APRIL FOOLS' DAY FOREVER

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On the last day of March a blizzard swept across the lower Great Lakes, through western New York and Pennsylvania, and raced toward the city with winds of seventy miles an hour, and snow falling at the rate of one and a half inches an hour. Julia watched it from her wide windows overlooking the Hudson River forty miles from the edge of the city and she knew that Martie wouldn't be home that night. The blizzard turned the world white within minutes and the wind was so strong and so cold that the old house groaned under the impact. Julia patted the window sill, thinking, "There, there," at it. "It'll be over soon, and tomorrow's April, and in three or four weeks I'll bring you daffodils." The house groaned louder and the spot at the window became too cold for her to remain there without a sweater.

Julia checked the furnace by opening the basement door to listen. If she heard nothing, she was reassured. If she heard a wheezing and an occasional grunt, she would worry and call Mr. Lampert, and plead with him to come over before she was snowed in. She heard nothing. Next she looked over the supply of logs in the living room.

Not enough by far. There were three good-sized oak logs, and two pine sticks. She struggled into her parka and boots and went to the woodpile by the old barn that had become a storage house, den, garage, studio. A sled was propped up against the grey stone-and-shingle building and she put it down and began to arrange logs on it. When she had as many as she could pull, she returned to the house, feeling her way with one hand along the barn wall, then along the basket-weave fence that she and Martie had built three summers ago, edging a small wild brook that divided the yard. The fence took her in a roundabout way, but it was safer than trying to go straight to the house in the blinding blizzard. By the time she had got back inside, she felt frozen. A sheltered thermometer would show no lower than thirty at that time, but with the wind blowing as it was, the chill degrees must be closer to ten or twenty below zero. She stood in the mud room and considered what else she should do. Her car was in the garage. Martie's was at the train station. Mail. Should she try to retrieve any mail that might be in the box? She decided not to. She didn't really think the mailman had been there yet, anyway. Usually Mr. Probst blew his whistle to let her know that he was leaving something and she hadn't heard it. She took off the heavy clothes then and went through the house checking windows, peering at the latches of the storm windows. There had been a false spring three weeks ago, and she had opened windows and even washed a few before the winds changed again. The house was secure.

What she wanted to do was call Martie, but she didn't. His boss didn't approve of personal phone calls during the working day. She

breathed a curse at Hilary Boyle, and waited for Martie to call her. He would, as soon as he had a chance. When she was certain that there was nothing else she should do, she sat down in the living room, where one log was burning softly. There was no light on in the room and the storm had darkened the sky. The small fire glowed pleasingly in the enormous fireplace, and the radiance was picked up by pottery and brass mugs on a low table before the fireplace. The room was a long rectangle, wholly out of proportion, much too long for the width, and with an uncommonly high ceiling. Paneling the end walls had helped, as had making a separate room within the larger one, with its focal point the fireplace. A pair of chairs and a two-seater couch made a cozy grouping. The colors were autumn forest colors, brilliant and subdued at the same time: oranges and scarlets in the striped covering of the couch, picked up again by pillows; rust browns in the chairs; forest-green rug. The room would never make *House Beautiful,* Julia had thought when she brought in the last piece of brass for the table and surveyed the effect, but she loved it, and Martie loved it. And she'd seen people relax in that small room within a room who hadn't been able to relax for a long time. She heard it then.

When the wind blew in a particular way in the old house, it sounded like a baby crying in great pain. Only when the wind came from the northwest over thirty miles an hour. They had searched and searched for the minute crack that had to be responsible and they had calked and filled and patched until it seemed that there couldn't be any more holes, but it was still there, and now she could hear the baby cry.

Julia stared into the fire, trying to ignore the wail, willing herself not to think of it, not to remember the first time she had heard the baby. She gazed into the fire and couldn't stop the images that formed and became solid before her eyes. She awakened suddenly, as in the dreams she had had during the last month or so of pregnancy. Without thinking, she slipped from bed, feeling for her slippers in the dark, tossing her robe about her shoulders hurriedly. She ran down the hall to the baby's room, and at the door she stopped in confusion. She pressed one hand against her flat stomach, and the other fist against her mouth hard, biting her fingers until she tasted blood. The baby kept on crying. She shook her head and reached for the knob and turned it, easing the door open soundlessly. The room was dark. She stood at the doorway, afraid to enter. The baby cried again. Then she pushed the door wide open and the hall light flooded the empty room. She fainted.

When she woke up hours later, grey light shone coldly on the bare floor, from the yellow walls. She raised herself painfully, chilled and shivering. Sleepwalking? A vivid dream and sleepwalking? She listened; the house was quiet, except for its regular night noises. She went back to bed. Martie protested in his sleep when she snuggled against his warm body, but he turned to let her curve herself to fit, and he put his arm about her. She said nothing about the dream the next day.

Six months later she heard the baby again. Alone this time, in the late afternoon of a golden fall day that had been busy and almost happy. She had been gathering nuts with her friend Phyllis Govern. They'd had a late lunch, and then Phyllis had had to run because it

was close to four. A wind had come up, threatening a storm before evening. Julia watched the clouds build for half an hour.

She was in her studio in the barn, on the second floor, where the odor of hay seemed to remain despite an absence of fifteen or twenty years. She knew it was her imagination, but she liked to think that she could smell the hay, could feel the warmth of the animals from below. She hadn't worked in her studio for almost a year, since late in her pregnancy, when it had become too hard to get up the narrow, steep ladder that led from the ground floor to the balcony that opened to the upstairs rooms. She didn't uncover anything in the large room, but it was nice to be there. She needed clay, she thought absently, watching clouds roll in from the northwest. It would be good to feel clay in her fingers again. She might make a few Christmas gifts. Little things, funny things, to let people know that she was all right, that she would be going back to work before long now. She glanced at the large blocks of granite that she had ordered before. Not yet. Nothing serious yet. Something funny and inconsequential to begin with.

Still thoughful, she left the studio and went to the telephone in the kitchen and placed a call to her supplier in the city. While waiting for the call to be completed, she heard it. The baby was in pain, she thought, and hung up. Not until she had started for the hall door did she realize what she was doing. She stopped, very cold suddenly. Like before, only this time she was wide awake. She felt for the door and pushed it open an inch or two. The sound was still there, no louder, but no softer either. Very slowly she followed the sound up the stairs, through the hall, into the empty room. She had been so

certain that it originated here, but now it seemed to be coming from her room. She backed out into the hall and tried the room she shared with Martie. Now the crying seemed to be coming from the other bedroom. She stood at the head of the stairs for another minute, then she ran down and tried to dial Martie's number. Her hands were shaking too hard and she botched it twice before she got him.

Afterward she didn't know what she had said to him. He arrived an hour later to find her sitting at the kitchen table, ashen-faced, terrified.

"I'm having a breakdown," she said quietly. "I knew it happened to some women when they lost a child, but I thought I was past the worst part by now. I've heard it before, months ago." She stared straight ahead. "They probably will want me in a hospital for observation for a while. I should have packed, but . . . Martie, you will try to keep me out of an institution, won't you? What does it want, Martie?"

"Honey, shut up. Okay?" Martie was listening intently. His face was very pale. Slowly he opened the door and went into the hall, his face turned up toward the stairs.

"Do you hear it?"

"Yes. Stay there." He went upstairs, and when he came back down, he was still pale, but satisfied now. "Honey, I hear it, so that means there's something making the noise. You're not imagining it. It is a real noise, and by God it sounds like a baby crying."

Julia built up the fire and put a stack of records on the stereo and turned it too loud. She switched on lights through the house, and set

the alarm clock for six twenty to be certain she didn't let the hour pass without remembering Hilary Boyle's news show. Not that she ever forgot it, but there might be a first time, especially on this sort of night, when she wouldn't be expecting Martie until very late, if at all. She wished he'd call. It was four-thirty. If he could get home, he should leave the office in an hour, be on the train at twenty-three minutes before six and at home by six forty-five. She made coffee and lifted the phone to see if it was working. It seemed to be all right. The stereo music filled the house, shook the floor and rattled the windows, but over it now and then she could hear the baby.

She tried to see outside, the wind-driven snow was impenetrable. She flicked on outside lights, the drive entrance, the light over the garage, the door to the barn, the back porch, front porch, the spotlight on the four pieces of granite that she had completed and placed in the yard, waiting for the rest of the series. The granite blocks stood out briefly during a lull. They looked like squat sentinels.

She took her coffee back to the living room, where the stereo was loudest, and sat on the floor by the big cherry table that they had cut down to fourteen inches. Her sketch pad lay here. She glanced at the top page without seeing it, then opened the pad to the middle and began to doodle aimlessly. The record changed; the wind howled through the yard; the baby wailed. When she looked at what she had been doing on the pad, she felt a chill begin deep inside. She had written over and over, MURDERERS. *You killed my babies.* MURDERERS.

Martie Sayre called the operator for the third time within the hour. "Are the lines still out?"

"I'll check again, Mr. Sayre." Phone static, silence, she was back. "Sorry, sir. Still out."

"Okay. Thanks." Martie chewed his pencil and spoke silently to the picture on his desk: Julia, blond, thin, intense eyes and a square chin. She was beautiful. Her thin body and face seemed to accentuate lovely delicate bones. He, thin also, was simply craggy and gaunt. "Honey, don't listen to it. Turn on music loud. You know I'd be there if I could." The phone rang and he answered.

"I have the material on blizzards for you, Mr. Sayre. Also, Mr. Boyle's interview with Dr. Hewlitt, A.M.S., and the one with Dr. Wycliffe, the NASA satellite weather expert. Anything else?"

"Not right now, Sandy. Keep close. Okay?"

"Sure thing."

He turned to the monitor on his desk and pushed the ON button. For the next half hour he made notes and edited the interviews and shaped a fifteen-minute segment for a special to be aired at ten that night. Boyle called for him to bring what he had ready at seven.

There was a four-man consultation. Martie, in charge of the science-news department; Dennis Kolchak, political-news expert; David Wedekind, the art director. Hilary Boyle paced as they discussed the hour special on the extraordinary weather conditions that had racked the entire earth during the winter. Boyle was a large man, over six feet, with a massive frame that let him carry almost three hundred pounds without appearing fat. He was a chain smoker, and prone to

nervous collapses. He timed the collapses admirably: he never missed a show. His daily half hour, "Personalized News," was the most popular network show that year, as it had been for the past three years. The balloon would burst eventually, and the name Hilary Boyle wouldn't sound like God, but now it did, and no one could explain the *X factor* that had catapulted the talentless man into the firmament of stars.

The continuity writers had blocked in the six segments of the show already, two from other points—Washington and Los Angeles—plus the commercial time, plus the copter pictures that would be live, if possible.

"Looking good," Hilary Boyle said. "Half an hour Eddie will have the first film ready. . . ."

Martie wasn't listening. He watched Boyle and wondered if Boyle would stumble over any of the words Martie had used in his segment. He hoped not. Boyle always blamed him personally if he, Boyle, didn't know the words he had to parrot. "Look, Martie, I'm a reasonably intelligent man, and if I don't know it, you gotta figure that most of the viewers won't know it either. Get me? Keep it simple, but without sacrificing any of the facts. That's your job, kid. Now give me this in language I can understand." Martie's gaze wandered to the window wall. The room was on the sixty-third floor; there were few other lights to be seen on this level, and only those that were very close. The storm had visibility down to two hundred yards. What lights he could see appeared ghostly, haloed, diffused, toned down to beautiful pearly luminescences. He thought of Boyle trying to say that, and then had to bite his cheek to keep

from grinning. Boyle couldn't stand it when someone grinned in his presence, unless he had made a funny.

