgia'.

"I understand that your own place in St. Louis is quite like this," Ben Israel said once as several of them ate supper at the 'Curley Q'.

"No, it is not," Duffey maintained. "Though that place had nearly passed out of my hands now, yet I know that it would never indulge in some of the things that are indulged in here. Better things and just possibly worse things it might indulge, but these particular sicknesses it would not accept."

But there was a wit with a new flavor about those places. There was a fever for newness all along the row. The food was good, though sometimes of a squeamish aspect that was hard to define. The drinks were good when they did not have an illicit needle in them. The music was Chicago-hot right enough, but it emphasized everything that was wrong with the Hot. The loose people drifting about were really loose.

"I'll come no more to this place nor to any of them on the row," Demetrio Gulch announced suddenly one evening, and he rose from the table. "It's nothing but a stifling bawdy house. There are good supper clubs to be had; there are good music halls and dance halls; there are good saloons and good honkey beer halls. There are places where fine talk may still be found. But this place is good for nothing. I've had my fill."

Demetrio rose to go, and they derided him with their wit and contempt that had toggle barbs on it. Olivia Hallahan, Shirley Israel, Alice Calumet, Josephine McSorley, those women hissed at him like she-addressee. All of them except Margery Redfox.

"Coming, Duffey?" Demetrio asked as he stood in that archway between the dining room and the entrance hall.

"Ah, not quite yet, Demetrio," Duffey told him. "I'll just finish my supper first." And Demetrio looked at Duffey with a weird sort of doubt and disappointment that would stand between these two henceforth.

Larry and Olivia Hallahan, Ben and Shirley Israel, Margery Redfox, Elmo Sheehan, John and Alice Calumet, Rollo and Josephine McSorley, and Duffey, they finished a really good supper. There was a comedian who was fair funny there. He was a natural, and yet he picked up a raunchy style that was unnatural. He had a tortured face behind some of his twisted jokes, a laugh-clown-laugh flesh mask.

Duffey had enough of the libertine in him already. This organized enticement was dangerous for him. He had enough trouble handling the liquor and the girls. The dope and the boys must not ever be for him. There had been certain sorcerers of these two advocacies whom he had not allowed to live when he had been Boy King so long ago. And if he had to let them live now, at least he wouldn't live with them.

Duffey rose, tardily it's true, and left in disgust. So those women and their slightly womanish men hissed at Duffey as they had at Demetrio a few moments before, with literal venom.

But later they would come after Duffey again with enticements and strings. They had designs on Duffey and they would not let him get clear.

Duffey performed his last public act of magic on November 8 of the year 1935. Oh, and it was almost his first public act of magic too, after his childhood or childhoods. Duffey was not a Charley Murray, to be doing magic tricks always. He was a real magician who concealed his magic. Real magic is not the sort of thing that one does for the public unless one is a Messiah. Magic is not given for the entertainment of swine or of the swine that is in everybody. The showboat stuff simply isn't in accord with the genuine article. A mixed company was talking at Duffey's one evening, and Morris Poor (Doctor Morris Poor, he had recently become) was expressing doubts as to Duffey having any of his hinted unusual powers.

"Melchisedech, I believe that you are insane," Doctor Morris Poor said. "There are little pieces of insanity floating up to the surface of you constantly. You have a doubled, even a tripled personality. You believe special and legendary things about yourself. Those things will split you

wide open. They will kill you. No person can maintain too many realities. There's no other possibility to be considered: you are insane, Duffey."

The people of this mixed company looked at Morris with some distaste and astonishment. Judley and Pauline Peacock were present, Charlotte Garfield, Mary Lightfoot, Helen Batavia, Dan and Nan Donovan, two younger persons whose names will not be given at the moment, Mary Kay Pack, Hierome Groben, Demetrio Glauch, Tony and Evelyn Apostolo, Sebastian Hilton and his Countess Margaret, Rollo and Josephine McSorley, Elena O'Higgins, Ben and Shirley Israel, d'Alesandro, Margery Redfox. And Letitia Duffey and Lily Koch. And of course Melchisedech himself. They all looked at this Morris Poor who had thrown a sort of challenge.

"I believe that I am as sane as most persons, as sane as anybody here," Duffey said. "But I can understand why there should be doubts about me. Yes, I do believe some special and legendary things about myself, but they are not imaginary things. Yes, it is difficult to maintain several realities, but I do it as well as I can. As many realities as are given to me cannot be too many realities. And persons have been split open before and have been killed. But I will not accept it from you that I am insane."

"You told the once of fantasies that you had about giant hands that would come to your aid when commanded, and that could perform almost anything that was required," Morris Poor said.

"I didn't tell you any such fantasy. I told you such a fact."

"You maintain that it's true!" Morris demanded in a forensic sort of manner.

"True, yes, true," Duffey and. "I am a magus and I have magic powers. But I may not use them without a reason. You are not a reason, Morris."

"My challenge is a reason," the newly-doctored Poor said. "You claim that you can order the navigable giant hands to move things." "Things. Yes, I suppose so. Things," Melchisedech said.

"To move mountains, Duffey, you fake?"

"A mountain's a little big, Morris, though I suppose it could be done. I could move a mule, maybe, if there was good reason to move a mine. Now drop the subject."

"No. Continue the subject, Morris," Rollo McSorley instigated.

