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## THE SECOND INQUISITION

Joanna Russ

If a man can resist the influences of his townsmen, if she can cut free from the tyranny of neighborhood gossip, the world has no terrors for him; there is no second inquisition.

-John Jay Chapman

I often watched our visitor reading in the living room, sitting under the floor lamp near the new, standing Philco radio, with her long, long legs stretched out in front of her and the pool -of light on her book revealing so little of her face: brownish, coppery features so marked that she seemed to be a kind of freak and hair that was reddish black .but so rough that it looked like ,the things my mother used for .scouring pots and pans. She read 'a great deal, that summer. If I ventured out of the archway, where I was not exactly hiding but only keeping in the shadow to watch her read, she would often raise her face and smile silently at me before beginning to read again, and her skin would take on an abrupt, surprising pallor as it moved into the light. When she got up -and went into the kitchen with the gracefulness of a stork, for something to eat, she was almost too tall for the doorways; she went on legs like a spider's, with long swinging arms and a little body in the middle, the strange proportions of the very tall. She looked down at my mother's plates and dishes from a great, gentle height, remarkably absorbed; and asking me a few odd questions, she would bend down over whatever she was going to eat, meditate on it for a few moments like a giraffe, and then straightening up back into the stratosphere, she would pick up the plate in one thin hand, curling around it fingers like legs, and go back gracefully into-the living room. She would lower herself into the chair that was always too small, curl her legs around it, become dissatisfied, settle herself, stretch them out again-I remember so well those long, hard, unladylike legs-and begin again to read.

She used to ask, "What is that? What is that? And what, is this?" but that was only at first.

My mother, who disliked her, said she was from the circus and we ought to try to understand and be kind.: My father made jokes. He did

not like big women or short -hair--which was still new in places like ours- women who read, although she was interested in his carpentry and he liked that.

But she was six feet four inches tall; this was in 1925.

My father was an accountant who built furniture as a hobby; we had a gas stove which he actually fixed once when it broke down and some outdoor tables and chair ' he had built in the back yard. Before our visitor came o, the train for her vacation with us, I used to spend all my time in the back yard, being underfoot, but once we had met her ,at the station and she shook hands with my. father-I think she hurt him whets she shook hands-I would watch her read and wish that she might talk to me.

She said: "You are finishing high school?"

I was in the archway, as usual; I answered yes.

She looked up at me again, then down at her book. She said, "This is a very bad book." I said nothing. Without looking up, she tapped one finger on the shabby hassock on which she had put her feet. Then she looked up and smiled at me. I stepped tentatively from the floor to the rug, as reluctantly as if I were crossing the Sahara; she swung her feet away and I sat down. Art close view her face looked as if every race in the world had been mixed and only the worst of each kept; an American Indian might look like that, or Ikhnaton from the encyclopedia, or a Swedish African, a Maori princess with the jaw of a Slav. It occurred to me suddenly that she might be a Negro, but no one else had ever seemed to think so, possibly because nobody in our town had ever seen a Negro. We had none. They were "colored people." She said; "You are not pretty, yes?" I got up. I said, "My father thinks you're a freak."

"You are sixteen," she said, ".sit down," and I .sat down. I crossed my arms over my breasts because they were (too big, like balloons. Then she said, "I am reading a very stupid book. You will take it away from me, yes?"

"No," I said.

"You must," she said, "or it will poison me, sure as God," and from her

lap she plucked up *The Green Hat: A Romance*, gold letters on green binding, last year's bestseller which I had had to swear never to read, and she held it out to me, leaning back in her chair with that long arm doing all the work, the book enclosed in a cage of fingers wrapped completely around it. I think she could have put those forgers around a basketball. I did not take it.

"Go on," she said, "read it, go on, go away," and I found myself at the archway, by the foot of the stairs with *The Green Hat: A Romance* in my hand. I turned it so the title was hidden. She was smiling -at me and had her arms folded back under her head. "Don't worry," she said. "Your body will be in fashion by the time of the next war." I met my mother at the top of the stairs and had to hide the book from her; my mother said, "Oh, the poor woman!" She was carrying some sheets. I went to my room and read through almost the whole night, hiding the book in the bedclothes when I was through. When I slept, I dreamed of Hispano-Suizas, of shingled hair and tragic eyes; of women with painted lips who had Affairs, who went night after night with Jews to low drives, who lived as they pleased, who had miscarriages in expensive Swiss clinics; of midnight swims, of desperation, of money, of illicit love, of a beautiful Englishman and getting into a taxi with him while wearing a cloth-of-silver cloak and a silver turban like the ones shown in the society pages of the New York City newspapers.

Unfortunately our guest's face kept recurring in my dream, and because I could not make out whether she was amused or bitter or very much of bath, it really spoiled everything.

My mother discovered the book the next morning. I found it next to my plate at breakfast. Neither my mother

nor my father made any remark about it; only my mother kept putting out the breakfast things with a kind of tender, reluctant smile. We all sat down, finally, when she had put out everything, and my father helped me to rolls and eggs and ham. Then he took off his glasses and folded them next to his plate. He leaned back in his chair and crossed his legs. Then he looked at the book and said in a tone of mock surprise, "Well! What's this?"

I didn't say anything. I only looked at my plate.

"I believe I've seen this before," he said. "Yes, I believe I have." Then he asked my mother, "Have you, seen this before?" My mother made a

kind of vague movement with her head. She had begun to butter some toast and was putting it on my plate. I knew she was not supposed to discipline me; only my father was. "Eat your egg," she said. My father, who had continued to look at *The Green Hat: A Romance with the* same expression of unvarying surprise, finally said:

"Well! This isn't a very pleasant thing to find on a Saturday morning, is it?"

I still didn't say anything, only looked -at my food. I heard my mother say worriedly, "She's not eating, Ben," and my father put his hand on the back of my chair so I couldn't push it away from the table, as I was trying to do.

"Of course you have an explanation for this,'" he said. "Don't you?"

I said nothing.

"Of course she does," he said, "doesn't she, Bess? You wouldn't hurt your mother like this. You wouldn't hurt your mother by stealing a book that you knew you weren't supposed to read and for very good reason, too. You know we don't punish you. We talk things over with you. We try to explain. Don't we?"

I nodded.

"Good," he said. "Then where did this book come from?"

I muttered something; I don't know what.

"Is my daughter angry?" said my father. "Is my daughter being rebellious?"

"She told you all about it!" I blurted out. My father's face turned red.

"Don't you dare talk about your mother that way!" he shouted, standing up. "Don't you dare refer to your mother in that way!"

"Now, Ben-" said my mother.

"Your mother is the soul of unselfishness," said my father, "and don't you forget it, missy; your mother has worried about you since the day

you were born and if you don't appreciate that, you can damn well-

"Ben!" said my mother, shocked.