Martie's part of the special was ready for taping by eight, and he went to the coffee shop on the fourteenth floor for a sandwich. He wished he could get through to Julia, but telephone service from Ohio to Washington to Maine was a disaster area that night. He closed his eyes and saw her, huddled before the fire in the living room glowing with soft warm light. Her pale hair hiding her paler face, hands over her ears, tight. She got up and went to the steps, looking up them, then ran back to the fire. The house shaking with music and the wind. The image was so strong that he opened his eyes wide and shook his head too hard, starting a mild headache at the back of his skull. He drank his coffee fast, and got a second cup, and when he sat down again, he was almost smiling. Sometimes he was convinced that she was right when she said that they had something so special between them, they never were actually far apart. Sometimes he knew she was right.

He finished his sandwich and coffee and wandered back to his office. Everything was still firm, ready to tape in twenty minutes. His part was holding fine.

He checked over various items that had come through in the last several hours, and put three of them aside for elaboration. One of them was about a renewal of the influenza epidemic that had raked England earlier in the year. It was making a comeback, more virulent than ever. New travel restrictions had been imposed.

Julia: "I don't care what they say, I don't believe it. Who ever heard of quarantine in the middle of the summer? I don't know why

travel's being restricted all over the world, but I don't believe it's because of the flu." Accusingly, "You've got all that information at your fingertips. Why don't you look it up and see? They banned travel to France before the epidemic got so bad."

Martie rubbed his head, searched his desk for aspirin and didn't find any. Slowly he reached for the phone, then dialed Sandy, his information girl. "See what we have on tap about weather-related illnesses, honey. You know, flu, colds, pneumonia. Stuff like that. Hospital statistics, admittances, deaths. Closings of businesses, schools. Whatever you can find. Okay?" To the picture on his desk, he said, "Satisfied?"

Julia watched the Hilary Boyle show at six thirty and afterward had scrambled eggs and a glass of milk. The weather special at ten explained Martie's delay, but even if there hadn't been the special to whip into being, transportation had ground to a stop. Well, nothing new there, either. She had tried to call Martie finally, and got the recording: *Sorry, your call cannot be completed at this time.* So much for that. The baby cried and cried.

She tried to read for an hour or longer and had no idea of what she had been reading when she finally tossed the book down and turned to look at the fire. She added a log and poked the ashes until the flames shot up high, sparking blue and green, snapping crisply. As soon as she stopped forcing her mind to remain blank, the thoughts came rushing in.

Was it crazy of her to think they had killed her two babies? Why would they? Who were they? Weren't autopsies performed on

newborn babies? Wouldn't the doctors and nurses be liable to murder charges, just like anyone else? These were the practical aspects, she decided. There were more. The fear of a leak. Too many people would have to be involved. It would be too dangerous, unless it was also assumed that everyone in the delivery room, in the OB ward, in fact, was part of a gigantic conspiracy. If only she could remember more of what had happened.

Everything had been normal right up to delivery time. Dr. Wymann had been pleased with her pregnancy from the start. Absolutely nothing untoward had happened. Nothing. But when she woke up, Martie had been at her side, very pale, red-eyed. *The baby is dead,* he'd said. And, *Honey, I love you so much. I'm so sorry. There wasn't a thing they could do.* And on and on. They had wept together. Someone had come in with a tray that held a needle. Sleep.

Wrong end of it. Start at the other end. Arriving at the hospital, four-minute pains. Excited, but calm. Nothing unexpected. Dr. Wymann had briefed her on procedure. Nothing out of the ordinary. Blood sample, urine. Weight. Blood pressure. Allergy test. Dr. Wymann: *Won't be long now, Julia. You're doing fine.* Sleep. Waking to see Martie, pale and red-eyed at her side.

Dr. Wymann? He would have known. He wouldn't have let them do anything to her baby!

At the foot of the stairs she listened to the baby crying. Please don't, she thought at it. Please don't cry. Please. The baby wailed on and on.

That was the first pregnancy, four years ago. Then last year, a repeat

performance, by popular demand. She put her hands over her ears and ran back to the fireplace. She thought of the other girl in the double room, a younger girl, no more than eighteen. Her baby had died too in the staph outbreak. Sleeping, waking up, no reason, no sound in the room, but wide awake with pounding heart, the chill of fear all through her. Seeing the girl then, short gown, long lovely leg climbing over the guard rail at the window. Pale yellow light in the room, almost too faint to make out details, only the silhouettes of objects. Screaming suddenly, and at the same moment becoming aware of figures at the door. An intern and a nurse. Not arriving, but standing there quietly. Not moving at all until she screamed. The ubiquitous needle to quiet her hysterical sobbing.

"Honey, they woke you up when they opened the hall door. They didn't say anything for fear of startling her, making her fall before they could get to her."

"Where is she?"

"Down the hall. I saw her myself. I looked through the observation window and saw her, sleeping now. She's a manic-depressive, and losing the baby put her in a tailspin. They're going to take care of her."

Julia shook her head. She had let him convince her, but it was a lie. They hadn't been moving at all. They had stood there waiting for the girl to jump. Watching her quietly, just waiting for the end. If Julia hadn't awakened and screamed, the girl would be dead now. She shivered and went to the kitchen to make coffee. The baby was howling louder.

She lighted a cigarette. Martie would be smoking continuously

during the taping. She had sat through several tapings and knew the routine. The staff members watching, making notes, the director making notes. Hilary Boyle walked from the blue velvet hangings, waved at the camera, took his seat behind a massive desk, taking his time, getting comfortable. She liked Hilary Boyle, in spite of all the things about his life, about him personally, that she usually didn't like in people. His self-assurance that bordered on egomania, his women. She felt that he had assigned her a number and when it came up he would come to claim her as innocently as a child demanding his lollipop. She wondered if he would kick and scream when she said no. The cameras moved in close, he picked up his clipboard and glanced at the first sheet of paper, then looked into the camera. And the magic would work again, as it always worked for him. The *X factor*.

A TV personality, radiating over wires, through air, from emptiness, to people everywhere who saw him. How did it work? She didn't know, neither did anyone else. She stubbed out her cigarette.

She closed her eyes, seeing the scene, Hilary leaving the desk, turning to wave once, then going through the curtains. Another successful special. A huddle of three men, or four, comparing notes, a rough spot here, another there. They could be taken care of with scissors, Martie, his hands shoved deep into his pockets, mooching along to his desk.

"Martie, you going home tonight?" Boyle stood in his doorway, filling it.

"Doesn't look like it. Nothing's leaving the city now."

"Buy you a steak." An invitation or an order? Boyle grinned. Invitation. "Fifteen minutes. Okay?"

"Sure. Thanks."

Martie tried again to reach Julia. "I'll be in and out for a couple of hours. Try it now and then, will you, doll?"

The operator purred at him. He was starting to get the material he had asked Sandy for: hospital statistics, epidemics of flu and flu-like diseases, incidence of pneumonia outbreaks, and so on. As she had said, there was a stack of the stuff. He riffled quickly through the print-outs. Something was not quite right, but he couldn't put his finger on what it was. Boyle's door opened then, and he stacked the material and put it inside his desk.

"Ready? I had Doris reserve a table for us down in the Blue Light. I could use a double Scotch about now. How about you?"

Martie nodded and they walked to the elevators together. The Blue Light was one of Boyle's favorite hangouts. They entered the dim, noisy room, and were led to a back table where the ceiling was noise-absorbing and partitions separated one table from another, creating small oases of privacy. The floor show was visible, but almost all the noise of the restaurant was blocked.

"Look," Boyle said, motioning toward the blue spotlight. Three girls were dancing together. They wore midnight-blue body masks that covered them from crown to toe. Wigs that looked like green and blue threads of glass hung to their shoulders, flashing as they moved.

"I have a reputation," Boyle said, lighting a cigarette from his old

one. "No one thinks anything of it if I show up in here three-four times a week."

He was watching the squirming girls, grinning, but there was an undertone in his voice that Martie hadn't heard before. Martie looked at him, then at the girls again, and waited.

"The music bugs the piss right out of me, but the girls, now that's different," Boyle said. A waitress moved into range. She wore a G-string, an apron whose straps miraculously covered both nipples and stayed in place somehow, and very high heels. "Double Scotch for me, honeypot, and what for you, Martie?"

"Bourbon and water."

"Double bourbon and water for Dr. Sayre." He squinted, studying the gyrating girls. "That one on the left. Bet she's a blonde. Watch the way she moves, you can almost see blondness in that wrist motion. ..." Boyle glanced at the twitching hips of their waitress and said, in the same breath, same tone of voice, "I'm being watched. You will be too after tonight. You might look out for them."

"Who?"

"I don't know. Not government, I think. Private outfit maybe. Like FBI, same general type, same cool, but I'm almost positive not government."

"Okay, why?"

"Because I'm a newsman. I really am, you know, always was, always will be. I'm on to something big."

He stopped and the waitress appeared with their drinks. Boyle's gaze followed the twisting girls in the spotlight and he chuckled. He

looked up at the waitress then. "Menus, please."

Martie watched him alternately with the floor show. They ordered, and when they were alone again Boyle said, "I think that immortality theory that popped up eight or ten years ago isn't dead at all. I think it works, just like what's-his-name said it would, and I think that some people are getting the treatments they need, and the others are being killed off, or allowed to die without interference."

Martie stared at him, then at his drink. He felt numb. As if to prove to himself that he could move, he made a whirlpool in the glass and it climbed higher and higher and finally spilled. Then he put it down. "That's crazy. They couldn't keep something like that quiet."

Boyle was continuing to watch the dancing girls. "I'm an intuitive man," Boyle said. "I don't know why I know that next week people will be interested in volcanoes, but if I get a hunch that it will make for a good show, we do it, and the response is tremendous. You know how that goes. I hit right smack on the button again and again. I get the ideas, you fellows do the work, and I get the credit. That's like it should be. You're all diggers, I'm the locator. I'm an ignorant man, but not stupid. Know what I mean? I learned to listen to my hunches. I learned to trust them. I learned to trust myself in front of the camera and on the mike. I don't know exactly what I'll say, or how I'll look. I don't practice anything. Something I'm in tune with . . . something. They know it, and I know it. You fellows call it the *X factor*. Let it go at that. We know what we mean when we talk about it even if we don't know what it is or how it works. Right. Couple of months ago, I woke up thinking that we should do a follow-up on the immortality thing. Don't look at me. Watch the

show. I realized that I hadn't seen word one about it for three or four years. Nothing at all. What's his name, the guy that found the synthetic RNA?"

"Smithers. Aaron Smithers."

"Yeah. He's dead. They worked him over so thoroughly, blasted him and his results so convincingly, that he never got over it. Finis. Nothing else said about it. I woke up wondering why not. How could he have been that wrong? Got the Nobel for the same kind of discovery, RNA as a cure for some kind of arthritis. Why was he so far off this time?" Boyle had filled the ashtray by then. He didn't look at Martie as he spoke, but continued to watch the girls, and now and then grinned, or even chuckled.

The waitress returned, brought them a clean ashtray, new drinks, took their orders, and left again. Boyle turned then to look at Martie. "What, no comments yet? I thought by now you'd be telling me to see a head-shrinker."

Martie shook his head. "I don't believe it. There'd be a leak. They proved it wouldn't work years ago."

"Maybe." Boyle drank more slowly now. "Anyway, I couldn't get rid of this notion, so I began to try to find out if anyone was doing anything with the synthetic RNA, and that's when the doors began to close on me. Nobody knows nothing. And someone went through my office, both here at the studio and at home. I got Kolchak to go through some of his sources to look for appropriations for RNA research. Security's clamped down on all appropriations for research. Lobbied for by the AMA, of all people."

"That's something else. People were too loose with classified data," Martie said. "This isn't in the universities any more. They don't know any more than you do."