"There is good reason to move a mule, Duffey," Doctor Poor said. "And the reason is that you're a fraud if you don't do it."

"Ah, I'm a fraud nine times a day," Duffey said, "but I'm not a fraud in this." Shirley Israel had been plying the company with a new liquor or mixture. She decided that things should get riper here.

"I will bet one hundred dollars that he can't do it," Rollo said.

"I will bet one hundred dollars that he can," Tony Apostolo covered the bet. "I take you on it, Rollo. You are wrong in this is you are wrong in everything."

"Fascist, it is a bet!" Rollo spat.

Lily and Letitia led the conversation to other channels, but it kept coming back.

"Does anybody know where the nearest mule can be found?" Margery Redfox asked.

"Now we're getting somewhere," Tony Apostolo said. "Over by the Traffic Trestle. The street department still uses a few of them to pull the slip-shovels, and they're using some of them there this week. They're moving dirt and putting it in some new kind of reinforcements. The underpinnings of the Trestle keep getting wrecked."

"Drink up, folks," Shirley said. "I have something new I want you all to try."

"I thought this was new," Lily said.

"One more additive will make it perfect, I believe," Shirley said.

"You will all love it."

"Not for a bet, Luffy Duffey," sister-in-law Lily said. "Not for a

notion. Only for need. And I don't believe there is a real need for you to move a mule by magic."

"I know," Duffey said. "But there may be need to blow down the blow-mouths."

"There's no such need, man of my heart," Letitia assured him. "And besides there will not be any proof. Oh, you will do it, and the crowd will see you do it. But someone will addle the wits of all of them, because such private powers are not meant to be published outside of the kingdom."

"Let it go, Duffey," said Mary Lightfoot who was always a peacemaker, as was her husband Isaac who was absent this evening however. "We are supposed to let the blow-mouths bloom along with the good people until the harvest time at the end of the world. And then they will be cut and bundled apart and burned in inquenchable fire."

"It's too long to wait," Duffey said.

"But let us not disregard how the blow-mouths come to be among us," the Countess Margaret contributed. "Let us remember who sowed them. Do not forget that 'an enemy has done this'."

"Hold your mouth, skinny woman," Morris Poor said to the Countess.

"And you keep yours shut too, skinny man," Rollo McSorley said to the companion of the countess who was Sebastian Hiltoh. (Watch it there, Rollo, you don't know what you're doing.)

"Duffey, you are less than a man if you don't come and move a mule," Doctor Morris Poor declared. This new drink of Shirley Israel had struck with the force of a natural catastrophe.

"He is less than a man if he doesn't come to the Traffic Trestle right now," Rollo McSorley stated in red-eyed wrath.

"Ah well, maybe I'm less than a man then, but I'm more of a man than the two of you together, Morris and Rollo. Little creatures, we will go over to the Traffic Trestle right now, and I will do one of two things. I will cause the mule to be moved. Or I will whup Rollo and Morris both at the same time. I will do whichever of these things comes first. One of them is as easy as the other."

"I'll want this thing verified and witnessed," Morris Poor said.

"I'll want representatives of the press present."

"Was there ever a more pressy crowd?" Tony Apostolo asked. "I'm a reporter. So is Rollo. And so is Elena O'Higgins. I'll call a photographer to come at once and cover it."

"I'll not trust your photographer, Tony," said Rollo. "I'll call one of my own I can trust."

"Sometimes three heads are better than two," Elena told them. "I'll call a lensman also." And these three calls and appointments were quickly made.

Twenty-seven persons piled out of the Duffey establishment in loud and unsteady fashion. They went to the Pont du Sable Traffic Trestle. Fortunately it was only a few blocks, and the party came to the lower level down under the trestle. Yes, there were three mules there, inside a little fence with the grading equipment. The three photographers arrived within half a minute of each other, and the stage was set.

"All right, Duffey, you fink, order the giant hands to come down and lift the mule and transport him across that little traffic island!" Doctor Morris Poor crackled.

"Take it easy, Mule-Doctor," the Countess said. "Duffey is no fink."

"Shut your mouth, skinny crow," Morris Poor said drunkenly.

"Duffey, you're not fit to be under a mule's tail," Rollo McSorley bawled out. "You can't do it, and that's not all you can't do."

"Blow it easier, loud-mouth," Sebastian Hilton spoke softly. "We all know who does belong under a mule's tail."

"Shut up completely, you damned runt," Rollo barked. "I whipped your lying brother and I'll whip you. Hold off that skin-and-bones harpy,

Morris."

"Easy, men, easy," Sebastian whined in that sissy half-sob that he used to pull so long ago. Duffey could almost hear the old words now, "Baw, lemmy alone, you big bully!", so Duffey knew that one part of the project would be taken care of by Sebastian, and the other would fall to himself.

Duffey lifted his head to look at the lower or Fortean sky. And he ordered a silent order. It happened just as he ordered it. It's too bad that Rollo and Morris, the two who had challenged it so loud, missed seeing it. It was their own fault.

"Don't touch my girl there," Sebastian Hilton had whined in that simulated, sissy way. And then two remarkable things happened in the same instant.

As to the one happening, twenty-four pairs of eyes and three cameras recorded twcnty-four and three slightly different versions of it. Giant hands did come down. They were seen by some and sensed by all. They took the largest of the mules under the belly. The mule howled the horrible, clattering sound that only a frightened mule can give.