"I'm sorry," I said, and then I said, "I'm very sorry, Mother." My father sat down. My father had a mustache and his hair was parted in the middle and slicked down; now one lock fell over the part in front and his whole face was gray and quivering. He was staring fixedly at his coffee cup. My mother came over and poured coffee for him; then she took the coffeepot into the kitchen and when she came back she had milk for me. She put the glass of milk on the table near my plate. Then she sat down again. She smiled tremblingly at my father; then she put her hand over mine on the table and said:

"Darling, why did you read that book?"

"Well?" said my father from across the table.

There was a moment's silence. Then:

"Good morning!"

and

"Good morning!"

and

"Good morning!" said our guest cheerfully, crossing the dining room in two strides, and folding herself carefully down into her breakfast chair, from where her knees stuck out, she reached across the table, picked up The Green Hat, propped it up next to her plate and began to read it with great absorption. Then she looked up. "You have a very progressive library," she said. "I took the liberty of recommending this exciting book to your daughter. You told me it was your favorite. You sent all the way to New York City on purpose for it, yes?"

"I don't-I quite-" said my mother, pushing back her chair from the table. My mother was trembling from head to foot and her face was set in an expression of fixed distaste. Our visitor regarded first my mother and then my

father, bending over then tenderly and with exquisite interest. She said:

"I hope you do not mind my using your library."

"No no no," muttered my father.

"I eat almost for two," said our visitor modestly, "because of my height. I hope you do not mind that?"

"No, of course not," said my father, regaining control of himself.

"Good. It is all considered in the bill," said the visitor, and looking about at my shrunken parents, each hurried, each spooning in the food and avoiding her gaze, she added deliberately:

"I took also another liberty. I removed from the end-' papers certain-ah-drawings that I did not think bore any relation to the text. You do not mind?"

And as my father and mother looked in shocked surprise and utter consternation-at each other-she said to me in a low voice, "Don't eat. You'll make yourself sick," and then smiled warmly at the two of them when my ; mother went off into the kitchen and my father on to the he was lane for work. She waved at them. I jumped up as soon as they were out of the room.

"There were no drawings in that book!" I whispered.

"Then we must make some," said she, and taking a pencil off the whatnot, she drew in the endpapers of the book a series of sketches: the heroine sipping a soda in an ice-cream parlor, showing her legs and very chic; in a sloppy bathing suit and big grin, holding up a large fish;- r driving her Hispano-Suiza into a tree only to be catapulted straight up into the air; and in the last sketch landing demure and coy in the arms of the hero, who looked violently surprised. Then she drew a white mouse putting on lipstick, getting married to another white mouse in a , church, the two entangled in some manner I thought I should not look at, the lady mouse with a big belly and two little mice inside (who were playing chess), then the little mice coming out in separate envelopes and finally= the whole family having a picnic, with somethings around' the picnic basket that I did not recognize and underneath in capital letters "I did not bring up my children to test-'; cigarettes." This left me blank. She laughed and rubbed it out, saying that it was out of date. Then she drew a white

mouse with a rolled-up umbrella chasing my mother. I picked that up and looked at it for a while; then I tore it into pieces, and tore the others into pieces as well. I said, "I don't think you have the slightest right to-" and stopped. She was looking at me with not anger exactly -not warning exactly-I found I had to sit down. I began to cry.

"Ah! The results of practical psychology," she said dryly, gathering up the pieces of her sketches. She took matches off the whatnot and set fire to the pieces in a saucer. She held up the smoking match between her thumb and forefinger, saying, "You see? The finger is-shall we say, perception?-but the thumb is money. The thumb is hard."

"You oughtn't to treat my parents that way!" I said, crying.

"You ought not to tear up my sketches," she said calmly.

"Why not! Why not!" I shouted.

"Because they are worth money," she said, "in some quarters. I won't draw you any more," and indifferently taking the saucer with the ashes in it in one palm, she went into the kitchen. I heard her voice and then my mother's and then my mother's again, and then our visitor's in a tone that would've made a rock weep, but I never found out what they said.

I passed our guest's room many times at night that summer, going in by the hall past her rented room where the second-floor windows gave out onto the dark garden. The electric lights were always on brilliantly. My mother had sewn the white curtains because she did everything like that and had bought the furniture at a sale: marbled-topped bureau, the wardrobe, the iron bedstead, an old Victrola against the wall. There was usually an open book on the bed. I would stand in the shadow of the open doorway and look across the bare wood floor, too much of it and all as slippery as the sea, bare wood waxed and shining in the electric light. A black dress hung on the front of the wardrobe and a pair of shoes like my mother's, T-strap shoes with thick heels. I used to wonder if she had silver evening slippers inside the wardrobe.

Sometimes the open book on the bed was Wells's *The Time Machine* and then I would talk to the black glass of the window, I would say :to the transparent reflections and the black branches of trees that moved

beyond it:

"I'm only sixteen."

"You look eighteen," she would say.

"I know," I would say. "I'd like to be eighteen. I'd like to go away to college. To Radcliffe, I think." ,

She would say nothing, out of surprise.

"Are you reading Wells?" I would say then, leaning against the door jamb. "I think that's funny. Nobody in this town reads anything; they just .think about social life. I read a lot, however. I would like to learn a great deal."

She would smile then, across the room.

"I did something funny once," I would go on. "I mean funny ha-ha, not funny peculiar." It was a real line, very popular. "I read The Time Machine and then I went around asking people were they Eloi or were they Morlocks; everyone liked it. The point is which you would be if you could, like being an optimist or a pessimist or do you like- bobbed hair." Then I would add, "Which are you?" and she would only shrug and smile a little more. She would prop her chin on one long, long hand and look into my eyes with her black Egyptian eyes and then she would say in her curious hoarse voice:

"It is you who must say it first."

"I think," I would say, "that you area Morlock," and sitting on the bed in my m-other's rented room with The Time Machine open beside her, she would say:

"You are exactly right. I am a Morlock. I am a Morlock on vacation. I have come from the last Morlock meeting, which is held out between the stars in a big goldfish bowl, so all the Morlocks have to cling to the inside walls like a flock of black bats, some right side up, some upside down, for there is no up and down there, clinging like a flock of black crows, like a chestnut burr turned inside out. There are half a thousand Morlocks and we rule the worlds. My black uniform is in the wardrobe."



"I knew I was right," I would say.

"You are always right she would say, "and you know the rest of it, too. You know what murderers we are and how terribly we live. We are waiting for the big bang when everything falls over and even the Morlocks will be destroyed; meanwhile I stay here waiting for the signal and I have messages clipped to the frame of your mother's amateur oil painting of Main Street because it will be in a museum-some day and my friends can find it; meanwhile I read The Time Machine."

Then I would say, "Can I come with you?" leaning against the door.

"Without you," she would say gravely, "all is lost," and flaking out from the wardrobe a black dress glittering with stars and a pair of silver sandals with high heels, she would say, "These are yours. They were my great-grandmother's, who founded the Order. In the name of TransTemporal Military Authority." And I would put them on.

It was almost a pity she was not really there.