Boyle's eyes gleamed. "Yeah? So you had a bee, too?"

"No. But I know people. I left Harvard to take this job. I keep in touch. I know the people in the biochemical labs there. I'd know if they were going on with this. They're not. Are you going to try to develop this?" he asked, after a moment.

"Good Christ! What do you think!"

Julia woke up with a start. She was stiff from her position in the large chair, with her legs tucked under her, her head at an angle. She had fallen asleep over her sketch pad, and it lay undisturbed on her lap, so she couldn't have slept very long. The fire was still hot and bright. It was almost eleven thirty. Across the room the television flickered. The sound was turned off, music continued to play too loud in the house. She cocked her head, then nodded. It was still crying.

She looked at the faces she had drawn on her pad: nurses, interns, Dr. Wymann. All young. No one over thirty-five. She tried to recall others in the OB ward, but she was sure that she had them all. Night nurses, delivery nurses, nursery nurses, admittance nurse . . . She stared at the drawing of Dr. Wymann. They were the same age. He had teased her about it once. "I pulled out a grey hair this morning, and here you are as pretty and young as ever. How are you doing?"

But it had been a lie. He was the unchanged one. She had been

going to him for six or seven years, and he hadn't changed at all in that time. They were both thirty-four now.

Sitting at the side of her bed, holding her hand, speaking earnestly. "Julia, there's nothing wrong with you. You can still have babies, several of them if you want. We can send men to the moon, to the bottom of the ocean, but we can't fight off staph when it hits in epidemic proportions in a nursery. I know you feel bitter now, that it's hopeless, but believe me, there wasn't anything that could be done either time. I can almost guarantee you that the next time everything will go perfectly."

"It was perfect this time. And the last time."

"You'll go home tomorrow. I'll want to see you in six weeks. We'll talk about it again a bit later. All right?"

Sure. Talk about it. And talk and talk. And it didn't change the fact that she'd had two babies and had lost two babies that had been alive and kicking right up till the time of birth.

Why had she gone so blank afterward? For almost a year she hadn't thought of it, except in the middle of the night, when it hadn't been thought but emotion that had ridden her. Now it seemed that the emotional response had been used up and for the first time she could think about the births, about the staff, about her own reactions. She put her sketch pad down and stood up, listening.

Two boys. They'd both been boys. Eight pounds two ounces, eight pounds four ounces. Big, beautifully formed, bald. The crying was louder, more insistent. At the foot of the stairs she stopped again, her face lifted.

It was a small hospital, a small private hospital. One that Dr. Wymann recommended highly. Because the city hospitals had been having such rotten luck trying to get rid of staph. Infant mortality had doubled, tripled? She had heard a fantastic figure given out, but hadn't been able to remember it. It had brought too sharp pains, and she had rejected knowing. She started up the stairs.

"Why are they giving me an allergy test? I thought you had to test for specific allergies, not a general test."

"If you test out positive, then they'll look for the specifics. They'll know they have to look. We're getting too many people with allergies that we knew nothing about, reacting to antibiotics, to sodium pentothal, to starch in sheets. You name it."

The red scratch on her arm. But they hadn't tested her for specifics. They had tested her for the general allergy symptoms and had found them, and then let it drop. At the top of the stairs she paused again, closing her eyes briefly this time. "I'm coming," she said softly. She opened the door.

His was the third crib. Unerringly she went to him and picked him up; he was screaming lustily, furiously. "There, there. It's all right, darling. I'm here." She rocked him, pressing him tightly to her body. He nuzzled her neck, gulping in air now, the sobs diminishing into hiccups. His hair was damp with perspiration, and he smelled of powder and oil. His ear was tight against his head, a lovely ear.

"You! What are you doing in here? How did you get in?"

She put the sleeping infant back down in the crib, not waking him. For a moment she stood looking down at him, then she turned and

walked out the door.

The three blue girls were gone, replaced by two zebra-striped girls against a black drop, so that only the white stripes showed, making an eerie effect.

"Why did you bring this up with me?" Martie asked. Their steaks were before them, two inches thick, red in the middle, charred on the outside. The Blue Light was famous for steaks.

"A hunch. I have a standing order to be informed of any research anyone does on my time. I got the message that you were looking into illnesses, deaths, all that." Boyle waved aside the sudden flash of anger that swept through Martie. "Okay. Cool it. I can't help it. I'm paranoid. Didn't they warn you? Didn't I warn you myself when we talked five years ago? I can't stand for you to use the telephone. Can't stand not knowing what you're up to. I can't help it."

"But that's got nothing to do with your theory."

"Don't play dumb with me, Martie. What you're after is just the other side of the same thing."

"And what are you going to do now? Where from here?"

"That's the stinker. I'm not sure. I think we work on the angle of weather control, for openers. Senator Kern is pushing the bill to create an office of weather control. We can get all sorts of stuff under that general heading, I think, without raising this other issue at all. You gave me this idea yourself. Weather-connected sickness. Let's look at what we can dig out, see what they're hiding, what they're willing to tell, and go on from there."

"Does Kolchak know? Does anyone else?"

"No. Kolchak will go along with the political angle. He'll think it's a natural for another special. He'll cooperate."

Martie nodded. "Okay," he said. "I'll dig away. I think there's a story. Not the one you're after, but a story. And I'm curious about the clampdown on news at a time when we seem to be at peace."

Boyle grinned at him. "You've come a long way from the history-of-science teacher that I talked to about working for me five years ago. Boy, were you green then." He pushed his plate back. "What made you take it? This job? I never did understand."

"Money. What else? Julia was pregnant. We wanted a house in the country. She was working, but not making money yet. She was talking about taking a job teaching art, and I knew it would kill her. She's very talented, you know."

"Yeah. So you gave up tenure, everything that goes with it."

"There's nothing I wouldn't give up for her."

"To each his own. Me? I'm going to wade through that goddam snow the six blocks to my place. Prettiest little piece you ever saw waiting for me. See you tomorrow, Martie."

He waved to the waitress, who brought the check. He signed it without looking at it, pinched her bare bottom when she turned to leave, and stood up. He blew a kiss to the performing girls, stopped at three tables momentarily on his way out, and was gone. Martie finished his coffee slowly.

Everyone had left by the time he returned to his office. He sat down at his desk and looked at the material he had pushed into the drawer.

He knew now what was wrong. Nothing more recent than four years ago was included in the material.

Julia slept deeply. She had the dream again. She wandered down hallways, into strange rooms, looking for Martie. She was curious about the building. It was so big. She thought it must be endless, that it wouldn't matter how long she had to search it, she would never finish. She would forever see another hall that she hadn't seen before, another series of rooms that she hadn't explored. It was strangely a happy dream, leaving her feeling contented and peaceful. She awakened at eight. The wind had died completely, and the sunlight coming through the sheer curtains was dazzling, brightened a hundredfold by the brilliant snow. Apparently it had continued to snow after the wind had stopped; branches, wires, bushes, everything was frosted with an inch of powder. She stared out the window, committing it to memory. At such times she almost wished that she was a painter instead of a sculptor. The thought passed. She would get it, the feeling of joy and serenity and purity, into a piece of stone, make it shine out for others to grasp, even though they'd never know why they felt just like that.

She heard the bell of the snowplow at work on the secondary road that skirted their property, and she knew that as soon as the road was open, Mr. Stopes would be by with his small plow and get their driveway. She hoped it all would be cleared by the time Martie left the office. She stared at the drifted snow in the back yard between the house and the barn and shook her head. Maybe Mr. Stopes could get that, too.

While she had breakfast she listened to the morning news. One disaster after another, she thought, turning it off after a few minutes. A nursing-home fire, eighty-two dead. A new outbreak of infantile diarrhea in half a dozen hospitals, leaving one hundred thirty-seven dead babies. The current flu-epidemic death rate increasing to one out of ten.

Martie called at nine. He'd be home by twelve. A few things to clear up for the evening show. Nothing much. She tried to ease his worries about her, but realized that the gaiety in her voice must seem forced to him, phony. He knew that when the wind howled as it had done the night before, the baby cried. She hung up regretfully, knowing she hadn't convinced him that she had slept well, that she was as gay as she sounded. She looked at the phone and knew that it would be even harder to convince him in person that she was all right, and, more important, that the baby was all right.

Martie shook her hard. "Honey, listen to me. Please, just listen to me. You had a dream. Or a hallucination. You know that. You know how you were the first time you heard it. You told me you were having a breakdown. You knew then that it wasn't the baby you heard, no matter what your ears told you. What's changed now?"

"I can't explain it," she said. She wished he'd let go. His hands were painful on her shoulders, and he wasn't aware of them. The fear in his eyes was real and desperate. "Martie, I know that it couldn't happen like that, but it did. I opened the door to somewhere else where our baby is alive and well. He has grown, and he has hair now, black hair, like yours, but curly, like mine. A nurse came in. I

scared the hell out of her, Martie. She looked at me just like you are looking now. It was real, all of it."

"We're going to move. We'll go back to the city."

"All right. If you want to. It won't matter. This house has nothing to do with it."

"Christ!" Martie let her go suddenly, and she almost fell. He didn't notice. He paced back and forth a few minutes, rubbing his hand over his eyes, through his hair, over the stubble of his beard. She wished she could do something for him, but she didn't move. He turned to her again suddenly. "You can't stay alone again!"

Julia laughed gently. She took his hand and held it against her cheek. It was very cold. "Martie, look at me. Have I laughed spontaneously during this past year? I know how I've been, what I've been like. I knew all along, but I couldn't help myself. I was such a failure as a woman, don't you see? It didn't matter if I succeeded as an artist, or as a wife, anything. I couldn't bear a live child. That's all I could think about. It would come at the most awkward moments, with company here, during our lovemaking, when I had the mallet poised, or mixing a cake. Whammo, there it would be. And I'd just want to die. Now, after last night, I feel as if I'm alive again, after being awfully dead. It's all right, Martie. I had an experience that no one else could believe in. I don't care. It must be like conversion. You can't explain it to anyone who hasn't already experienced it, and you don't have to explain it to him. I shouldn't even have tried."

"God, Julia, why didn't you say what you were going through? I

didn't realize. I thought you were getting over it all." Martie pulled her to him and held her too tightly.

"You couldn't do anything for me," she said. Her voice was muffled. She sighed deeply.

"I know. That's what makes it such hell." He pushed her back enough to see her face. "And you think it's over now? You're okay now?" She nodded. "I don't know what happened. I don't care. If you're okay, that's enough. Now let's put it behind us. . . ."

"But it isn't over, Martie. It's just beginning. I know he's alive now. I have to find him."

"Can't get the tractor in the yard, Miz Sayre. Could of if you hadn't put them stones out there in the way." Mr. Stopes mopped his forehead with a red kerchief, although he certainly hadn't worked up a sweat, not seated on the compact red tractor, running it back and forth through the drive.

Julia refilled his coffee cup and shrugged. "All right. We'll get to it. The sun's warming it up so much. Maybe it'll just melt off."

"Nope. It'll melt some, then freeze. Be harder'n ever to get it out then."

Julia went to the door and called to Martie, "Honey, can you write Mr. Stopes a check for clearing the drive?"

Martie came in from the living room, taking his checkbook from his pocket. "Twenty?"

"Yep. Get yourself snowed in in town last night, Mr. Sayre?"

"Yep."

Mr. Stopes grinned and finished his coffee. "Some April Fools' Day, ain't it? Forsythia blooming in the snow. Don't know. Just don't know 'bout the weather any more. Remember my dad used to plant his ground crops on April Fools' Day, without fail." He waved the check back and forth a minute, then stuffed it inside his sheepskin coat. "Well, thanks for the coffee, Miz Sayre. You take care now that you don't work too hard and come down with something. You don't want to get taken sick now that Doc Hendricks is gone."