"Easy there, little fellow, easy there," a huge, black-man voice whispered from the low sky, and the mule relaxed with the certainty that these were authorized hands taking him up. The mule arched his back, and he was lifted through the air; or anyhow he moved through the air, up over the fence and out of that little pen. And he came down again in that traffic island across a half-street.

The other things that happened at the same moment was Morris Poor and Rollo McSorley being blinded and felled by slashing blows from the lightning-like Sebastian Hilton. Sebastian still wore a sharply embossed ring on either hand as he had when he was a school boy. Ah, those things could cut! Ah, Sebastian was fast with his hands! What a cocky sadist Sebastian was anyhow!

The piece in the Chicago Herald and Examiner (of November 14) was a modest one, and it tried to be factual. It was done by Elena O'Higgins. It made the simple statement that a mule had been transported thirty feet, before a score of witnesses, on the night before, under the Pont du Sable Traffic Trestle, transported through the air by mysterious conveyance. It said that the witnesses gave conficting statements, but all agreed that the mule moved thirty feet through the air. The photograph that accompanied her story showed the mule in the air, but it did not show any giant hands supporting it.

The piece in the Daily News for November 14 was written by Rollo McSorley and was a bitterly facetious piece titled, "I was kicked by a flying mule." Rollo claimed that he was really kicked by a drink known as The Green Mule. He said that this drink was given to a party of people by a nefarious Jewess, and that damned if he didn't think that he wanted another drink of it sometimes. Rollo wrote: "Whatever it was that I bet, I lost my bet. Whoever I said I could whip, I couldn't. Whatever I said that somebody couldn't do, he did it." And the photo that accompanied this light-hearted story showed the mule in the air, and it showed giant hands holding it there. There were also brightish blurs here and there that might indicate some kind of double exposure. The three photographers had exchanged pictures, but the Tribune was the only paper that used all three of them.

The piece in the November 14 Chicago Tribune was done by Toiyy Apostolo. It had quite a bit of everything in it. It had statements from most of the witnesses:

"How did that mule get over the fence?" Judley Peacock had asked. "He jumped over it, that's how. I tended mules in the army and I know that a mule can outjump any horse. And the fence around that little pen wasn't more than seven feet tall. The mule jumped over the fence, and he got to the traffic island in two more jumps. On yes, there was a big black man up on the trestle, the biggest man I ever saw in my life. And he called something down to the mule. That's why the mule jumped. But the big man didn't lift

the mule with his hands. It looked as if he did, and I thought at the time that he did. But he didn't. That would be silly. That mule got there in three big jumps."

"When does a jump turn into a flight?" asked that beautiful and vulgar midget Charlotte Garfield. "That mule went thirty feet in the air, and that's all there was to it. No, it didn't exactly break it up into three jumps. It started to come down two times in between, but each time it got the elemental goad and it went up again without ever coming down to earth. Yeah, it was that big shine up there who did it. He reached down (his arm must have been fifty feet long) and put a three-stage firecracker under the mule's tail. He detonated that firecracker by voice, and every time the big coon honored, the firecracker blew another stage and the mule went up in the air again before he had come down. I tell you, you could smell burnt mule all over the place."

Really though, the evidence was pretty consistent. Three quarters of the witnesses said that it was a clear case that giant hands came down, lifted the mule, and transported it thirty feet and set it down again. That is what happened -- a quite impossible thing.

Shirley Israel never did rediscover that combination of liquors to bring them all so near to the living edge.

#### CHAPTER IV

Oh no, no, that wasn't Duffey's last public act of magic. We forgot about the frequent puppet acts that he put on, mostly for children. Melchisedech and Letitia Duffey would give these little magic puppet shows for the children. They would give them in fire stations, in community buildings of city parks, in lodge halls, in cauldrons' homes, in hospitals, in library meeting rooms, in special auditoriums, and in schools. Letitia would make some very good stringed puppets, and she could manipulate them and ventriloquise them well. Well, hers was a good puppet show in itself, and she had been putting it on for children ever since she was a child herself.

Duffey would bring only his banjo with him, and the flat-boater straw hat that went with it. For his puppets, he used local talent. He used mice.

There was an exciting difference between the actors in these Puppet Shows. The puppets of Letitia were wooden, or they were made out of twasted wire and pieces of tin cans, or they were made out of cloth. But the puppets of Melchisedech were alive and real. Mice.

Yes, mice. Local mice. Is there a place anywhere that does not have a few mice, inside its walls or under its floors or in its dark corners? It is no odd thing at all. It is almost universal.

Duffey would call for mice to come out of their crannies. And they would come, however many of them he commanded to come. Duffey had dominion over mice. They would come out, squealing fearfully. And Duffey would pick them up and place them on the table of the performance. Letitia would have token mouse costumes made, and would put them onto the mice who would now have been sweet-talked into friendly cooperation. There would be a funny hat put on one of the mice, a little jacket on another, a pair of mouse eye glasses on the third. This was to identify them in the characters they were playing. And then, the mice would take over the show and give superb performances. The Letitia Puppets would be only minor characters over against the mice majors. There is a lot of ham in all mice, and there was inspired hain in these Duffey-infused creations/contrivances. The mice would speak their lines in voice roles that could be understood perfectly. This was either first or second or third degree magic. That the mice should talk indeed would be magic of the first degree. That the voices of Melchisedech or Letitia should talk through the mice was second or third degree magic. And the way that the mice followed voice commands and made the right motions in the puppet dramas, and struck the right attitudes, that was first degree

magic.