Every year in the middle of August the Country Club gave a dance, not just for the rich families who were members but also for the "nice" people who lived in frame houses in town and even for some of the smart, economical young couples who lived in apartments, just as if they had been in the city. There was one new, red-brick apartment building downtown, four stories high, with a courtyard. We were supposed to go, because I was old enough that year, but the day before the dance my father became ill with pains in his left side and my mother had to stay home to take care of him. He was propped up on pillows on the living-room daybed, which we had pulled out into the room so he could watch what my mother was doing with the garden out back and call to her once in a while through the windows. He could also see the walk leading up to the front door. He kept insisting that she was doing things all wrong. I did not even ask if I could go to the dance alone. My father said:

"Why don't you go out and help your mother?"

"She doesn't want me to," I said. "I'm supposed to stay here," and then he shouted angrily, "Bess! Bess!" and began to give her instructions through the window. I saw another pair of hands appear in the

window next to my mother's and then our guest-,squatting back on her heels and smoking a cigarette-pulling up weeds. She was working quickly and efficiently, the cigarette between her teeth.

"No, not that way!" shouted my father, pulling on the blanket that my mother had put over him. "Don't you know what you're doing! Bess, you're ruining everything! Stop it! Do it right!" My mother looked bewildered and; upset; she passed out of the window and our visitor took her place; she waved to my father and he subsided, pulling the blanket up around his neck. "I don't like women who. smoke," he muttered irritably. I slipped out through the

kitchen. --

My father's toolshed and working space took up the farther half of the back yard; the garden was spread over the nearer half, part kitchen garden, part flowers, and then extended down either side of the house where we had fifteen feet or so of space before a white slat fence and the next people's side yard. It was an on-and-offis

garden, and the house was beginning to need paint. My mother was working in the kitchen garden, kneeling. our guest was standing, pruning the lilac trees, still smoking.' I said:

"Mother, can't I go, can't I go!" in a low voice.

My mother passed her hand over her forehead and called "Yes, Ben!" to my father.

"Why can't I go!" I whispered. "Ruth's mother and Betty's mother will be there. Why couldn't you call Ruth's mother and Betty's mother?"

"Not that way!" came a blast from the living-room window. My mother sighed briefly and then smiled a cheerful smile. "Yes, Ben!" she called brightly. "I'm listening." My father began to give some more instructions.

"Mother," I said desperately, "why couldn't you-"

"Your father wouldn't approve," she said, and again she produced a bright smile and called, encouragingly to my father. I wandered over to the lilac trees where our visitor, in her usual nondescript black dress,

was piling the dead wood under the tree. She took a last puff on her cigarette, holding it between thumb and forefinger, then ground it out in the grass and picked up in both arms the entire lot of dead wood. She carried it over to the fence and dumped it.

"My father says you shouldn't prune trees in August," I blurted suddenly.

"Oh?" she said.

"It hurts ?hem," I whispered.

"Oh," she said. She had on gardening gloves, though much too small; she picked up the pruning shears and began snipping again through inch-thick trunks and dead branches that snapped explosively when they broke and whipped out at your face. She was efficient and very quick.

I said nothing at all, only watched her face.

She shook her head decisively.

"But Ruth's mother and Betty',s mother-" I began, faltering.

"I never go out," she said.

"You needn't stay," I said, placating.

"Never," she said. "Never at all," and snapping free a particularly large, dead, silvery ,branch from the lilac tree, she put it in my arms. She stood there looking at me and her look was .suddenly very severe, very unpleasant, something foreign, like the look of somebody who had seen people go off to battle to die, the "movies" look but hard, hard as nails. I knew I wouldn't get to go anywhere. I thought she might have seen battle in the Great War, maybe even been in some of it. I said, although I could barely speak:

"Were you in the Great War?"

"Which great war?" said our visitor. Then she said, "No, I never go out," and returned -to scissoring the trees.

On the night of the dance my .mother told me to get dressed, and I did. There was a mirror on the back of my door, but the window was better; it softened everything; it hung me out in the middle of a black

space and made my eyes into mysterious shadows. I was wearing pink organdy and a bunch -of daisies from the garden, not the wild kind. I came downstairs and found our visitor waiting for me at the bottom: tall, bare-armed, almost beautiful, for she'd done something to her impossible hair and the rusty reddish black curled slickly like the best photographs. Then she moved and I thought she was altogether beautiful, all black and rippling silver like a Paris dress or better still a New York dress, with a silver band around her forehead like an Indian princess's and silver shoes with the chunky heels and the one strap over the instep.

She said, "AH! don't you look nice," and then in a

whisper, taking my arm and looking down -at me with curious gentleness, "I'm going to be a bad chaperone. I'm going to disappear."

"Well!" said I, inwardly shaking, "I hope I can take care of myself, I should think." But I hoped she wouldn't leave me alone and I hoped that no one would laugh at her. She was really incredibly tall.

"Your father's going to sleep at ten," said my mother. "Be back by eleven. Be happy." And she kissed me.

But Ruth's father, who drove Ruth and I and Ruth's mother and our guest to the Country Club, did not laugh. And neither did anyone else. Our visitor seemed to have put on a strange gracefulness with her dress, and a strange sort of kindness, too, so that Ruth, who had never seen her but had only heard rumors about her, cried out, "Your friend's lovely!" and Ruth's father, who taught mathematics at high school, said (clearing his throat), "It must be lonely staying in," and our visitor said only, "Yes. Oh yes. It is," resting one immensely long, thin, elegant hand on his shoulder like some kind of unwinking spider, while his words and hers went echoing out into the night, back and forth, back and forth, losing themselves in the trees that rushed past the headlights and massed blackly to each side.

"Ruth wants to join a circus!" cried Ruth's mother, laughing.

"I do not!" said Ruth.

"You will not," said her father.

"I'll do exactly as I please," said Ruth with her nose in the air, and -she took a chocolate cream ,out of her handbag and put it in her mouth.

"You will not!" said Ruth's father, scandalized.

"Daddy, you know I will too," said Ruth, serenely though somewhat muffled, land under cover of the dark she wormed over to me in the back seat and passed, from her hot hand to mine, anther chocolate cream. late it; ~it was unpleasantly and piercingly sweet.

"Isn't it glorious?" said Ruth.