"I thought that new doctor was working out fine," Martie said.

"Yep. For some people. You don't want him to put you in the hospital, though. The treatment's worse than the sickness any more, it seems." He stood up and pulled on a flap-eared hat that matched his coat. "Not a gambling man myself, but even if I was, wouldn't want them odds. Half walks in gets taken out in a box. Not odds that I like at all."

Julia and Martie avoided looking at one another until he was gone. Then Julia said incredulously, "Half!"

"He must be jacking it way up."

"I don't think so. He exaggerates about some things, not things like that. That must be what they're saying."

"Have you met the doctor?"

"Yes, here and there. In the drugstore. At Dr. Saltzman's. He's young, but he seemed nice enough. Friendly. He asked me if we'd had our ... flu shots." She finished very slowly, frowning slightly.

"And?"

"I don't know. I was just thinking that it was curious of him to ask. They were announcing at the time that there was such a shortage, that only vital people could get them. You know, teachers, doctors, hospital workers, that sort of thing. Why would he have asked if we'd had ours?"

"After the way they worked out, you should be glad that you didn't take him up on it."

"I know." She continued to look thoughtful, and puzzled. "Have you met an old doctor recently? Or even a middle-aged one?"

"Honey!"

"I'm serious. Dr. Saltzman is the only doctor I've seen in years who's over forty. And he doesn't count. He's a dentist."

"Oh, wow! Look, honey, I'm sorry I brought up any of this business with Boyle. I think something is going on, but not in such proportions, believe me. We're a community of what?—seven hundred in good weather? I don't think we've been infiltrated."

She wasn't listening. "Of course, they couldn't have got rid of all the doctors, probably just the ones who were too honest to go along with it. Well, that probably wasn't many. Old and crooked. Young and . . . immortal. Boy!"

"Let's go shovel snow. You need to have your brain aired out."

While he cleared the path to the barn, Julia cleaned off the granite sculptures. She studied them. They were rough-quarried blocks, four feet high, almost as wide. The first one seemed untouched, until the light fell on it in a certain way, the rays low, casting long shadows. There were tracings of fossils, broken, fragmented.

Nothing else. The second piece had a few things emerging from the surface, clawing their way up and out, none of them freed from it, though. A snail, a trilobite-like crustacean, a winged insect. What could have been a bird's head was picking its way out. The third one had denned animals, warm-blooded animals, and the suggestion of forests. Next came man and his works. Still rising from stone, too closely identified with the stone to say for certain where he started and the stone ended, if there was a beginning and an end at all. The whole work was to be called *The Wheel.* These were the ends of the spokes, and at the hub of the wheel there was to be a solid granite seat, a pedestal-like seat. That would be the ideal place to sit and view the work, although she knew that few people would bother. But from the center, with the stones in a rough circle, the shadows should be right, the reliefs complementary to one another, suggesting heights that had been left out, suggesting depths that she hadn't shown. All suggestion. The wheel that would unlock the knowledge within the viewer, let him see what he usually was blind to. ...

"Honey, move!" Martie nudged her arm. He was panting hard.

"Oh, dear. Look at you. You've been moving mountains!" Half the path was cleared. "Let's make a snowman, right to the barn door."

The snow was wet, and they cleared the rest of the path by rolling snowballs, laughing, throwing snowballs at each other, slipping and falling. Afterward they had soup and sandwiches, both of them too beat to think seriously about cooking.

"Nice day," Julia said lazily, lying on the living-room floor, her chin propped up by cupped hands, watching Martie work on the fire.

"Yeah. Tired?"

"Um. Martie, after you talked with Hilary, what did you do the rest of the night?"

"I looked up Smithers' work, what there was in the computer anyway. It's been a long time ago, I'd forgotten a lot of the arguments."

"And?"

"They refuted him thoroughly, with convincing data."

"Are you certain? Did you cross-check?"

"Honey, they were men like . . . like Whaite, and . . . Never mind. They're just names to you. They were the leaders at that time. Many of them are still the authorities. Men like that tried to replicate his experiments and failed. They looked for reasons for the failures and found methodological bungling on his part, erroneous conclusions, faulty data, mistakes in his formulae."

Julia rolled over, with her hands clasped under her head, and stared at the ceiling. "I half remember it all. Wasn't it almost a religious denunciation that took place? I don't remember the scientific details. I wasn't terribly interested in the background then, but I remember the hysteria."

"It got loud and nasty before it ended. Smithers was treated badly. Denounced from the pulpit, from the Vatican, from every scientific magazine ... It got nasty. He died after a year of it, and they let the whole business die too. As they should have done."

"And his immortality serum will take its place along with the alchemist's stone, the universal solvent, a pinch of something in

water to run the cars. ..."

" 'Fraid so. There'll always be those who will think it was suppressed." He turned to build up the fire that had died down completely.

"Martie, you know that room I told you about? The nursery? I would know it again if I saw it. How many nurseries do you suppose there are in the city?"

Martie stopped all motion, his back to her. "I don't know." His voice was too tight.

Julia laughed and tugged at his sweater. "Look at me, Martie. Do I look like a kook?"

He didn't turn around. He broke a stick and laid the pieces across each other. He topped them with another stick, slightly larger, then another.

"Martie, don't you think it's strange that suddenly you got the idea to look up these statistics, and Hilary approached you with different questions about the same thing? And at the same time I had this . . . this experience. Doesn't that strike you as too coincidental to dismiss? How many others do you suppose are asking questions too?"

"I had thought of it some, yes. But last night just seemed like a good time to get to things that have been bugging us. You know, for the first time in months no one was going anywhere in particular for hours."

She shook her head. "You can always rationalize coincidences if you are determined to. I was alone for the first time at night since I

was in the hospital. I know. I've been over all that, too. But still..." She traced a geometrical pattern at the edge of the carpet. "Did you have a dream last night? Do you remember it?" Martie nodded.

"Okay. Let's test this coincidence that stretches on and on. I did too. Let's both write down our dreams and compare them. For laughs," she added hurriedly when he seemed to stiffen again. "Relax, Martie. So you think I've spun out. Don't be frightened by it. I'm not. When I thought that was the case, six months ago, or whenever it was, I was petrified. Remember? This isn't like that. This is kooky in a different way. I feel that a door that's always been there has opened a crack. Before, I didn't know it was there, or wouldn't admit that it was anyway. And now it's there, and open. I won't let it close again."

Martie laughed suddenly and stopped breaking sticks. He lighted the fire and then sat back with a notebook and pen. "Okay."

Martie wrote his dream simply with few descriptions. Alone, searching for her in an immense building. A hospital? An endless series of corridors and rooms. He had forgotten much of it, he realized, trying to fill in blanks. Finally he looked up to see Julia watching him with a faint smile. She handed him her pad and he stared at the line drawings that could have been made to order to illustrate his dream. Neither said anything for a long time.

"Martie, I want another baby. Now."

"God! Honey, are you sure? You're so worked up right now. Let's not decide ..."

"But I have decided already. And it is in my hands, you know."

"So why tell me at all? Why not just toss the bottle out the window and be done with it?"

"Oh, Martie. Not like that. I want us to be deliberate about it, to think during coitus that we are really making a baby, to love it then. . . ."

"Okay, honey. But why now? What made you say this now?"

"I don't know. Just a feeling."

"Dr. Wymann, is there anything I should do, or shouldn't do? I mean ... I feel fine, but I felt fine the other times, too."

"Julia, you are in excellent health. There's no reason in the world for you not to have a fine baby. I'll make the reservation for you. . . ."

"Not ... I don't want to go back to that same hospital. Someplace else."

"But, it's ..."

"I won't!"

"I see. Well, I suppose I can understand that. Okay. There's a very good, rather small hospital in Queens, fully equipped. ..."

"Dr. Wymann, this seems to be the only hang-up I have. I have to see the hospital first, before you make a reservation. I can't explain it. . . ." Julia got up and walked to the window high over Fifth Avenue. "I blame the hospital, I guess. This time I want to pick it out myself. Can't you give me a list of the ones that you use, let me see them before I decide?" She laughed and shook her head. "I'm amazed at myself. What could I tell by looking? But there it is."

Dr. Wymann was watching her closely. "No, Julia. You'll have to trust me. It would be too tiring for you to run all over town to inspect hospitals. ..."

"No! I ... I'll just have to get another doctor," she said miserably. "I can't go in blind this time. Don't you understand?"

"Have you discussed this with your husband?"

"No. I didn't even know that I felt this way until right now. But I do."

Dr. Wymann studied her for a minute or two. He glanced at her report spread out before him, and finally he shrugged. "You'll just wear yourself out for nothing. But, on the other hand, walking's good for you. I'll have my nurse give you the list." He spoke into the intercom briefly, then smiled again at Julia. "Now sit down and relax. The only thing I want you to concentrate on is relaxing, throughout the nine months. Every pregnancy is totally unlike every other one. ..."

She listened to him dreamily. So young-looking, smooth-faced, tanned, if overworked certainly not showing it at all. She nodded when he said to return in a month.

"And I hope you'll have decided at that time about the hospital. We do have to make reservations far in advance, you know."

Again she nodded. "I'll know by then."

"Are you working now?"

"Yes. In fact, I'm having a small showing in two weeks. Would you like to come?"

"Why don't you give me the date and I'll check with my wife and let

you know?"

Julia walked from the building a few minutes later feeling as though she would burst if she didn't find a private place where she could examine the list of hospitals the nurse had provided. She hailed a taxi and as soon as she was seated she looked over the names of hospitals she never had heard of before.

Over lunch with Martie she said, "I'll be in town for the next few days, maybe we could come in together in the mornings and have lunch every day."

"What are you up to now?"

"Things I need. I'm looking into the use of plastics. I have an idea. . . ."

He grinned at her and squeezed her hand. "Okay, honey. I'm glad you went back to Wymann. I knew you were all right, but I'm glad you know it too."

She smiled back at him. If she found the nursery, or the nurse she had startled so, then she would tell him. Otherwise she wouldn't. She felt guilty about the smiles they exchanged, and she wished momentarily that he wouldn't make it so easy for her to lie to him.

"Where are you headed after lunch?" he asked.

"Oh, the library . . ." She ducked her head quickly and scraped her sherbet glass.

"Plastics?"

"Um." She smiled again, even more brightly. "And what about you? Tonight's show ready?"

"Yeah. This afternoon, in . . ." he glanced at his watch, "... exactly one hour and fifteen minutes I'm to sit in on a little talk between Senator George Kern and Hilary. Kern's backing out of his weather-control fight."

"You keep hitting blank walls, don't you?"

"Yes. Good and blank, and very solid. Well, we'd better finish up. I'll drop you at the library."

"Look at us," she said over the dinner table. "Two dismaler people you couldn't find. You first. And eat your hamburger. Awful, isn't it?"

"It's fine, honey." He cut a piece, speared it with his fork, then put it down. "Kern is out. Hilary thinks he got the treatment last month. And his wife too. They were both hospitalized for pneumonia at the same time."

"Do you know which hospital? In New York?"

"Hell, I don't know. What difference does . . . What are you getting at?"

"I ... Was it one of these?" She got the list from her purse and handed it to him. "I got them from Dr. Wymann's nurse. I wouldn't go back to that one where ... I made them give me a list so I could look them over first."

Martie reached for her hand and pressed it hard. "No plastics?"

She shook her head.

"Honey, it's going to be all right this time. You can go anyplace you

want to. I'll look these over. You'll just be . . ."

"It's all right, Martie. I already checked out three of them. Two in Manhattan, one in Yonkers. I ... I'd rather do it myself. Did Senator Kern mention a hospital?"