The mice were good. The puppet plays were good. The children knew that it was all magic, and they were right. And when all the plays were finished, the mice would take off their attributes and bits of costume and set them in front of Letitia. Then, at the hand-clap command of Melchisedech, the mice would all jump off the table and scamper into the walls again, or into their places under the floors.

Duffey would end up the shows with a few tunes on his banjo. That also was magic, the noises he could get out of that little pluck-box.

The Duffeys had been giving a lot of shows in the parish schools. Then a lively little female teacher came and asked them to give a show in one of the public schools. This was the Gurdon S. Hubbard Elementary School, absolutely the newest school on the north side.

"It is so clean, it is so tight, it is so perfect, it is so new," the little teacher said, "and it would be so if you would give one of your exquisite little shows for our children."

"A public school?" Duffey questioned. "But we are not sent except to the children of the House of Israel."

"Listen, you flaming Irishman," that little teacher said. "You have it all backwards. We are of the House of Israel. You aren't. Sixty-three percent of our students are of the House of Israel. You come."

The Duffeys came. And the show started off well enough, with Letitia putting her un-live puppets through some of their stringed antics, and with Melchisedech making his banjo produce noises that were very like the fanfare of trumpets. Then a malfunction developed.

They ran into a snag as they had never run into before. Duffey had dominion over mice, and he commanded seven of them to come out and perform. And they did not come. He commanded again. Nothing. There was no refusal. What was it then?

There were no mice.

"What is the matter, Melchisedech?" Letitia asked.

"What is the matter, Mr. Duffey," the lively little female teacher asked. "You seem very perturbed over something. What is the trouble?"

"No mice."

"But I have seen your act before. There are no mice, and then you call them out of the vasty void as you say."

"That is what I say for my patter, but I really call them out of the walls and out of the floor spaces and out of the crannies. I call them here, and there are none of them to come. In this brand new, squeaky-clean abomination there is not even one mouse, not one in the whole building." "Oh, I am very proud of that," the little teacher said, "but I see the difficulty now. What is to be done?"

"Only prayer and fasting and virtual miracle will bring them when there are none," Duffey said. "I pray, I fast now for several minutes, but will they come? Open the auditorium doors and the corridor doors and the front and back door of the building. Then we will see."

"But we are very careful to keep the doors closed," the little teacher said, "or things might get in."

"I certainly hope that things will get in," Duffey said. Then he went into an intensity of concentration or prayer. The little teacher did have all the doors opened. And Letitia took Duffey's banjo and gave a little entertainment while they waited. She was good on the banjo, but she wasn't Duffey. There was some apprehension that not even the happy banjo-plucking could dispel. Five minutes went by, then seven, then nine.

Then there came into the room seven of the most out-of-breath mice you ever saw. They must have come from a long ways, more than a block, for they would never have lived anywhere in the area of the Gurdon S. Hubbard Elementary School. Those were tired and foot-sore mice. Mice usually don't travel very far in a hurry.

Duffey picked up the seven out-of-breath mice and put them on the

table.

"Quick," he told Letitia, "make seven little mouse-sized oxygen masks. I will have to revive these little fellows." Letitia made the seven little masks and put them on the mice. "But we haven't any oxygen tank with fittings small enough for these masks," Letitia said. "And there aren't any fittings on the masks anyhow. They are only paper masks, and no oxygen to go with them."

"The mice think they are real," Duffey said. "So do I. There is real oxygen going to them now or I am a rodent's uncle. See, they revive. Why had you so little faith, Letitia?"

"I don't know," she said. "I should have learned by now to have faith."

The mice were revived and were bright-eyed and eager. They suffered their token costumes to be put on them, and they went into their roles with great verve. It was one of the best presentations the Duffeys ever gave.

But just what had happened?

"Those mice don't come from around here," said a zoology teacher, teacher of the class 'Our Happy World, Zoology for the Grade School Students' as it was listed in the school prospectus. "And they don't come from a couple of blocks away either. These are Central American mice."

"We take what we can get," Melchisedech Duffey said, Magic it had been, little touches of magic, bit handfuls of magic.

CHAPTER V

Shirley Israel (Damn that woman anyhow!) was at the heart of the rumor that there were salons around the near north side that were more witty and more informative than the salon of the Duffeys. Shirley's own salon was said to be one of them. The Israels and the McSorleys and the Calumets and the Hallahaans and their crowd did not want to dump Duffey. They wanted to keep him. They were convinced, though they denied it, that there really was magic in him. They wanted to use him.

The stuff that was pushed in the more witty salons was dismal, but it stuck like cockleburs and it itched like nettles. It disturbed one. It caused swellings and sores and blood, and that was only the dragonheaded tip of the iceberg.

The whole complex, and the way it savaged Duffey, was so trashy that it will only be given in bare abridgement. Some of the persons who had sordid roles in this affair later repented of their parts. Others did not repent, either here or hereafter. They are still unrepentant in Hell to this day, and they have the reputations of being very bad actors there.