The Country Club was much more bare than I had expected, really only a big frame building with a veranda three-quarters of the way around it and not much lawn, but there was a path down front to two stone pillars that made a kind of gate and somebody had strung .the gate and the whole path with colored Chinese lanterns. That part was lovely. Inside, the whole first storey was one room, with a varnished floor like the high school gym, and a punch table at one end and the ribbons and Chinese lanterns hung all over the ceiling. It did not look quite like the movies but everything - was beautifully painted. I had noticed that ,there were wicker armchairs scattered on the veranda. I decided it was "nice." Behind the punch table was a flight of stairs that led to a gallery full of tables where the grown-ups could go and drink (Ruth insisted they would be bringing real liquor for "mixes," although of course the Country Club had to pretend not to know about that) and on both sides of the big room French windows that opened onto the veranda and the Chinese lanterns, swinging a little in the breeze. Ruth was wearing a better dress than mine. We went over to the punch table and drank punch while she asked me about our visitor ,and I made up a lot of lies. "You don't know anything," said Ruth. She waved across the room to some friends of hers; then I could see her start dancing with a boy in front of the band, which was at the other end of the room. Older people were dancing and people's parents, some older boys and girls. I stayed by the punch table. People who knew my parents came over and talked to me; they asked me how I was and I said I was fine; then they asked me haw my father was and I said she was fine. Someone offered to introduce me to someone but I said I knew him. I hoped somebody would come over. I thought I would skirt around the dance floor and try to talk to some of the girls I knew, but then I thought I wouldn't; I imagined myself going up the stairs with Iris March's lover from The Green Hat to sit at a table and smoke a cigarette -or drink

something. I stepped behind the punch table and went through the French windows. Our guest was a few chairs away with her feet stretched out, resting on the lowest rung of the veranda. She was reading a magazine with the aid of a small flashlight. The flowers planted around the veranda showed up a little in the light from the Chinese lanterns: shadowy clumps and masses of petunias, a few of the white ones springing into life as she turned the

page of her book and the beam of the flashlight moved in her hand. I decided I would have my cigarette in a long holder. The moon was coming up over the woods past the Country Club lawns, .but it was a cloudy night and all I could see was a vague lightening of the sky in that direction. It was rather warm. I remembered something about an ivory cigarette holder flaunting at the moon. Our visitor turned another page. I thought that she must have been aware of me. I thought again of Iris March's lover, coming .out do get me on the "terrace" when somebody tapped me on the shoulder; it was Ruth's father. He took me by the wrist and led me to our visitor, who looked up and smiled vaguely, dreamily, in the dark under the colored lanterns. Then Ruth's father said:

"What do you know? There's a relative of yours inside!" She continued to smile but her face stopped moving; she smiled gently and with tenderness at the space next to her head for the barely perceptible part of a moment. Then she completed the swing of her head and looked at him, still smiling, but everything had gone out of it.

"How lovely," she said. Then she said, "Who is it?"

"I don't know," said Ruth's father, "but he's tall, looks just like you-beg pardon. He says he's your cousin."

"Por nada," said our guest -absently, and getting up, she shook hands with Ruth's father. The three of us went back inside. She left the magazine and flashlight on the chair; they -seemed to belong to the Club. Inside, Ruth's father took us up the steps to the gallery and there, at the end of it, sitting at one of the tables, was a man even taller than our visitor, tall even sitting down. He was in evening dress while half the men at the dance were in business suits. He did not really look like her in the face; he was a little darker and .a little flatter of feature;

but as we approached him, he stood up. He -almost reached the ceiling. He was a giant. He and our visitor did not shake hands. The both of

them looked at Ruth's father, smiling formally, and Ruth's father left us; then the stranger looked quizzically at me but our guest had already sunk into a nearby seat, all willowness, all grace. They made a handsome couple. The stranger brought a silver-inlaid flask out of his hip pocket; he took the pitcher of water that stood on the table and poured some into a clean glass. Then he added whisky from the flask, .but our visitor did not take it. She only turned it aside, amused, with one finger, and said to me, "Sit down, child." which I did. Then she said:

"Cousin, how did you find me?"

"Par chance, cousin," said the stranger. "By luck." He screwed the top back on the flask very deliberately and put the whole thing back in his pocket. He began to stir the drink he had made with a wooden muddler provided by the Country Club.

"I have endured much annoyance," he said, "from that man to whom you spoke. There is not a single specialized here; they are all half-brained: scattered and stupid."

"He is a kind and clever man," said she. "He teaches mathematics."

"The more fool he," said the stranger, "for ;the mathematics he thinks he teaches!" and he drank his own drink. Then he said, "I think we will go home now."

"Eh! This person?" said my friend, drawing up the ends of her lips scornfully, half amused. "Not this person!"

"Why not this person, who knows me?" said the strange man.

"Because," said our visitor, and turning deliberately away from me, she put her face next to his and began to whisper mischievously in his ear. She was watching the dancers on the floor below, half the men in business suits, half the couples middle-aged. Ruth and Betty and some of their friends, and some vacationing college boys. The band was playing the fox-trot. The strange man's face altered just a little; it darkened; he finished his drink, put it down, and then swung massively in his seat to face me.

"Does she go out?" he said sharply.

"Well?" said our visitor idly.

"Yes," I said. "Yes, she goes out. Every day."

"By car or on foot?" I looked -at her but she was doing nothing. Her thumb and finger formed a circle on the table.

"I don't know," I said.

"Does she go on foot?" he said.

"No," I blurted suddenly, "no, -by car. Always by car!" He .sat back in his seat.

"You would do anything," he said conversationally. "The lot of you."

"I?" she said. "I'm not dedicated. I can be reasoned with."

After a moment of silence he said, "We'll talk."

She shrugged. "Why not?"

"This girl's home," he said. "I'll leave fifteen minutes after you. Give me your hand."

"Why?" ,she said. "You know where I live. I am not going to hide in the woods like an animal."

"Give me your hand," he repeated. "For old time's sake." She reached across the table. They clasped hands and she winced momentarily. Then they both rose. She smiled dazzlingly. She took me by the wrist and led me down the stairs while the strange man called after us, as if the phrase pleased him, "For old Mime's sake!" and then "Good health, cousin! Long life!" while the band struck up a march in ragtime. She-stopped to talk to five or six people, including Ruth's father who taught mathematics in the high school, and the band leader, and Betty, who was drinking punch with a boy from our class. Betty said to me under her breath, "Your daisies are coming loose. They're -gonna fall off." We walked through the parked cars until we reached one that she seemed to like; they were all open and some owners left the keys in them; she got in behind the wheel and started up.

"Burt this isn't your car!" I said. "You can't just--2'



"Get in!" I slid in next to .her.

"It's after ten o'clock," I said. "You'll wake up my father. Who-"

"Shut up!"

I did. She drove very fast and very badly. Halfway home she began to slow down. Then suddenly she laughed -out loud and .said very confidentially, not to me but as if to .somebody else:

" I told him I had planted a Neilsen loop around here that would put half of Greene County out of phase. A dead man's control. I had to go :out and stop it every week."

"What's a Neilsen loop?" I said.

"Jam yesterday, jam tomorrow, but never jam today," she quoted.

"What," said I emphatically, "is a-"

"I've told you, baby," she said, "and you'll never know more, God willing," and pulling into our driveway with a screech that would have wakened the dead, she vaulted out of the car and through the back door into the kitchen, just as if my mother and father had both been asleep or in a cataleptic trance, like those in .the works of E. A. Poe. Then she told me to get the iron poker from .the garbage burner in the back yard and find out if the end was still hot; when I brought the thing in, she laid the hot end over one of the flames of the stove. Then she rummaged around under the sink and came up with a bottle of my mother's Clear Household Ammonia.