"Someplace on Long Island. I don't remember ..."

"There's a Brent Park Memorial Hospital on Long Island. Was that it?"

"Yes. No. Honey, I don't remember. If he did mention it, it passed right over my head. I don't know." He put the list down and took her other hand and pulled her down to his lap. "Now *you* give. Why do you want to know? What did you see in those hospitals that you visited? Why did you go to the library?"

"I went to three hospitals, all small, all private, all run by terribly young people. Young doctors, young nurses, young everybody. I didn't learn anything else about them. But, in the library I tried to borrow a book on obstetrics, and there aren't any."

"What do you mean, there aren't any? None on open shelves? None in at the time?"

"None. They looked, and they're all out, lost, not returned, gone. All of them. I tried midwifery, and the same thing. I had a young boy who was terribly embarrassed by it all searching for me, and he kept coming back with the same story. Nothing in. So I went to the branch library in Yonkers, since I wanted to see the hospital there anyway, and it was the same thing. They have open shelves there, and I did my own looking. Nothing."

"What in God's name did you plan to do with a book on obstetrics?"

"Isn't that beside the point? Why aren't there any?"

"It is directly to the point. What's going through your mind, Julia? Exactly what are you thinking?"

"The baby is due the end of December. What if we have another blizzard? Or an ice storm? Do you know anything about delivering a baby? Oh, something, I grant you. Everyone knows something. But what about an emergency? Could you handle an emergency? I thought if we had a book ..."

"I must have wandered into a nut ward. I'm surrounded by maniacs. Do you hear what you're saying? Listen to me, sweetheart, and don't say a word until I'm finished. When that baby is due, I'll get you to a hospital. I don't care which one you choose, or where it is. You'll be there. If we have to take an apartment next door to it for three months to make certain, we'll do it. You have to have some trust and faith in me, in the doctor, in yourself. And if it eases your mind, I'll get you a book on obstetrics, but by God, I don't plan to deliver a baby!"

Meekly she said, "You just get me a book and I'll behave. I promise." She got up and began to gather up their dishes. "Maybe later on we'll want some scrambled eggs or something. Let's have coffee now."

They moved to the living room, where she sat on the floor with her cup on the low table. "Is Kern satisfied that no biological warfare agent got loose to start all this?"

Martie looked at her sharply. "You're a witch, aren't you? I never told you that's what I was afraid of."

She shrugged. "You must have."

"Kern's satisfied. I am too. It isn't that. His committee decided to drop it, at his suggestion, because of the really dangerous condition of the world right now. It's like a powder keg, just waiting for the real statistics to be released. That would blow it. Everyone suspects that the death rate has risen fantastically, but without official figures, it remains speculation, and the fuse just sits there. He's right. If Hilary does go on, he's taking a terrible risk." He sighed. "It's a mutated virus that changes faster than the vaccines that we come up with. It won't be any better until it mutates into something that isn't viable, then it will vanish. Only then will the governments start opening books again, and hospitals give out figures for admittances and deaths. We know that the medical profession has been hit probably harder than any other. Over-exposure. And the shortage of personnel makes everything that used to be minor very serious now."

Julia nodded, but her gaze didn't meet his. "Sooner or later," she said, "you'll have to turn that coin over to see what's on the other side. Soon now, I think."

Julia wore flowered pants and a short vest over a long-sleeved tailored blouse. With her pale hair about her shoulders, she looked like a very young girl, too young to be sipping champagne from the hollow-stemmed goblet that she held with both hands. Dwight Gregor was in the middle of the circle of stones, studying the effects from there. Gregor was the main critic, the one whose voice was heard if he whispered, although all others were shouting. Julia

wished he'd come out of the circle and murmur something or other to her. She didn't expect him to let her off the hook that evening, but at least he could move, or something. She probably wouldn't know what his reactions had been until she read his column in the morning paper. She sipped again and turned despairingly to Martie.

"I think he fell asleep out there."

"Honey, relax. He's trying to puzzle it out. He knows that you're cleverer than he is, and more talented, and that you worked with the dark materials of your unconscious. He feels it and can't grasp the meaning. . . ."

"Who are you quoting?"

"Boyle. He's fascinated by the circle. He'll be in and out of it all evening. Watch and see. Haven't you caught him looking at you with awe all over his face?"

"Is that awe? I was going to suggest that you tell him I'm good and pregnant."

Martie laughed with her, and they separated to speak with the guests. It was a good show, impressive. The yard looked great, the lighting effects effective, the waterfall behind the basket-weave fence just right, the pool at the bottom of the cascading water just dark and mysterious enough. . . . Martie wandered about his yard proudly.

"Martie?" Boyle stopped by him. "Want to talk to you. Half an hour over by the fence. Okay?"

Gregor left the circle finally and went straight to Julia. He raised her hand to his lips and kissed it lightly, keeping his gaze on her face.

"My dear. Very impressive. So nihilistic. Did you realize how nihilistic it is? But of course. And proud, also. Nihilistic but proud. Strange combination. You feel that man almost makes it, this time. Did you mean that? Only one toe restraining him. Sad. So sad."

"Or you can imagine that the circle starts with the devastation, the ruins, and the death of man. From that beginning to the final surge of life that lifts him from the origins in the dirt. . . . Isn't that what you really meant to say, my dear?" Frances Lefever moved in too close to Julia, overwhelming her with the sweet, sickening scent of marijuana heavy on her breath. "If that's where the circle begins, then it is a message of nothing but hope. Isn't that right, my dear?"

Gregor moved back a step, waving his hand in the air. "Of course, one can always search out the most romantic explanation of anything. ..."

"Romantic? Realistic, my dear Dwight. Yours is the typical male reaction. Look what I've done. I've destroyed all mankind, right back down to the primordial ooze. Mine says, Look, man is freeing himself, he is leaping from his feet-of-clay beginnings to achieve a higher existence. Did you really look at that one? There's no shadow, you know."

Dwight and Frances forgot about Julia. They argued their way back to the circle, and she leaned weakly against the redwood fence and drank deeply.

"Hey. Are you all right, Julia?"

"Dr. Wymann. Yes. Fine. Great."

"You looked as if you were ready to faint. ..."

"Only with relief. They like it. They are fascinated by it. It's enigmatic enough to make them argue about meanings, so they'll both write up their own versions, different from each other's, and that will make other people curious enough to want to see for themselves. ..."

Dr. Wymann laughed and watched the two critics as they moved about the large stones, pointing out to one another bits and pieces each was certain the other had missed.

"Congratulations, Julia."

"What did *you* think of it?"

"Oh, no. Not after real critics have expressed opinions."

"Really. I'd like to know."

Dr. Wymann looked again at the circle of stones and shrugged. "I'm a clod. An oaf. I had absolutely no art training whatever. I like things like Rodin. Things that are unequivocal. I guess I didn't know what you were up to with your work."

Julia nodded. "Fair enough."

"I'm revealed as an ass."

"Not at all, Dr. Wymann. I like Rodin too."

"One thing. I couldn't help overhearing what they were saying. Are you the optimist that the woman believes, or the pessimist that Gregor assumes?"

Julia finished off her champagne, looking at the goblet instead of the doctor. She sighed when it was all gone. "I do love champagne." She smiled at him then. "The stones will give you the answer. But

you'll have to find it yourself. I won't tell."

He laughed and they moved apart. Julia drifted back inside the house to check the buffet and the bar. She spoke briefly with Margie Mellon, who was taking care of the food and drinks. Everything was holding up well. A good party. Successful unveiling. A flashbulb went off outside, then another and another.

"Honey! It's really great, isn't it? They love it! And you! And me because I'm married to you!"

She never had seen Martie so pleased. He held her close for a minute, then kissed each eyelid. "Honey, I'm so proud of you I can't stand it. I want to strip you and take you to bed right now. That's how it's affected me."

"Me too. I know."

"Let's drive them all off early. . . ."

"We'll try anyway."

She was called to pose by the circle, and she left him. Martie watched her. "She is so talented," a woman said, close to his ear. He turned. He didn't know her.

"I'm Esther Wymann," she said huskily. She was very drunk. "I almost envy her. Even if it is for a short time. To know that you have that much talent, a genius, creative genius. I think it would be worth having, even if you knew that tomorrow you'd be gone. To have that for a short time. So creative and so pretty too."

She drained a glass that smelled like straight Scotch. She ran the tip of her tongue around the rim and turned vaguely toward the bar. "You too, sweetie? No drink? Where's our host? Why hasn't he

taken care of you? That's all right. Esther will. Come on."

She tilted when she moved and he steadied her. "Thanks. Who're you, by the way?"

"I'm the host," he said coldly. "What did you mean by saying she has so little time? What's that supposed to mean?"

Esther staggered back from his hand. "Nothing. Didn't mean anything." She lurched away from him and almost ran the three steps that took her into a group of laughing guests. Martie saw Wymann put an arm about her to help hold her upright. She said something to him and the doctor looked up quickly to see Martie watching them. He turned around, still holding his wife, and they moved toward the door to the dining room. Martie started after them, but Boyle appeared at the doorway and motioned for him to go outside.

The doctor would keep, Martie decided. He couldn't talk to him with that drunken woman on his arm anyway. He looked once more toward the dining-room doorway, then followed Boyle outside.

A picture or two, someone said. He stood by Julia, holding her hand, and the flashbulbs exploded. Someone opened a new bottle of champagne close by, and that exploded. Someone else began shrieking with laughter. He moved away from the center of the party again and sat down at a small table, waiting for Boyle to join him.

"This is as safe as any place we're likely to find," Boyle said. He was drinking beer, carrying a quart bottle with him. "What have you dug out?"

The waterfall splashed noisily behind them, and the party played noisily before them. Martie watched the party. He said, "The death rate, extrapolated only, you understand. Nothing's available on paper anywhere. But the figures we've come up with are: from one million eight hundred thousand five years ago, up to fourteen and a quarter million this year."

Boyle choked and covered his face with his handkerchief. He poured more beer and took a long swallow.

Martie waited until he finished, then said, "Birth rate down from three and a half million to one million two hundred thousand. That's live births. At these rates, with the figures we could find, we come up with a loss per thousand of sixty-three. A death rate of sixty-three per thousand."

Boyle glared at him. He turned to watch the party again, saying nothing.

Martie watched Julia talking with guests. She never had looked more beautiful. Pregnancy had softened her thin face, had added a glow. What had that bitch meant by saying she had so little time? He could hear Julia's words inside his head: *You'll have to turn it over sooner or later.* She didn't understand. Boyle didn't understand. Men like Whaite wouldn't have repudiated a theory so thoroughly if there had been any merit whatsoever in it. It was myth only that said the science community was a real community. There were rivalries, but no corruption of that sort. The whole scientific world wouldn't unite behind a lie. He rubbed his eyes. But how many of the scientists knew enough about biochemistry to form independent judgments? They had to take the word of the men who were

considered authorities, and if they, fewer than a dozen, passed judgment, then that judgment was what the rest of the community accepted as final. Only the amateurs on the outside would question them, no one on the inside would think of doing so.

Martie tapped his fingers on the table impatiently. Fringe thinking. Nut thinking. They'd take away his badge and his white coat if he expressed such thoughts. But, damn it, they could! Six or eight, ten men could suppress a theory, for whatever reason they decided was valid, if only they all agreed. Over fourteen million deaths in the States in the past year. How many in the whole world? One hundred million, two hundred million? They'd probably never know.

"Hilary, I'm going up to Cambridge tomorrow, the next day, soon. I have to talk to Smithers' widow."

Hilary nodded. "At that death rate, how long to weed us out? Assuming Smithers was right, that forty percent can be treated."