The aggressive element of the Red Decade itself (the 1930's) was strong in Chicago, but its mind sets cut across all cities and persons. It was only one of the many heads of the old monster, not the largest nor the most fearsome head. But all of those heads are deadly. Most of the university people were besworn to the red thing, and most of the newspaper people. But a person with a stout hide could repel most of the lances cast. So it went on for some years.

Casey Szymansky, the son of Duffey's old associate Gabriel and a talisman child of Melchisedech Duffey, had stopped attending colleges. The only thing that he brought out of his university experience was a small circulation magazine newspaper named The Crock. This magazine had some intellectual and cultural pretensions, and it was very opinionated. So the red rovers had tried to take it over.

They hadn't any handle to take hold of it by then, and Casey battled them, sometimes energetically, sometimes fitfully. But there was something fearsome in their persistence in trying to board and scuttle the sheet. The attempts were annoying in the way that a housefly is annoying. And then one noticed that the supposed housefly was another kind of flying creature, deadly, deadly. But things still went on for a while, and the deadly midges



weren't able to harm the Casey.

There had been a little bit of world political unease in those years. One of its earlier climaxes came a short time after the close of the Red Decade, with the entry of the United States into the global war in December of 1941. Hardly anybody remembers this minor bit of history, but it did happen.

Casey joined the U.S. Army in April of 1942 and went away to the now forgotten war. He asked Duffey to run The Crock for him while he was in service, and Duffey did so. When Duffey had the magazine, there were many talented contributors, d'Alesandro the masterly engraver, Demetrio Glauch, Hierome Groben, Ethyl Ellenberger, Thos. J. Chronicker S.J., Christopher Tompkinson, Mary Frances Rattigan (her translations were done under the name of Polly Polyglot), Mary Lightfoot, others. Some of these had contributed to the sheet when Casey had it, but now they worked with more aim and direction. And others of them were brought in by Duffey.

The peculiar people still tried to take The Crock over, and Duffey laughed at them. This went on for several years. Then a man out of left field came to talk to Duffey. He had a portfolio. The man quickly told Duffey that it would do him no good to destroy the portfolio as there were only copies in it and the originals were in another place. He also devised that it would do no good for Duffey to destroy him, the man with the portfolio, as friends knew where he had gone, and they were standing by. In fact, the man said, if they did not hear from him by telephone every five minutes while he was in Duffey's place, they would break down the doors and come to the rescue.

This was a peculiar business. The man with the portfolio was larger than Duffey and no more than his age. Duffey was something of a battler, but he seldom assaulted visitors. Duffey threw open the door of his place and propped it open. The friends of the man wouldn't need to break down the doors to come in to the rescue. Then Duffey pulled his phone out of the phone jack and carried it to another room. Duffey had a nonstandard phone that coupled by a plug-in phone jack to the lines. This meant that the friends would not get any calls and that they would come in five minutes or so. Then Duffey took the portfolio away from the man and sat down to examine it.

It was mostly full of photographs. Duffey went through them with a sort of puzzled laughter. "Why?" he asked, "Why, who would be so interested in my private doings? I'm not that interesting a person." The puzzlement grew stronger and the laughter weaker. Duffey himself was in every one of the pictures, or at least (in the case of several of the dimmer ones) there was writing on the face of the photograph identifying Duffey as being in them. Some of the photographs had to be more than ten years old. "Why, why?" Duffey asked. Some of the pictures showed Duffey in middling compromising situations.

Many of the pictures were of Duffey and the various young girls carrying on upon that old black leather sofa in the book store. They showed him having dirty fun with Mary Frances Rattigan and Mary Catherine Carruthers, and Mary Jean, and Ethyl Ellenberger. It showed him playing the funny uncle with them from the time they were eight or ten years old.

"It had to be that little kid Hugo Stone," Duffey said. "He always had a camera with him, and he was always popping up in odd corners of the store. But how could he have known then, so long ago, that you could have use of these to blackmail me now?"

"Hugo was always a smart boy," the man said. "He is of my own kindred. He knew enough to accumulate and keep everything that might possibly be of future use."

There were later pictures of Duffey with grown women in various places, some of them in his very own rooms. Who had planted a camera in his own place? Who could come and go in the Duffey quarters? Only about two hundred persons, that's all. The pictures showed Duffey carrying on a little

bit with Countess Margaret Hochfelsen and with that mendacious midget Charlotte Garfield. But it wasn't serious carrying on with those two. Others showed him playing the funny lover with Mona Greatheart and Shirley Israel and Josephine McSorley and Catherine Quick and Elena O'Higgins and Beverly Boyd and Mary Lightfoot and Jenny Reid. And yet, there wasn't anything so very outrageous about any of them either. "Who was the assiduous cameraman of these," Duffey said. "They are taken in a dozen places. Who has been so busy with this hobby?"

And one of the pictures showed (Oh, no, no, no, that wasn't at all what it seemed to be: why cannot a photograph show what is all in fun and what isn't?) Duffey entangled in a very funny manner of loving with his sister-in-law Lily Koch. The only flagrante picture in the whole portfolio was of Duffey and Shirley Israel. And that was an entrapment, a badger game trick, a sneak attack. But several of the others had a little bit of heat in them and they did not seem to have any innocent explanations.