"That stuff's awful," I said. "If you let that get in your eyes-"

"Pour some in the water glass," she said, handing it to me. "Two-thirds full. Cover it with a saucer. Get another glass and another saucer and put all of them on the kitchen table. Fill your mother's water pitcher, cover that, and put that on the table."

"Are you going to drink that?" I cried, horrified, halfway to the table with the covered glass. She merely pushed me. I got everything set up, and also pulled three chairs up to the kitchen table; I then went to turn off the gas flame, but she took me by the hand and placed me so that I hid the stove from the window and the door. She said, "Baby, what is

the specific heat of iron?"

"What?" I said.

"You know it, baby," she said. "What is it?"

L only stared at her.

"But you know it, baby," she said. "You know it better than I. You know that your mother was burning garbage today and the poker would still be hot. And you know better than to touch the iron pots when they come fresh from the oven, even though the flame is off, because iron takes a long time to heat up and a long .time to cool off, isn't that so?"

I nodded.

"And you don't know," she added, "how long it takes for aluminum pots to become cold because nobody uses aluminum for pots yet. And if I told you how scarce the heavy metals are, and what a radionic oven is, and how

the heat can go through the glass and the plastic and even the ceramic lattice, you wouldn't know what I was talking about, would you?"

"No," I said, suddenly frightened, "no, no, no."

"Then you know more than some," she said. "You know more than me. Remember how I used to burn myself, fiddling with your mother's things?" She looked at her palm and made a face. "He's coming," she said. "Stand in front of the stove. When he asks. you to turn off the gas, turn it off. When I say `Now,' hit shim with the poker."

"I can't," I whispered. "He's too big."

"He can't hurt you," she said. "He doesn't dare; that would be an anachronism. Just do as I say."

"What are you going to do?" I cried.

"When I say 'Now,'" she repeated serenely, "hit .him with the poker," and sitting down by .the table, she reached into a jam-jar of odds and ends my mother kept on the windowsill and began to buff her nails with

e Lady Marlene emery stick. Two minutes passed by the kitchen clock. Nothing happened. I stood there with my hand on the cold end of the poker, doing nothing until I felt I had to speak, so I said, "Why are you making a face? Does something hurt?"

"The splinter in my palm," she said calmly. "The bastard."

"Why don't you take it out?"

" It will blow up the house."

He stepped in through the open kitchen door.

Without a word she put both arms palm upward on the kitchen table and without a word he took off the black cummerbund of his formal dress and flicked it at her. It settled over both her arms and then began to draw tight, molding itself over her arms and the table like a piece of black adhesive, pulling her almost down onto it and whipping one end around the table edge until the wood almost cracked. It seemed to paralyze her arms. He put his finger to his tongue and then to her palm, where there was a small black spot. The spot disappeared. He laughed and told me to turn off the flame, so I did.

"Take it off," she said .then.

He said, "Too bad you are in chiding or you too could carry weapons," and then, as the edge of the table let out a startling sound like a pistol shot, he flicked the black tape off her arms, returning it to himself, where it disappeared into his evening clothes.

"Now that I have used this, everyone knows where we are," he said, and he sat down in a kitchen chair that was much too small for him and lounged back in it, his knees sticking up into the air.

Then she said something I could not understand. She took the saucer off the empty glass and poured water into it; she said something unintelligible again and held it out to him, but he motioned it away. She shrugged and drank the water herself. "Flies," she said, and put the saucer back on. They sat in silence for several minutes. I did not know what to do; I knew I was supposed to wait for the word "Now" and then hit him with the poker, but no one seemed to be saying or doing anything. The kitchen clock, which I had forgotten to wind that morning, was running down at ten minutes to eleven. There was a

cricket making noise close outside the window and I was afraid the ammonia smell would get out somehow; then, just as I was getting a cramp in my legs from standing still, our visitor nodded. She sighed, - too, regretfully. The strange man got to his feet, moved his chair carefully out of the way and pronounced:

"Good. I'll call them."

"Now?" said she.

I couldn't do it. I brought the poker in front of me and stood there with it, holding it in both hands. The stranger -who almost had to stoop to avoid our ceiling-wasted only a glance on me, as if I were hardly worth looking at, and then concentrated his attention on her. She had her chin in her hands. Then she closed her eyes.

"Put that down, please," she said tiredly.

I did not know what to do. She opened her eyes and took the saucer off the other glass on the table.

"Put that down right now," she said, and raised the glass of ammonia to her lips.

I swung at him clumsily with .the poker. I was not sure what happened next, -but I think he laughed and seized the end-the hot end-and then threw me off balance just as he screamed, because the next thing I knew I was

down on all fours watching her trio him as he threw himself at her, his eyes screwed horribly shut, choking and coughing and just missing her. The ammonia glass was lying empty and broken on the -floor; a brown stain showed where it had rolled off the white tablecloth on the kitchen table. When he fell, she kicked him in the side of the head. Then she stepped carefully away from him and held out her hand to me; I gave her the poker, which she took with the folded edge of the tablecloth, and reversing it so that she held the cold end, she brought it down with immense force-not on his head, as I had expected, but on his windpipe. When he was still, she touched the hot end of the poker to several places on his jacket, passed it across where his belt would be, and to two places on both of his shoes. Then she said to me, "Get out."

I did, but not before I saw her finishing the job on his throat, not with the poker but with the thick heel of her silver shoe.

When I came back in, there was nobody there. There was a clean, rinsed glass on the drainboard next to the wooden sink and the poker was propped up in one corner of the sink with cold water running on it. Our visitor was at the stove, brewing tea in my mother's brown teapot. She was standing under the Dutch cloth calendar my mother, who was very modern, kept hanging on the wall. My mother pinned messages on it; one of them read "Be Careful. Except for the Bathroom, More Accidents Occur in the Kitchen Than in Any Other Part of the House."

"Where-" I said, "where is-is-"

"Sit down," she said. "Sit down here," and she put me into his seat at the kitchen table. But there was no one anywhere. She said, "Don't think too much." Then she went back to the tea and just as it was ready to pour, my mother came in from the living room, with a blanket around her shoulders, smiling foolishly and saying, "Goodness, I've been asleep, haven't I?"

"Tea?" said our visitor.

"I fell asleep just like that," said my mother, sitting down.

"I forgot," said our visitor. "I borrowed a car. I felt ill. I must call them on the telephone," and she went out onto the hall, for we had been among the first to have a she phone. She came back a few minutes later. "Is it all right?" said my mother. We drank our tea in silence.

"Tell me," said our visitor at length. "How is your radio reception?"

"It's perfectly fine," said my mother, a bit offended.

"That's fine," said our visitor, and then, as if she couldn't control herself, "because you live in a dead area, you know, thank God, a dead area!"

My mother said, alarmed, "I beg your pardon"

"Excuse me," said our visitor, "I'm ill," -and she put her cup into her saucer with a clatter, got up and went out of the kitchen. My mother put one hand caressingly over mine.

"Did anyone . . . insult her at the dance?" ,said my mother, softly.