"About twelve and a half years, starting two years ago." Martie spoke without stopping to consider his figures. He wasn't sure when he had done that figuring. He hadn't consciously thought of it.

He watched as Julia spoke with Dr. Wymann, holding his hand several seconds. She nodded, and the doctor turned and walked away. What had Wymann's wife meant? Why had she said what she had? If "they" existed, she was one of them. As Wymann was. As Senator Kern was. Who else?

"I don't believe it!"

"I know."

"They couldn't keep such figures quiet! What about France?

England? Russia?"

"Nothing. No statistics for the last four years. Files burned, mislaid, not properly completed. Nothing."

"Christ!" Boyle said.

Julia smoked too much, and paced until the phone rang. She snatched it up. "Martie! Are you all right?"

"Sure. What's wrong, honey?" His voice sounded ragged, he was out of breath.

"Darling, I'm sorry. I didn't want to alarm you, but I didn't know how else to reach you. Don't say anything now. Just come home, Martie, straight home. Will you?"

"But . . . Okay, honey. My flight is in fifteen minutes. I'll be home in a couple of hours. Sit tight. Are you all right?"

"Yes. Fine. I'm fine." She listened to the click at the other end of the line, and felt very alone again. She picked up the brief note that she had written and looked at it again. "Lester B. Hayes Memorial Hospital, ask for Dr. Conant."

"It's one on my list," she said to Martie when he read it. "Hilary collapsed at his desk and they took him there. Martie, they'll kill him, won't they?"

Martie crumpled the note and let it drop. He realized that Julia was trembling and he held her for several minutes without speaking. "I have to make some calls, honey. Will you be all right?"

"Yes. I'm fine now. Martie, you won't go, will you? You won't go to

that hospital?"

"Sh. It's going to be all right, Julia. Sit down, honey. Try to relax."

Boyle's secretary knew only that she had found him sprawled across his desk and in the next few minutes, Kolchak, or someone, had called the ambulance and he was taken away to the hospital. The report they had was that he was not in serious condition. It had happened before, no one was unduly alarmed, but it was awkward. It never had happened before a show. This time . . . Her voice drifted away.

Martie slammed the receiver down. "It really *has* happened before. The hospital could be a coincidence."

Julia shook her head. "I don't believe it." She looked at her hands. "How old is he?"

"Fifty, fifty-five. I don't know. Why?"

"He's too old for the treatment, then. They'll kill him. He'll die of complications from flu, or a sudden heart attack. They'll say he suffered a heart attack at his desk. ..."

"Maybe he did have a heart attack. He's been driving himself. . . . Overweight, living too fast, too hard, too many women and too much booze ..."

"What about Smithers? Did you see Mrs. Smithers?"

"Yes. I saw her. I was with her all morning. ..."

"And within an hour of your arrival there, Hilary collapses. You're getting too close, Martie. You're making them act now. Did you learn anything about Smithers, or his work?"

"It's a familiar kind of thing. He published prematurely, got clobbered, then tried to publish for over a year and had paper after paper returned. During that time he saw everything he'd done brought down around his ears. His wife believes he committed suicide, although she won't admit it even to herself. But it's there, in the way she talks about them, the ones who she says hounded him. ..."

"And his papers?"

"Gone. Everything was gone when she was able to try to straighten things out. There wasn't anything left to straighten out. She thinks he destroyed them. I don't know. Maybe he did. Maybe they were stolen. It's too late now."

The phone shrilled, startling both of them. Martie answered. "Yes, speaking. ..." He looked at Julia, then turned his back. His hand whitened on the phone. "I see. Of course: An hour, maybe less."

Julia was very pale when Martie hung up and turned toward her. "I heard," she said. "The hospital . . . it's one of theirs. Dr. Conant must be one of them."

Martie sat down and said dully, "Hilary's on the critical list. I didn't think they'd touch him. I didn't believe it. Not him."

"You won't go, will you? You know it's a trap."

"Yes, but for what? They can get to me any time they want. They don't have to do it this way. There's no place to hide."

"I don't know for what. Please don't go."

"You know what this is? The battle of the Cro-Magnon and the Neanderthal all over again. One has to eliminate the other. We can't

both exist in the same ecological niche."

"Why can't they just go on living as long as they want and leave us alone? Time is on their side."

"They know they can't hide it much longer. In ten years it would be obvious, and they're outnumbered. They're fighting for survival, too. Hitting back first, that's all. A good strategy."

He stood up. Julia caught his arm and tried to pull him to her. Martie was rigid and remote. "If you go, they'll win. I know it. You're the only one now who knows anything about what is going on. Don't you see? You're more valuable than Boyle was. All he had was his own intuition and what you gave him. He didn't understand most of it even. But you . . . They must have a scheme that will eliminate you, or force you to help them. Something."

Martie kissed her. "I have to. If they just want to get rid of me, they wouldn't be this open. They want something else. Remember, I have a lot to come back for. You, the baby. I have a lot to hate them for, too. I'll be back."

Julia swayed and held on to the chair until he turned and left the house. She sat down slowly, staring straight ahead.

Martie looked at Dr. Wymann without surprise. "Hilary's dead?"

"Unfortunately. There was nothing that could be done. A fatal aneurism. ..."

"How fortunate for you."

"A matter of opinion. Sit down, Dr. Sayre. We want to talk with you quite seriously. It might take a while." Wymann opened the door to

an adjoining office and motioned. Two men in doctors' coats entered, nodded at Martie, and sat down. One carried a folder.

"Dr. Conant, and Dr. Fischer." Wymann closed the door and sat down in an easy chair. "Please do sit down, Sayre. You are free to leave at any time. Try the door if you doubt my word. You are not a prisoner."

Martie opened the door. The hallway was empty, gleaming black and white tiles in a zigzag pattern, distant noise of an elevator, sound of a door opening and closing. A nurse emerged from one of the rooms, went into another.

Martie closed the door again. "Okay, your show. I suppose you are in charge?"

"No. I'm not in charge. We thought that since you know me, and in light of certain circumstances, it might be easier if I talked to you. That's all. Either of these two . . . half a dozen others who are available. If you prefer, it doesn't have to be me."

Martie shook his head. "You wanted me. Now what?"

Wymann leaned forward. "We're not monsters, no more than any other human being, anyway. Smithers had exactly what he said he had. You know about that. He really died of a heart attack. So much for history. It works, Sayre. For forty percent of the people. What would you do with it? Should we have made it public? Held a lottery? It would have gone underground even more than it has now, but it would be different. We don't want to kill anyone. The others, the ones who couldn't use it, would search us out and exterminate us like vermin. You know that. In the beginning we needed time. We

were too accessible, too vulnerable. A handful of people knew what it was, how to prepare it, how to test for results, how to administer it, what to watch for, all the rest. It's very complicated. We had to protect them and we had to add numbers."

Martie watched him, thinking, Julia knew. The babies. Both of them. The new pregnancy. She was afraid time was running out. This man, or another like him. Had they done anything, or simply failed to do something for the first two? Was there any difference really? His skin felt clammy and he opened his hands when he realized that his fingers were getting stiff.

"It's going on everywhere, more or less like here. Have you read . . . ? No, of course not. . . . I'll be frank with you, Sayre. The world's on a powder keg, has been for over a year. Martial law in Spain, Portugal, Israel, most of the Mid-East. Nothing at all out of China. Japan ripped wide open by strikes and riots, tighter than a drum right now. Nothing's coming out of there. It's like that everywhere. Clampdown on all news. No travel that isn't high-priority. France has been closed down for six months. More restrictions than when they were occupied. Same with England. Canada has closed her borders for the first time in history, as has Mexico. UNESCO recommended all this, in an effort to stop the epidemics, ostensibly. But really to maintain secrecy regarding the climbing death rate. And everyone's panic-stricken, terrified of being hit next. It must have been like this during the Plague outbreaks. Walled cities, fear. Your story coming now would ignite the whole world. There'd be no way to maintain any sort of order. You know I'm right. We couldn't let you and Boyle go on with it."

Martie stood up. "If you try to sell yourselves as humanitarians, I might kill you right now."

"It depends entirely on where you're standing. Most men with any kind of scientific training see almost immediately that what we've done, how we've done it, was the only way this could have been handled. Out in the open, with more than half the people simply not genetically equipped to tolerate the RNA, there would have been a global catastrophe that would have destroyed all of mankind. Governments are made up of old men, Sayre. Old men can't use it. Can you imagine the uprising against all the world governments that would have taken place! It would have been a holocaust that would have left nothing. We've prevented that."

"You've set yourselves up as final judges, eliminating those who can't take it. ..."

"Eliminating? We upset the entire Darwinian framework for evolution by our introduction of drugs, our transplants, life-saving machines. We were perpetuating a planet of mental and physical degenerates, with each generation less prepared to live than the last. I know you think we're murderers, but is it murder to fail to prescribe insulin and let a diabetic die rather than pass on the genes to yet another generation?" Wymann started to pace, after glancing at his watch, checking it against the wall clock.

"There have been hard decisions, there'll be more even harder ones. Every one of us has lost someone he cared for. Every one! Conant lost his first wife. My sister . . . We aren't searching out people to kill, unless they threaten us. But if they come to us for treatment, and we know that they are terminal, we let them die."

Martie moistened his lips. "Terminal. You mean mortal, with a temporary sore throat, or a temporary appendix inflammation, things you could treat."

"They are terminal now, Sayre. Dying in stages. Dying from the day they are born. We don't prolong their lives."

"Newborn infants? Terminal?"

"Would you demand that newborn idiots be preserved in institutions for fifty or sixty years? If they are dying, we let them die."

Martie looked at the other doctors, who hadn't spoken. Neither of them had moved since arriving and sitting down. He turned again to Wymann. "You called me. What do you want?"

"Your help. We'll need people like you. Forty percent of the population, randomly chosen, means that there will be a shortage of qualified men to continue research, to translate that research into understandable language. The same sort of thing you're doing now. Or, if you prefer, a change of fields. But we will need you."

"You mean I won't suffer a thrombosis, or have a fatal wreck for the next twenty years, if I play along?"

"More than that, Martie. Much more than that. During your last physical examination for insurance you were tested, a routine test by the way. Not conclusive, but indicative. You showed no gross reactions to the synthetic RNA. You would have to be tested more exhaustively, of course, but we are confident that you can tolerate the treatments. ..."

"What about Julia? What do you plan for her?"

"Martie, have you thought at all about what immortality means? Not

just another ten years tacked on at the end, or a hundred, or a thousand. As far as we know now, from all the laboratory data, there is no end, unless through an accident. And with our transplant techniques even that is lessening every week. Forever, Martie. No, you can't imagine it. No one can. Maybe in a few hundred years we'll begin to grasp what it means, but not yet. ..."

"What about Julia?"

"We won't harm her."

"You've tested her already. You know about her."

"Yes. She cannot tolerate the RNA."

"If anything goes wrong, you'll fold your hands and let her die. Won't you? *Won't you!"*

"Your wife is a terminal case! Can't you see that? If she were plugged into a kidney machine, a heart-and-lung machine, with brain damage, you'd want the plug pulled. You know you would. We could practice preventive medicine on her, others like her, for the next forty years or longer. But for what? For what, Dr. Sayre? As soon as they know, they'll turn on us. We can keep this secret only a few more years. We know we are pushing our luck even now. We took an oath that we would do nothing to prolong the lives of those who are dying. Do you think they would stop at that? If they knew today, we'd be hunted, killed, the process destroyed. Lepers would rather infect everyone with their disease than be eradicated. Your wife will be thirty-five when the child is born. A century ago she would have been doomed by such a late pregnancy. She would have been an old woman. Modern medicine has kept her

youthful, but it's an artificial youthfulness. She is dying!"