"Well, what are you going to do with them?" Duffey asked stiffly.

"Oh, we hope that we will not do anything with them," the man said. "It is just that some of us want to join with you in the excellent little magazine you are running, and you have not welcomed us with open arms. We do not want to join in from hope of money gain. We will bring in money, not take it out. And we will enlarge the magazine. But it is an idea magazine, and we want our ideas to be in it."

"Who are you going to blackmail me to?"

"Oh, to your wife, and to others."

"You're wasting your time," Duffey said. "My wife can read my mind. She knows the things I have done. These things cannot be held against me, however they may look. I have confessed the few guilty things among them and I have been absolved of them. And any guilt I ever had in them, either in fact or in appearance, is gone now. It is all past."

"Some of these pictures, you most know, are not too old."

"Some of my confessings and absolvings are not too old either."

"Ah, but will your wife absolve you?"

"Certainly she will. I will explain to her that I am clear of all these things now, and that she must hold me clear of them. But she already knows this. I am, in fact, a changed man for some two years now."

"Changed man, you had not yet changed when these pictures were taken. And I will bet that your wife takes a very unchanged view of them when she sees them."

The friends of the portfolio man came in then. They had not got a call from him, and they came to see whether he and Duffey had proceeded to violence. Rollo McSorley and Elmo Sheehan were among those friends, and several others who were still half-friends of Duffey.

"Get out, all of you," Duffey said. "I'll not be blackmailed."

"Then your wife will see some of these pictures this evening," the portfolio man said.

"Why won't she see all of them?" Duffey asked. "Show all of them to her at once. Why not?"

"Oh, we will keep some of them still hanging over you," the man said. "It is more effective that way. Besides, I haven't even brought all of them in. There will always be others, until you cooperate."

"Out, all of you," Duffey ordered.

There are sterner measures that we can take also," said one of the half-friends.

"You mean the three preternatural slant-faced killers?" Duffey asked. "I wonder, do you carry spares for them?"

"Spare?"

"Yes. At least one of them will be killed at our next encounter. I thought you might want to keep the number at three. Out, all of you, out!"

"You'll be sorry, Duff," Rollo McSorley warned.

"Of course I will be. I'll become a man of sorrows for a while. But

I'll not let your camel's nose into the tent that is The Crock. And I'll not do worse things than I have been pictured as doing."

When Duffey got all of them out of there, he went for a walk. This thing was an irksome threat over him, but something was also threatening to destroy a shadow of his. To a primitive, and Duffey was always that, the destruction of a shadow is a mortal wounding of the Self.

Duffey had his shadows, and they were fleshed much of the time, or he believed that they were. He had shadows, he had fetches, he had doubles of himself. One of these doubles, who was often in a shabby sort of empathy with Duffey, lived there in Chicago. He lived only about six blocks from Duffey, but in a poorer neighborhood. And he was a poor man.

Duffey went to that house to talk to the overwhelmed man. There was nobody at the house. Then Duffey, following an intuitive path as a bound dog might, came to a shabby north end tavern and was called 'McFadden's North End Tavern'. He went in and found a despondent man who looked slightly like himself.

The man was sitting alone at a table with a half-full glass of beer in front of him. He was maybe forty years old, with short-cut hair between the colors of sandy and orange. His eyes were fire-blue, but the fire in them was tired this afternoon. His hands were always busy. They were weaving patterns in the air, and banging into each other with little jolting claps.

"Of this I am entirely innocent," the man was muttering. "I haven't done these things, and yet witnesses have seen me coming and going about them. I don't understand it at all. I am an innocent man and I don't want to understand it."

Duffey shivered, for the man's voice was quite like his own.

"You are half-shaded over," Duffy told the man. "So am I. Together we can form a window to let a little light in."

"No," the man said, but he didn't look at Duffey. "You're a devil. You bugged me once before, several years ago, or a man very like you did. There is something wrong about you. Do not sit down, I'm telling you, fellow!" And the man banged his hands together loudly and nervously. But Duffey was already sitting down at the table with him.

"I will sit here, man," Duffey said, "and I will talk to you. You owe me an explanation, though neither of us can say why." The man looked at Duffey angrily.

"A pitcher here, young McFadden," Duffey called them. It was one of those seventy-two ounce pitchers that young McFadden brought, and a glass for Duffey and a fresh glass for the other man. "And onions and other things," Duffey ordered of McFadden. "You are sure that you are innocent of it all?" Duffey asked his table mate then. "How have witnesses seen you going and coming about things if you are innocent of them?"

"It's as if there were a devil associated with me and the devil had done the things and they were reported of me," the man said. "But my wife believes the reports. This is the blow. Why have you broken off that layer of onion and cast it aside? I have a care what you do there. Isn't that layer as good as the rest of the onion?"

"The onion?" Duffey asked "Why, I wasn't noticing. I eat it a bit, then I open it up a bit, and I toy with it. You were saying that there were things about your own conduct that you don't understand, and --"

"I was saying that you cast one layer of the onion aside as if it weren't as good as the rest. Do you believe that I'm only an onion layer to you? Do you believe that I'm an inferior layer to be cast off like nothing? Well, we may go to fist bailiwick to decide which of us is the onion and which of us is the layer. I am a tornado, and you are one of my spinoffs, that's what you are, man. Oh, the other thing, is regards my wife and our relationship. I have never done one wrong thing, not one. And now I have. This afternoon I have."