"Oh no," I said.

"Are you sure?" my mother insisted. "Are you perfectly sure? Did anyone comment? Did anyone say anything about her appearance? About her height? Anything that was not nice?"

"Ruth did," I said. "Ruth said she looked like a giraffe." My mother's hand slid off mine; gratified, she got up and began to gather up the tea things. She put them into the sink. She clucked her tongue over the poker and put it away in the kitchen closet. Then she began to dry the glass that our visitor had previously rinsed and put on the drainboard, the glass that had held ammonia.

"The poor woman," said my mother, drying it. "Oh, the poor woman."

Nothing much happened after that. I began to get my books ready for high school. Blue cornflowers sprang up along the sides of the house and my father, who was better now, cut them down with a scythe. My mother was growing hybrid ones in the back flower garden, twice as tall and twice as big as any of the wild ones; she explained to me about hybrids and why they were bigger, but I forgot it. Our visitor took up with a man, not a nice man, really, because he worked in the town garage and was Polish. She didn't go out but used to see him in the kitchen at night. He was a thickset, stocky man, very blond, with a real Polish name, but everyone called him

Bogalusa Joe because he had spent fifteen years in Bogalusa, Louisiana (he called it "Loosiana") and he talked about it all the time. He had a theory, that the colored people were just like us and that in a hundred years everybody would be all mixed up, you couldn't tell them apart. My mother was very advanced in her views but she wouldn't ever let me talk to him. He was very respectful; he called her "Ma'am," and didn't use any bad language, but he never came into the living room. He would always meet our visitor in the kitchen or sometimes on the swing in the back garden. They would drink coffee; they would play cards. Sometimes she would say to him, "Tell me a story, Joe. I love a good story," and he would talk about hiding out in Loosiana; he had had

to ; hide out from somebody or something for three years in . the middle of the Negroes and they had let him in and let shim work and took care of him. He said, "The coloreds are like anybody." Then he said, "The nigras are smarter. They got to be. They ain't nobody's fool. I had a black girl for two years once was the smartest woman in the world. Beautiful woman. Not -beautiful like a white, though, not the same.

"Give us a -hundred years," .he added, "and it'll all be mixed."

"Two hundred?" said our visitor, pouring coffee. He put a lot of sugar in his; then he remarked that he had: learned that in Bogalusa. She sat down: She was leaning her elbows on the table, smiling at him. She was stirring her own coffee with a spoon. He looked at her a moment, and then he said softly:

"A black woman, smartest woman in the world. You're' black, woman, ain't you?" .

"Part," she said.

"Beautiful woman," he said. "Nobody knows?"

"They know in the circus," she said. "But there they don't care. Shall I tell you what we circus people -think of x you?"

"Of who?" he said, looking surprised.

"Of all of you," she said. "All who aren't in the circus. `All who can't do what we can do, who aren't the biggest or the best, who can't kill a man barehanded or learn a, new language in six weeks or slit a man's jugular at fifteen yards with nothing but a pocketknife or climb the Greene County National Bank from the first storey to the .sixth with no equipment. I can do all that."

"I'll be damned," said Bogalusa Joe softly.

"We despise you," she said. "That's what we do. We think you're slob. The scum of the earth! The world's fertilizer, Joe, that's what you are."

"Baby, you're blue," he said. "You're blue tonight," and then he took her hand across the table, but not the way they did it in the movies, not the way they did it in the books; there was a look on his face I had never

seen on anyone's before, not the high school boys when .they put a line over on a girl, not on grown-ups, not even on the brides and grooms because all that was romantic or showing off or "lust" and he only looked infinitely kind, infinitely concerned. She pulled .her hand out of his. With the same faint, detached smile she had had all night, she pushed back her chair and stood up. She said flatly:

"All I can do! What good is it?" She shrugged. She added, "I've got to leave tomorrow." He got up .and put his arm around her shoulders. I thought that looked bad because he was -actually -a couple of inches shorter than she was.

He said, "Baby, you don't have to go." She was staring out into the back garden, as if looking miles away, miles out, far away into our vegetable patch or our swing or my mother's hybrids; into something nobody could see. He said urgently, "Honey, look-" and then, when she continued to stare, pulling her face around so she had to look at him, both his broad, mechanic's hands under her chin, "Baby, you can stay with me." He brought his face closer to hers. "Marry me," he said suddenly. She began to laugh. I had never heard her laugh like that before. Then she began to choke. He put his arms around her and she leaned against him, choking, making funny noises like someone with asthma, finally clapping her hands over her face, then biting her palm, heaving up and down as if she were sick. It took me several ,seconds to realize that she was crying. He looked very troubled. T ey stood there: she cried, he, distressed-and I hiding, watching all of it. They began to walk slowly toward the kitchen door. When they had gone out and put out the light, I followed

them out into the back garden, to the swing my father had rigged up under the one big tree: cushions and springs to the ground like a piece of furniture, big enough to hold-' four people. Bushes screened it. There was a kerosene lantern my father had mounted on a post, but it was out. I could just about see them. They sat for a few minutes, saying nothing, looking up through .the tree into the darkness. The swing creaked a little as our visitor crossed and uncrossed her long legs. She took out a cigarette and lit it, their faces with even that little glow: an orange spot that wavered up and down as she smoked, making the darkness more black. Then it disappeared. She had ground it out underfoot in the grass. h could see them. again. Bogalusa Joe, the garage mechanic, said:

"Tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow," she said. Then they kissed each other. I liked that; it was



all right; I had seen it before. She--' leaned back against the cushions of the swing and seemed; to spread her feet in the invisible grass; she let her head and arms fall back onto tile cushion. Without saying a word, he lifted her skirt far above her knees and put his .' hand between her legs. There was a great deal more of the same business and I watched it all, from the first twisting to the stabbings, the noises, the life-and-death -\_ battle in the dark. The word Epilepsy kept repeating itself in my head. They got dressed and again began to smoke, ,talking in tones I could not hear. I crouched in the bushes, my heart beating violently.

She did not leave the next day, or the next or the next; and she even took a dress to my mother and asked if she .: could have it altered somewhere in town. My school-:\_ clothes were out, being aired in the back yard to get the mothball smell out of them. I put covers on all my books. ' I came down one morning to ask my mother whether I couldn't have a jumper taken up at the hem because the \_ magazines said it was all right for young girls. I expected a fight over it. I couldn't find my mother in the hall or the kitchen so I tried the living room, but before I had r got halfway through the living-room arch, someone said,: "Stop there," and I saw both my parents sitting on two chairs near the front door, both with their hands in their laps, both staring straight ahead, motionless as zombies.

I said, "Oh for heaven's sake, what're you-"

"Stop there," said the same voice. My parents did not move. My mother was smiling her social smile. There was no one else in the room. I waited for a little while, my parents continuing to be dead, and then from some corner on my left, near the new Philco, our visitor came gliding out, wrapped in my mother's spring coat, stepping softly across the rug and looking carefully at all the living-room windows. She grinned when she saw me. She tapped the tap of the Philco radio and motioned me in. Then she took off the coat and draped it :over .the radio.