Martie made a movement toward Wymann, who stepped behind his desk warily. Conant and Fischer were watching him very closely. He sank back down in the chair, covering his face. Later, he thought. Not now. Find out what you can now. Try to keep calm.

"Why did you tell me any of this?" he asked after a moment. "With Boyle gone my job is gone. I couldn't have hurt you."

"We don't want you to light that fuse. You're a scientist. You can divorce your emotions from your reason and grasp the implications. But aside from that, your baby, Martie. We want to save the baby. Julia has tried and tried to find a book on obstetrics, hasn't she? Has she been successful?"

Martie shook his head. The book. He had meant to ask about one at Harvard, and he'd forgotten. "The baby. You think it will be able to ... The other two? Are they both . . . ?"

"The only concern we have now is for the successful delivery of the child that your wife is carrying. We suspect that it will be one of us. And we need it. That forty percent I mentioned runs through the population, young and old. Over forty, give or take a year or two, they can't stand the treatments. We don't know exactly why yet, but we will eventually. We just know that they die. So that brings us down to roughly twenty-five percent of the present population. We need the babies. We need a new generation of people who won't be afraid of death from the day they first grasp the meaning of the word. We don't know what they will be, how it will change them, but we need them."

"And if it isn't able to take the RNA?"

"Martie, we abort a pregnancy when it is known that the mother had German measles, or if there is a high probability of idiocy. You know that. Unfortunately, our technique for testing the foetus is too imperfect to be certain, and we have to permit the pregnancy to come to term. But that's the only difference. It would still be a therapeutic abortion."

Martie and Julia lay side by side, not touching, each wakeful, aware that the other was awake, pretending sleep. Julia had dried tears on her cheeks. Neither of them had moved for almost an hour. "But goddam it, which one is Cro-Magnon and which Neanderthal?" Martie said, and sat upright.

Julia sat up too. "What?"

"Nothing. I'm sorry. Go back to sleep, honey. I'm getting up for a while."

Julia swung her legs off the bed. "Can we talk now, Martie? Will you talk to me about it now?"

Martie muttered a curse and left the room.

This was part of the plan, he knew. Drive them apart first, make it easier for him to join them later. He sat down in the kitchen with a glass half filled with bourbon and a dash of water.

"Martie? Are you all right?" Julia stood in the doorway. She was barely showing her pregnancy now, a small bulge was all. He turned away. She sat down opposite him. "Martie? Won't you tell me?"

"Christ, Julia, will you shove off! Get off my back for a while?"

She touched his arm. "Martie, they offered you the treatment, didn't they? They think you could take it. Are you going to?"

He jerked out of the chair, knocking it over, knocking his glass over. "What are you talking about?"

"That was the crudest thing they could have done right now, wasn't it? After I'm gone, it would have been easier, but now . . ."

"Julia, cut it out. You're talking nonsense. . . ."

"I'll die this time, won't I? Isn't that what they're planning? Did they tell you that you could have the babies if you want them? Was that part of it too?"

"Has someone been here?" Martie grabbed her arm and pulled her from the chair.

She shook her head.

He stared at her for a long time, and suddenly he yanked her against him hard. "I must be out of my mind. I believed them. Julia, we're getting out of here, now. Tomorrow."

"Where?"

"I don't know. Somewhere. Anywhere. I don't know."

"Martie, we have to stop running. There are physical limits to how much I can run now. But besides that, there's really no place to run to. It's the same everywhere. You haven't found anyone who will listen to you. One check with your personal data file and that's it. We may never know what they put on your record, but it's enough to make every official pat you on the head and say, 'Don't worry,

Dr. S. We'll take care of it.' We can't get out of the country, passport requests turned down for medical reasons. But even if we could . . . more of the same."

Julia was pale, with circles under her eyes. It was early in November, cold in Chicago, where the apartment overlooked Lake Michigan. A flurry of powdery snow blew in a whirlwind across the street.

Martie nodded. "They've covered everything, haven't they? Special maternity hospitals! For the safety and protection of the mother and child. To keep them from the filthy conditions that exist in most hospitals now. Keep them safe from pneumonia, flu, staph. . . . Oh, Christ!" He leaned his head against the glass and watched the dry dustlike snow.

"Martie ..."

"Damn. I'm out of cigarettes, honey. I'll just run out and get some."

"Okay. Fine."

"Want anything?"

"No. Nothing." She watched him pull on his coat and leave, then stood at the window and watched until he emerged from the building and started to walk down the street. The baby kicked and she put her hand over her stomach. "It's all right, little one. It's all right."

Martie was only a speck among specks standing at the corner, waiting for the light to turn. She could no longer pick out his figure from those around him. "Martie," she whispered. Then she turned away from the window and sat down. She closed her eyes for a

moment. They wanted her baby, this baby, not just another child who would become immortal. They were too aware of the population curve that rises slowly, slowly, then with abandon becomes an exponential curve. No, not just a child, but her particular child. She had to remember that always. The child would be safe. They wouldn't let it be harmed. But they wouldn't let her have it, and they knew that this time she wouldn't give it up. So she'd have to die. The child couldn't be tainted with her knowledge of death. Of course, if it too was unable to tolerate the RNA, there was no real problem. Mother and child. Too bad. No cures for ... whatever they'd say killed them. Or would they keep her, let her try again? She shook her head. They wouldn't. By then Martie would be one of them, or dead. This was the last child for her.

"So what can I do?" she asked.

Her hands opened and closed convulsively. She shut her eyes hard. "What?" she whispered desperately. *"What?"*

She worked on the red sandstone on the ground floor of the barn. It was too big to get up to her studio, so she'd had her tools, bench, table, everything brought down. It was drafty, but she wore heavy wool slacks and a tentlike top, and was warm.

She whistled tunelessly as she worked. . . .

Julia stood up too fast, then clutched the chair for support. Have to remember, she told herself severely. Work. She had to go to work. She picked up her sketch pad, put it down again. Red sandstone, 10x10x8. And red quartzite, 4x3x2. She called her supplier on Long Island.

"Funny, Mrs. Sayre. Just got some in," he said. "Haven't had sandstone for ... oh, years, I guess."

"Can you have it delivered tomorrow?"

"Mrs. Sayre, everyone who's ever touched rock is working. Had to put on an extra man. Still can't keep up."

"I know. And the painters, and composers, and poets . . ." They settled for the day after her arrival home.

She reserved seats on the six P.M. flight to New York, asked for their hotel bill within the hour, and started to pack. She paused once, a puzzled frown on her forehead. Every one of her friends in the arts was working furiously. They either didn't know or didn't care about the disastrous epidemics, the travel bans, any of it.

Martie walked slowly, his head bowed. He kept thinking of the bridge that he had stood on for an hour, watching filthy water move sluggishly with bits and pieces of junk floating on the surface: a piece of orange, a plastic bag, a child's doll with both arms gone, one eye gone. The doll had swirled in a circle for several minutes, caught in a branch, then moved on out of sight. Of no use to anyone, unwanted, unloved now. Imperfect, cast away.

The wind blew, whipping his coat open, and he shivered. On trial, before his judges. Martin Sayre, do you dare risk your immortal soul for this momentary fling? Confess, go to the flame willingly, with confession on your lips, accept the flame, that too is momentary, and rejoice forever in Paradise.

"Dr. Sayre, you're a reasonable man. You know that we can't do

anything for your wife. She will be allowed to bear her child here. No other hospital would admit her, none of the city hospitals would dare. We won't harm her, Dr. Sayre. We won't do anything that is not for her own good. ..."

Torquemada must have argued so.

And, somewhere else. He couldn't keep them apart, all the same, different faces, but the same. "Of course, the child will have to be taken from her, no matter what happens. The fear of death is a disease as dangerous almost as death itself. It drives man mad. These new children must not be infected with it. . . ."

And somewhere else. "Ah, yes, Dr. Sayre. Meant to call you back, but got tied up. Appropriations Committee sessions, don't you know. Well now, Dr. Sayre, this little theory of yours about the serum. I've been doing some thinking on that, Dr. Sayre, and don't you know, I can't come up with anything to corroborate what you say. Now if you can furnish some hard proof, don't you know, well now, that would make a difference. Yes, sir, make a big difference."

And again, "Hello, Martie, I just don't know. You may be absolutely right. But there's no way to get to anything to make sure. I can't risk everything here on a wild-goose chase. I checked your data file, as you suggested, and they have a diagnosis made by a Dr. Fischer of Lester B. Hayes Memorial Hospital, who examined you extensively in four examinations from March through August of this year. He recommended treatment for schizophrenia; you refused. Face it, Martie, I have to ask myself, isn't this just a schizophrenic construct?"

He should have jumped, he decided. He really should have jumped.

He opened the door to the apartment to find Julia surrounded by their luggage, her coat over a chair, and sketch pads strewn about her on the floor.

"Honey, what's the matter?"

"I want to go home. Now. We have seats for six o'clock. ..."

"But, Julia, you know ..."

"Martie, with you, or without you, I'm going home."

"Are you giving up, then? Is that it? You go slinking back licked now, let them take away your baby, do whatever they mean to do to you. . . ."

"Martie, I can't explain anything. I never can, you know. But I have to go back. I have work to do before the baby comes. I just have to. It's like this with every artist I know. Jacques Remy, Jean Vance, Porter, Dee Richardson . . . I've been in touch with different ones here and there, and they're all driven to work now. Some of my best friends simply didn't have time to see me. None of them can explain it. There's a creative explosion taking place and we're helpless. Oh, if I could drink, I could probably resist it by getting dead drunk and staying that way. ..."

"What are you going to do?" He picked up several sheets of her drawing paper, but there were only meaningless scribbles on it.

"I don't know. I can't get it on paper. I need my tools, the sandstone. My hands know, will know when they start. . . ."

"Julia, you're feverish. Let me get you a sleeping pill. We'll go home in a day or two, if you still feel like this. Please . . ."

She grabbed up her coat and swung it about her shoulders, jerking her arms through the sleeves, paying no attention to him. "What time is it?"

"Four. Sit down, honey. You're as pale as a ghost. . . ."

"We'll have to wait at the airport, but if we don't leave now, traffic will get so bad. Let's start now, Martie. We can have a sandwich and coffee while we wait."

At the airport she couldn't sit still. She walked the length of the corridors, rode the ramps to the upper levels, watched planes arriving and departing, walked to the lowest levels and prowled in and out of shops. Finally they boarded their plane and the strap forced her into a semblance of quietude.

"Martie, how do you, science, explain dreams? The content of dreams? Wait, there's more. And the flashes of intuition that almost everyone experiences from time to time? The jumps into new fields that scientists make, proposing new theories explaining the universe in a way that no one had ever thought of before? *Deja vu* feelings? Oh, what else? Flashes of what seems to be telepathy? Clairvoyance? Hilary's *X factor?* All those things that scientists don't usually want to talk about?"

"I don't. I don't try. I don't know the answer. And no one else does either." The engines roared and they were silent until the mammoth jet was above the clouds. Clouds covered the earth from Chicago to Kennedy Airport.

Julia looked down sometime later and said, "That's like it is with us. There are clouds hiding something from us, and once in a while a

strong light probes through for a minute. The clouds thin out, or the light is strong for a short time, whatever. It doesn't last. The cloud layer thickens, or the power source can't keep up the strength of the beam, and there are only the clouds. No one who wasn't there or didn't see through them at that moment would believe they could be penetrated. And trying to make a whole out of such glimpses is a futile thing. Now a bit of blue sky, now a star, now pitch-black sky, now the lights of a passing plane ..."

"So we invent an infrared light that penetrates the clouds. ..."

"What if there were something on the other side of the layer that was trying to get through to us, just as much as we were trying to get through from this side, and with as little success . . . ?" She hadn't even heard him. Martie took her hand and held it, letting her talk on. Her hand was warm and relaxed now that they were actually heading for home.