"What have you done this afternoon. And what is your name?" Duffey

asked.

"Mike. Mike Melchiades, that is."

"What did you mean when you said that you had never done one wrong thing as regards your wife, but now you had?" Duffey asked.

"When she left the, I immediately went down and pulled everything out of our joint account. It wasn't much, a little over three hundred dollars. And she had probably put more into it than I had. But I was back in our rooms thirty minutes later and I got a call from the bank. My wife was there and wanting to make a twenty dollar withdrawal. I said no. I could hear her crying near the other end of the line, but I said no again. What will she do with no money at all, and her on the town with just a little suitcase? She is shy. She doesn't know how to make out. And she is broken up in the false belief that I am untrue to her. Poor people have a hard time of it. Getting mad and pulling out are luxuries that they csn never really afford. A man is like an onion there, fellow, yes. He has layers to him, and the layer doesn't care to be discarded like that. You think I'm only a layer of it. You're wrong. I'm not that. Leave me here, Devil. But if you should happen to see my wife -- Oh, but you wouldn't know my wife if you saw her --

"I would know her," Duffey said.

"Tell her to come home," the man said. "Tell her that this thing is not really broken off between us."

Duffey went out of McFaddens and walked. He suspected that the man was right. The man was the tornado, and Duffey was only a spinoff from him. Or that was the way it was part of the time. Poor people, ignorant people, low class people often have tremendous psychic power. They are tornados indeed; blind tornados. They generate terrible power, and richer people steal it from them and use it themselves.

Duffey knew that the Chicago interlude was about finished, and it had been a tolerably bright complexity of awareness and styles and livings and enjoyments and arts and immediacies. He was not overly proud, but he knew that his own dimming out from this scene would dim it a little bit for everyone there. Melchisedech and Letitia had designed their own part of Chicago as they had designed other things, other events, life scenarios, and other persons themselves. Now, as they would soon be leaving the city, one way or another, all those things would become undesigned again.

Duffey walked by the Pont du Sable Traffic Trestle that had become interior to him, a universal bridge. Several cars had just accomplished a real-life crash against some of its abutments. That meant that another part of Duffey was crippled.

"Mike!" a woman cried. "Oh, Mike!" Then she stopped confused. "I thought you were my Mike," she said.

"Go home to him," Duffey told her. "It was all a misunderstanding. He hadn't abused your relationship at all, and now he is sorry that he closed out the account."

"Somehow I couldn't possibly face him before tomorrow," the woman said, and there isn't any place that I could go."

"There are rooms on the other end of the block," Duffey said, "and low-cost eating places. You can make it till tomorrow easily." Duffey gave her twenty dollars.

"But I couldn't take money from a man in the street," the woman said.

"Be quiet, woman," Duffey told her. "It is given to you. It is not yours to ask whether you will take it. Take it and go somewhere. And tomorrow go home. And do not wonder too much about the congruence of events."

Duffey knew then that Letitia was gone, or was going from their place at that very moment. He knew that she had divined much of what had happened, though she had not yet been approached by the man with the

portfolio. She didn't want to see what it all was, and she wouldn't. But she had gone away for a while. She would have supplied, though, a good cover story for her going away, an account of a very necessary trip. What else would a priceless wife, who reads her husband's brain and heart, do?

## CHAPTER VI

About a month after this, there was a little meeting of the stockholders of the Crock. Duffey himself had a big piece of the stock of the magazine, and he had been in nice control of it all with Casey's proxy votes. But now a strange man presented a dated and signed proxy from Casey Szymansky who was still across the APO Oceans. And this proxy preempted the earlier proxy that Casey had given to Duffey before he went overseas.

The money involved, the stock involved, the equipment involved were none of them very much. The Crock was capitalized for only five thousand dollars; and Duffey, even though he had lost part of his facility for making and handling money, could have covered that quite a few times. But there wouldn't be any buying out. The strange man and his group took over the Crock and they changed its orientation.

Of course, Letitia Duffey had returned from her necessary trip before this. She still did not see the portfolio or the material in it, and she was without any interest in it. And the group had already forced Duffey out of the way on this deal. Well, there would be other deals. They would keep the portfolio of pictures, and perhaps they could find use for them some day.

It was about a year or fourteen months after the taking over of the Crock that Casey Szymansky came home. He confirmed that the orientation of the Crock had changed, that he himself would be running it again with help and suggestions from the 'group', and that Duffey was severed from it forever.

Casey said that every damned thing in the world had changed for him now. He said that he had traded souls either with the devil or with a virtual devil, and that he would maintain an entirely different way in the world thenceforth. And Duffey understood just what he was up to and how big the change in him really was.

But it couldn't be a total break between Casey and Duffey even then. Casey was one of the Duffey creatures, and Duffey couldn't repent of having made him. But Casey had grown larger than Duffey and more contrary. The Casey moon had grown bigger and heavier than the Duffey planet, and that had set up one hell of an eccentric. The whole business of Casey Szymansky must be investigated in depth pretty soon.