She was in .black from head to foot.

I thought black, but black was not the word; the word was blackness, dark beyond dark, dark that drained the eyesight, something I could never have imagined even in my dreams, a black in which there was no detail, no sight, no nothing, only an awful, desperate dizziness, for her body-the thing was skintight, like a diver's costume or an acrobat's-had actually disappeared, completely blotted out except for its outline.

Her head and bare hand floated in the air. She said, "Pretty, yes?" Then she at crosslegged on our radio. She said, "Please pull the curtains," and I dial, going from one to the other and drawing them shut, circling my frozen parents and then stopping in the middle of the quaking floor. I said, "I'm going to faint." She was off the radio and into my mother's coat in an instant; holding me by the arm, she got me onto the livingroom couch and put her arm :around me, massaging my back. She said, "Your parents are asleep." Then she said, "You have known some of this. You area wonderful little pickup but you get mixed up, yes? All about the Morlocks? The Trans-Temporal Military Authority?"

I began to say "Oh oh,oh oh-" -and she massaged my back again.

"Nothing will hurt you," she said. "Nothing will hurt your parents. Think how exciting it is! Think! The rebel Morlocks, the revolution in the Trans-Temporal Military Authority."

"But I-I-" I said.

"We are friends," she continued gravely, taking my

hands. "We are real friends. You helped me. We will not forget that," and slinging my mother's coat off onto the couch, she went and stood in front of the archway. She put her hands an her hips, then began rubbing the back of her neck nervously and clearing her throat. She turned around to give me one last look.

"Are you calm?" she said. I nodded. She smiled at me. "Be calm," she said softly. "Sois tranquille. We're friends," and then she put herself to watching the archway. She said once, almost sadly, "Friends," and then stepped back and smiled again at me.

The archway was turning into a mirror. It got misty, then bright, like a cloud of bright dust, then almost like a curtain; and then it was -a mirror, although all I could see in it was our visitor and myself, not my parents, not the furniture, not the living room.

Then the first Morlock stepped through.

And the second.

And the third.

And the others.

Oh, the living room was filled with giants! They were like her, like her in the face, like her in the bodies of the very tall, like her in the black uniforms, men and women of all the races of the earth, everything mixed and huge as my mother's hybrid flowers but a foot taller than our visitor, a flock of black ravens, black bats, black wolves, the professionals of the future world, perched on our furniture, on the Philco radio, some on the very walls and drapes -of the windows as if they could fly, hovering in the air as if they were out in space where the Morlocks meet, half a thousand in a bubble between the stars.

Who rule the worlds.

Two came through the mirror who crawled on the rug, both in diving suits and goldfish-bowl helmets, a man and a woman, fat and shaped like seals. They lay on the rug breathing .water (for I saw the specks flowing in it, in and out of strange frills around their necks, the way dust moves in air) and looking up at the rest with tallowy faces. Their suits bulged. One of the Morlocks said something to one of the seals and one of seals answered, fingering a ,thing attached to the barrels -on its back, gurgling.

Then they all began to talk.

Even if I'd known what language it was, I think it would have been too fast for me; it was very fast, very hard-sounding, very urgent, like the numbers pilots call in to the ground or something like that, like a code that everybody knows, to get things done as fast as you can. Only the seal-people talked slowly, and they gurgled and stank like a dirty beach. They did not even move their faces except to make little round mouths, like fish. I think I was put to sleep for a while (or maybe I just fell asleep) and then it was something about the seal-people, with the Morlock who was seated on the radio joining in--and then general enough--and then something going round the whale room--and then that fast, hard urgent talk .between one of the Morlocks .and my friend. It was still business, but they looked at me; it was awful to be looked at and yet I felt numb; I wished I were asleep; I wanted to cry because I could not understand a word they were saying. Then my friend suddenly shouted;

she stepped back and threw both arms out, hands extended and fingers spread, shaking violently. She was shouting instead of talking, shouting desperately about something, pounding one fist into her palm, her face contorted, just as if it was not business. The other Morlock was breathing quickly and had gone pale with rage. He whispered something, something very venomous. He took from his black uniform, which could have hidden anything, a silver dime, and holding it up between thumb and forefinger, he said in perfectly clear English, while looking at me:

"In the name of the war against the Trans-Tempor-"

She had jumped him in an instant. I scrambled up; I saw her close his fist about the dime with her own; then it was all a blur on the floor until the two of them stood up again, as far as they could get from each other, because it was perfectly clear that they hated each other. She said very distinctly, "I do insist." He shrugged. He said something short and sharp. She took out of her own darkness a knife—only a knife—and looked slowly about the room at each person in it. Nobody moved. She raised her eyebrows.

"Tchal grozny?"

The seal-woman hissed on the floor, like steam coming out of a leaky radiator. She did not get up but lay on her back, eyes blinking, —a woman encased in fat.

"You?" said my friend insultingly. "You will stain the carpet."

The seal-woman hissed again. Slowly my friend walked toward her, the others watching. She did not bend down, as I had expected, but dove down abruptly with a kind of sidewise roll, driving herself into the seal-woman's side. She had planted one heel on the stomach of the woman's diving suit; she seemed to be trying to tear it. The sealwoman caught my friend's knife-hand with one glove and was trying to turn it on my friend while she wrapped the other gloved arm around my friend's neck. She was trying to strangle her. My friend's free arm was extended on the rug; it seemed to me that she was either leaning on the floor or trying to pull herself free. Then again everything went into a sudden blur. There was a gasp, a loud, mechanical click; my friend vaulted up and backward, — dropping her knife and clapping one hand to her left eye. The seal-

woman was turning from side to side on the floor, a kind of shudder running from her feet to her head, an expressionless flexing of her body and face. Bubbles were forming in the goldfish-bowl helmet. The other seal-person did not move. As I watched, the water began falling in the seal-woman's helmet and then it was all air. I supposed she was dead. My friend, our visitor, was standing in the middle of the room, blood welling from under her hand; she was bent over with pain and her face was horribly distorted but not one person in the room moved to touch her.

"Life!" she gasped, "for life. Yours," and then she crashed to the rug. The seal-woman had slashed open her eye. Two of the Morlocks rushed to her then and picked up her and her knife; they were dragging her toward the mirror in the archway when she began muttering some thing.

"Damn your sketches!" shouted the Morlock she had fought with, completely losing control of himself. "We are at war; Trans-Temp is at our heels; do you think we have time for dilettantism? You presume on being the woman's granddaughter! We are fighting for the freedom of fifty billions of people, not for your scribbles!" and motioning to the others, who immediately dragged the body of the seal-woman through the mirror and began to follow it themselves, he turned to me.

"You!" he snapped. "You will speak to nobody of this. Nobody!"

I put my arms around myself.