Melchisedech Duffey, in his 'time of trial' here, had sustenance from his quasi-brother Bascom Bagby in St. Louis. Duffey received weekly letters from Bagby. He had also received weekly letters from Bagby during his seven hidden years (there was something inexplicable about that part of it). The letters were of great intelligence and compassion. They were written in a good hand on old lined tablet paper. These letters seemed to be a part of Duffey's introspection, but they were real enough and exterior enough. And now, Bagby understood the situation without Duffey ever mentioning it to him.

"It was the revolt of the Titan was it, the first of them to revolt and attempt to overturn you? And this phase of it has been successful for him. He has thrown you out of your Chicago Olympia, and now you must descend into the world or else seek another mountain top. 'It was probably for the best,' as the man said when he had lost both arms and legs and been blinded in an accident, 'it will keep me home nights and out of trouble'. You will be coming here very soon now. You will be meeting most of the rest of this titan race that you created in moments of abstraction or absent mindedness. We never will know what you were thinking when you did it. Most of them will

like you though. I will see you in St. Louis in about thirteen days. Oh, you didn't know you were coming here then? You are."

As it had been both fashionable and expensive, during the Chicago interlude to be analyzed, Melchisedech had been analyzed by Doctor Saul Rafelson. Duffey never was released as cured by Rafelson (or Doctor Raffles, as both Melchisedech and Letitia called him). The doctor went so far as to say that there never was any such thing was a cure in these matters. This was at variance with the stated opinions of most of the other psychoanalysts.

Here are a few notes, though, that Doctor Rafelson made on the case of Melchisedech Duffey:

"The types of Duffey's fantasies are not extraordinary. They are the 'Child of God', 'Child of Gold', 'Master of Ebony Slaves', 'Master of Giants', 'The Riding King', 'The Boy King', 'The Miracle Worker', 'I am many thousands of years old', 'Successive Lives', 'Parallel Lives', 'The many-layered myself', 'The monster within', 'Living shadows of myself', 'My power to confer power', 'My power to make people', 'The company of the elites', 'The conferring of talismans and lives', and the 'But for my intervention, the world would be in deadly peril' fantasy. Who has not had all these fantasies? They are the things that are entertained by every boy of unhealthy mind.

"In only one way was Duffey out of the ordinary in his relationship to his own fantasies: He was able to articulate them exteriorily. Or to put it in layman's words, 'He makes them happen!' I have to accept this as fact. I have encountered the same thing in two other patients in past years, but not nearly so powerfully as in Duffey. Duffey believes that there are other aspects and persons of himself: and so, in consequence, there are. These may be psychic projections, or they may be the real persons captured by Duffey as satellites, possibly never having seen him. Or they may be valid and living images that have split off from him for independent existence. This was the 'Splitting Image' of popular lore. I have examined two of these freestanding images of Duffey and had them under analysis. There was no doubt that they are flesh and blood (one of them has a citation for his faithfulness as a blood donor). They are young people far above the average in mentality and body. Duffey may have wrought better in them than he has been wrought in himself.

"Duffey believes that he has made twelve of these young people (twelve was the most frequent 'works and days' number). These are not the same as Duffey's 'shadows'. Duffey must have intended these twelve independent satellites to express twelve aspects of himself. Yes, his egomania was monumental.

"Duffey believes that he was a magician and sorcerer. Of course he was. There are a lot of them active in the world, and the world does not seem to be too much the worse for it.

"Duffey was one of those rare persons who might be able to impose topological inversion on the world. This was possible both mathematically and psychically. This would be bringing about the case that the world was contained in Duffey and not Duffey in the world. Many of us in this discipline have known about such possibilities, and we have even recognized several momentary happenings of it. We call it the case of the world spending three days in the belly of Jonah, though there has never been anything like a three-day period. (In the year 1848, the whole world was contained within a young goat herder in Anatolia for twelve minutes, but mostly it was only three or four seconds on even a major inversion.) The thing may even have happened, for very brief periods, in the case of Duffey.

"Yes, Duffey believes that he molds and even creates persons. This was part of his talisman-conferring and life-conferring fantasies, but still there was slippery fact to it. It really seems as though a group of Duffey's

contingent creations were presently rustling towards congruent fulfillment. If this happens, if they get to know each other in their fullness, then these contingent creations will be living persons in life situations, and they will have been so all along. If this blows up, then they will not be, and they will not have been. If they are, then the world will have to accommodate and provide antecedents and contexts for them. This will require a terrific amount of ingenious and preternatural plot construction on the part of someone.

"I have told Duffey that he must get rid of the unrealities that surround and infest him. But a peculiarity of his unrealities was that they are solid and bodied. Duffey may well be murdered by a group of three of his unrealities. They've tried it before.

"I have been asked several times by professional colleagues to make a statement about the Duffey phenomena. They all know about them, but how could they have any except intuitive knowledge about them? How do they know that there are Duffey phenomena, and how could they have known that I might have entree to this knowledge? All right, this is a statement:

"We cannot leave this phenomena out of account or all our psychological statements will be worthless. No study of human inter-reactions, of human relations to the exocosmos, of the variable human functions of the creator-created roles, of the overlapping of the human persons in individuals and groups, of the sharing of 'persons' by individuals and groups, of the gaining and losing of reality by phenomenal persons, no such investigations can be complete if they omit evidence of the prototypical Duffey matter. It will lead right to the heart of the meaning of matter itself. It will lead there, but I will not follow it there. I'm spooked.'

Doctor Saul Rafelson"