"Do not try to impress anyone with stories," he added contemptuously. "You are lucky to live," and without another look he followed the last of the Morlocks through the mirror, which promptly disappeared. There was blood on the rug, a few inches from my feet. I bent down and put my fingertips in it, and then with no clear reason, I put my fingers to my face.

"--come back," said my mother. I turned to face them, the wax manikins who had seen nothing.

"Who the devil drew the curtains!" shouted my father. "I've told you" (to me) "that I don't like tricks, young lady, and if it weren't for your mother's--"

"Oh, Ben, Ben! She's had a nosebleed!" cried my mother.

They told me later that I fainted.

I was in bed a few days, because of the nosebleed, but then they let me up. My parents said I probably had had anemia. They also said they had seen our visitor off at the railroad station that morning, and that she had boarded the train as they watched her; tall, frizzy-haired, freakish, dressed in black down to between the knees and ankles, legged like a stork and carrying all her belongings in a small valise. "Gone to the circus," said my mother. There was nothing in the room that had been hers, nothing in the attic, no reflection in the window at which she had stood, brilliantly lit against the black night, nothing in the kitchen and nothing at the Country Club but tennis courts overgrown with weeds. Joe never came back to our house: The week before school I looked through all my books, starting with *The Time Machine* and ending with *The Green Hat*; then I went downstairs and looked through every book in the house. There was nothing. I was invited to a party; my mother would not let me go. Cornflowers grew around the house. Betty came over once and was

bored. One afternoon at the end of summer, with the wind blowing through the empty house from top to bottom and everybody away, nobody next door, my parents in the back yard, the people on the other side of us gone swimming, everybody silent or sleeping or off somewhere -except for someone down the block whom I could bear mowing the lawn-I decided to sort and try on all my shoes. I did this in front of a full-length mirror fastened to the inside of my closet door. I had been taking off and putting on various of my winter dresses, too, and I was putting one particular one away in a box on the floor of the closet when I chanced to look up at the inside of the closet door.

She was standing at the mirror. It was all black behind her, like velvet. She was wearing something black and silver, half-draped, half-nude, and there were lines on her face that made it look sectioned off, or like a cobweb; she had one eye. The dead eye radiated spinning white light, like a Catherine wheel. She said:

"Did you ever think to go back and take care of yourself when you are little? Give yourself advice?"

I couldn't say anything.

"I am not you," she said, "but I have had the same thought and now I have come back four hundred and fifty years. Only there is nothing to say. There is never anything to say. It is a pity, but natural, no doubt."

"Oh, please!" I whispered. "Stay!" She put one foot up on the edge of the mirror as if it were the threshold of a door. The silver sandal she had worn at the Country Club dance almost came into my bedroom: thick-heeled, squat, flaking, as ugly as sin; new lines formed on her face and all over her bare skin, ornamenting her all over. Then she stepped back; she shook her head, amused; the dead eye waned, filled again, exploded in sparks and went out, showing the naked socket, ugly, shocking and horrible.

"Tcha!" she said, "my grandma thought she would bring something hard to a world that was soft and silly but nice, and now it's silly and not so nice and the hard has got too hard and the soft too soft and my great-grandmother-it is she who founded the order-is dead. Not that it matters. Nothing ends, you see. Just keeps going on and on."

"But you can't see!" I managed. She poked herself in the temple and the eye went on again.

"Bizarre," she said. "Interesting. Attractive. Stone blind is twice as good. I'll tell you my sketches."

"But you don't-you can't " I said.

"The first," she said, lines crawling all over her, "is an Eloi having the Go-Jollies, and that is a bald, fat man in a toga, a frilled bib, a sunbonnet and shoes you would not believe, who has a crystal ball in his lap and from it wires plugged into his eyes and his nose and his ears and his tongue and his head, just like your lamps. That is an Eloi having the Go-Jollies."

I began to cry.

"The second," she went on, "is a Morlock working; and that is myself holding a skull, like Hamlet, only if you look closely at the skull you will see it is the world, with funny things sticking out of the seas and the polar ice caps, and that it is full of people. Much too full. There are too many of the worlds, too."

"If you'll stop-!" I cried.

"They are all pushing each other off," she continued, "and some are falling into the sea, which is a pity, no doubt, but quite natural, and if

you will look closely at all these Eloi you will see that each one is holding his crystal ball, or running after an animated machine which runs faster than he, or watching another Eloi on a screen who is cleverer and looks fascinating, and you will see that under the fat the man or woman is screaming, screaming and dying.

"And my third sketch," she said, "which is a very little one, shows a goldfish bowl full of people in black. Behind that is a smaller goldfish bowl full of people in black, which is going after the first goldfish bowl, and behind the second is a third, which is going after the second, and so on, or perhaps they alternate; that would be more economical. Or perhaps I am only bitter because I lost my eye. It's a personal problem."

I got to my feet. I was so close I could have touched her. She crossed her arms across her breast and looked down at me; she then said softly, "My dear, I wished to take you with me, but that's impossible. I'm very sorry,"

and looking for the first time both serious and tender, she disappeared behind a swarm of sparks.

I was looking at myself. I had recently made, passionately and in secret, the uniform of the Trams-Temporal Military Authority as I thought it ought to look: a black tunic over black sleeves and black tights. The tights were from a high school play I had been in the year before and the rest was cut out of the lining of an old winter coat. That was what I was wearing that afternoon. I had also fastened a silver curling-iron to my waist with a piece of cord. I put one foot up in the air, as if on the threshold of the mirror, and a girl in ragged black stared back at me. She turned and frantically searched the entire room, looking for sketches, for notes, for specks of silver paint, for anything at all. Then she sat down on my bed. She did not cry. She said to me, "You look idiotic." Someone was still mowing the lawn outside, probably my father. My mother would be clipping, patching, rooting up weeds; she never stopped. Someday I would join the circus, travel to the moon, write a book; after all, I had helped kill a man. I had been somebody. It was all nonsense. I took off the curling-iron and laid it on the bed. Then I undressed and got into my middy-blouse and skirt and I put the costume on the bed in a heap. As I walked toward the door of the room, I turned to take one last look at myself in the mirror and at my strange collection of old clothes. For a moment something else moved in the mirror, or I thought it did, something behind me or to one side, something menacing, something half-blind, something heaving slowly



like a shadow, leaving perhaps behind it faint silver flakes like the shadow of a shadow or some carelessly dropped coins, something glittering, something somebody had left on the edge of vision, dropped by accident in the dust .and cobwebs of an attic. I wished for it violently; I stood and clenched my fists; I almost cried; I wanted something to come out of the mirror and strike me dead. If I could not have :a protector, I wanted a monster, a mutation, a horror, a murderous disease, anything at all to accompany me downstairs so that I would not have to go down alone.

Nothing came. Nothing god, nothing bad. I heard the lawnmower going on. I would have to face by myself father's red face, his heart disease, his temper, his nasty' insistencies. I would have to face my mother's sick smile, looking up from the flowerbed she was weeding, always on her knees somehow, saying before she was ever asked, "Oh the poor woman. Oh the poor woman." And quite alone. No more stories.