"Suppose that it, whatever it is, gets through only now and then, but when it does it is effective because it knows what it's looking for, and we never do. Not infrared . . ." She had heard. "But the other direction. Inward. We send other kinds of probes. Psychoanalysis, EEG, drugs, hypnosis, dream analysis . . . We are trying to get through, but we don't know how, or what we're trying to reach, or how to know when we have reached it."

"God?" Martie turned to look at her. "You're talking about reaching God?"

"No. I think that man has always thought of it as God, or some such thing, but only because man has always sensed its presence and didn't know what it was or how it worked, but he knew that it was

more powerful than anything else when it did work. So, he called it God."

"Honey, we've always been afraid of what we didn't understand. Magic, God, devils . . ."

"Martie, until you can explain why it is that more comes out of some minds than goes in, you haven't a leg to stand on, and you know it."

Like the new geometries, he thought. The sum can be greater than its parts. Or, parallel lines might meet in some remote distance. He was silent, considering it, and Julia dozed. "But, dammit," he breathed a few minutes later. . . .

"You're a Hull, Watson, Skinner man," Julia finished, not rousing from her light sleep. He stared at her. She hadn't studied psychology in her life. She didn't know Hull from Freud from Jung.

The polishing wheel screamed for hours each day as the carborundum paste cut into the quartzite. Martie dragged Julia from it for her meals, when it was time to rest, at bedtime.

"Honey, you'll hurt yourself. It might be hard on the baby. ..."

She laughed. "Have I ever looked better or healthier?"

Thin, pale, but with a fiery intensity that made her more beautiful than he had seen her in their lives together. Her eyes were luminous. The tension that had racked her for months was gone. She carried the baby as if unaware of the extra burden, and when she slept, it was deep untroubled sleep that refreshed her wholly.

"You're the one who is suffering, darling," she said softly, fairy-touching his cheek. Her hands were very rough now, fingernails split and broken jaggedly. He caught her rough hand and pressed it hard against his cheek.

"Wymann has been calling, hasn't he?" Julia asked after a moment. She didn't pull her hand from his face. He turned it over and kissed the palm. "It's all right to talk about it, Martie. I know he's been calling. They want to see me as soon as possible, to make sure of the baby, to see if the delivery will be normal, or if a section is called for. It's all right."

"Have you talked to him?"

"No. No. But I know what they're thinking now. They're afraid of me, of people like me. You see, people who have high creativity don't usually have the right sort of genes to take their RNA. A few, but not enough. It worries them."

"Who've you been talking to?"

"Martie, you know where I've been spending my time." She laughed. "It is nice to be home, isn't it?" The fireplace half of the living room was cheerful and glowing, while shadows filled the rest of the long room. "Of course, when you consider that only about twenty-five percent of the people are getting the RNA it isn't surprising that there aren't many with creative abilities that have been developed to any extent. But, what is sad is that those few who were writers or painters, or whatever, don't seem to continue their work once they know they are immortal. Will women want to continue bearing children if they know they're immortal already?"

"I don't know. You think that the maternal instinct is just a drive to achieve immortality, although vicariously?"

"Why not? Is a true instinct stilled with one or two satisfying meals, or sex acts, or whatever? Women seem to be satisfied as soon as they have a child or two."

"If that's so, then, whatever happens, the race will be finished. If women don't want children, don't have to satisfy this drive, I should say, it's a matter of time. We have the means to prevent pregnancy, why would they keep on getting knocked up?"

"Because something else needs the children, the constantly shifting, renewing vision that is provided by children. Not us, not me. It. Something else. That thing that is behind us pushing, learning through us. You have the books. You've been reading everything you can find on psychology. The nearest we have been able to describe that something is by calling it the collective unconscious, I think."

"Jung's collective unconscious," Martie muttered. "You know, some scientists, philosophers, artists work right down the middle of a brightly illuminated strip, never go off it. Darwin, for instance. Skinner. Others work so close to the edge that half the time they are in the grey areas where the light doesn't follow, where you never knew if madness guided the pen or genius. Jung spent most of his time on the border, sometimes in the light, sometimes in the shadows. His collective unconscious, the fantasy of a man who couldn't stand mysteries not solved during his own lifetime."

Julia stood up and stretched. "God, I'm tired. Bath time." Martie wouldn't let her get into and out of the bathtub alone now. "Martie,

if there is such a thing—and there is, there is—it's been threatened. It has to have the constantly shifting viewpoint of mankind in order to learn the universe. A billion experiences, a trillion, who knows how many it will need before it is finished? It was born with mankind, it has grown with mankind, as it matures so does man, and if mankind dies now, so will it. We are its sensory receptors. And what Wymann and the others propose is death to it, death to them eventually. It feeds the unconscious, nourishes it, gives it its dreams and its flashes of genius. Without it, man is just another animal, clever with his hands perhaps, but without the dream to work toward. All our probes into space, into the oceans, so few inward. We are so niggardly in exploring the greatest mystery of all, potentially the most rewarding of all."

She had her bath, and he helped her from the tub and dried her back and smoothed lotion over it. He tucked her into bed, and she smiled at him. "Come to bed, Martie. Please."

"Soon, honey. I'm . . . restless right now."

A few minutes later when he looked in on her, she was sound asleep. He smoked and drank and paced, as he did night after night. Julia was like one possessed. He grimaced at the choice of words. She worked from dawn until night, when he forced her to stop. He made their meals, or she wouldn't have eaten. He had to touch her before she knew he was there to collect her for a meal. He stood sometimes and watched her from the doorway, and he was frightened of her at those times. She was a stranger to him, her eyes almost closed, sometimes, he thought, and discarded the thought immediately, her eyes were all the way closed.

Her hands held life of their own, strong, white knuckled, thin hands grasping mallet and chisel. She couldn't wear gloves while she worked. She dressed in heavy wool pants, and a heavy sweater, covered by a tentlike poncho that she had made from an army blanket. She wore fleece-lined boots, but her hands had to be bare. He would touch her arm, shake her, and slowly recognition would return to her eyes, she would smile at him and put down her tools; without looking at the thing she was making, she would go with him. He would rub her freezing hands for her, help her out of the heavy garments that were much too warm for the house.

Sometimes after she had gone to bed, usually by nine, he would turn on the barn lights and stand and stare at her work. He wanted, at those times, to pull it down and smash it to a million pieces. He hated it for possessing her when he would have her sit on a velvet cushion and spend her last months and weeks with . . .

He threw his glass into the fireplace, then started to pick up the pieces and put them in an ashtray. Something wet sparkled on his hand, and he stared at it for a moment. Suddenly he put his head down on the floor and sobbed for her, for himself, for their child.

"Sayre, why haven't you brought her in for an examination?"

Martie watched Wymann prowl the living room. Wymann looked haggard, he thought suddenly. He laughed. Everyone was looking haggard except Julia.

Wymann turned toward him with a scowl. "I'm warning you, Sayre. If the child is orphaned at birth, the state won't quibble a bit about

our taking it. With you or without you ..."

Martie nodded. "I've considered that." He rubbed his hand over his face. A four- or five-day beard was heavy on his cheeks and chin. His hand was unsteady. "I've thought of everything," he said deliberately. "All of it. I lose if I take you up, lose if I don't."

"You won't lose with us. One woman. There are other women. If she died in childbirth, in an accident, you'd be married again in less than five years. ..."

Martie nodded. "I've been through all that, too. No such thing as the perfect love, lasting love. Why'd you come out here, Wymann? I thought you were too busy for just one patient to monopolize your time. Farthest damn housecall I've ever heard of. And not even called." He laughed again. "You're scared. What's going wrong?"

"Where's Julia?"

"Working. Out in the barn."

"Are you both insane? Working now? She's due in two weeks at the most!"

"She seems to think this is important. Something she has to finish before she becomes a mother and stops for a year or two."

Wymann looked at him sharply. "Is she taking that attitude?"

"You first. Why are you out here? What's wrong with the master plan for the emerging superman?"

"He's here because people aren't dying any more. Are they, Dr. Wymann?"

Julia stood in the doorway in her stocking feet, stripping off the

poncho. "You have to do things now, don't you, Doctor? Really do things, not just sit back and watch."

"There is some sort of underground then, isn't there? That's why you two made the grand tour, organizing an underground."

Julia laughed and pulled off her sweater. "I'll make us all some coffee."

Martie watched her. "A final solution, Doctor. You have to come up with a new final solution, don't you? And you find it difficult."

"Difficult, yes. But not impossible."

Martie laughed. "Excuse me while I shave. Make yourself comfortable. Won't take five minutes."

He went through the kitchen and caught Julia from behind, holding her hard. "They'll have to change everything if that's true. They won't all go along with murder, wholesale murder. This will bring it out into the open where we can decide. ..."

Julia pulled away and turned to look at him squarely. "This isn't the end. Not yet. There's something else to come. . . ."

"What?"

"I don't know. I just know that this isn't the end, not yet. Not like this. Martie, have you decided? It's killing you. You have to decide."

He shrugged. "Maybe it will be decided for me. I'm going up to shave now."

She shook her head. "You'll have to make the decision. Within a week, I think."

"Dr. Wymann, why is it that proportionately more doctors than laymen are suicides?" Julia poured coffee and passed the sugar as she spoke. "And why are there more alcoholics and drug-users among the medical profession?"

Wymann shrugged. "I give up, why?"

"Oh, because doctors as a group are so much more afraid of death than anyone else. Don't you think?"

"Rather simplistic, isn't it?"

"Yes. Often the most unrelenting drives are very simplistic."

"Julia, you have to come in to be examined. You know that. There could be unsuspected complications that might endanger the baby."

"I'll come in, as soon as I finish what I'm doing. A few more days. I'll check in then if you like. But first I have to finish. It's Martie's Christmas present."

Martie stared at her. Christmas. He'd forgotten.

She smiled. "It's all right. The baby is my present. The sculpture is yours."

"What are you doing? Can I see?" Wymann asked. "Although, remember, I like understandable things. Nothing esoteric or ambiguous."

"This one is as simple ... as a sunset. I'll go get my boots."

As soon as she had left them, Wymann stood up and paced back and forth in quick nervous strides. "I bet it reeks of death. They're all doing it. A worldwide cultural explosion, that's what the Sunday *Times* called it. All reeking of death."

"Ready? You'll need warm clothes, Doctor."

Muffled in warm garments, they walked together to the barn. The work was ten feet high in places. The quartzite was gone, out of sight. Martie didn't know what she had done with it. What remained was rough sandstone, dull red, with yellow streaks. It looked very soft. She had chiseled and cut into it what looked like random lines. At first glance it seemed to be a medieval city, with steeples, flattened places, roofs. The illusion of a city faded, and it became a rough mountainous landscape, with stiletto-like peaks, unknowable chasms. Underwater mountains, maybe. Martie walked around it. He didn't know what it was supposed to be. He couldn't stop looking, and, strangely, there was a yearning deep within him. Dr. Wymann stood still, staring at it with a puzzled expression. He seemed to be asking silently, "This is it? Why bother?"

"Martie, hold my hand. Let me explain. ..." Her hand was cold and rough in his. She led him around it and stopped at the side that the west light hit. "It has to be displayed outside. It should rest on a smooth black basalt base, gently curved, not polished, but naturally smooth. I know that they can be found like that, but I haven't been able to yet. And it should weather slowly. Rain, snow, sun, wind. It shouldn't be protected from anything. If people want to, they should be able to touch it. Sculpture should be touched, you know. It's a tactile art. Here, feel . . ." Martie put his hand where she directed and ran his fingers up one of the sharply rising peaks. "Close your eyes a minute," she said. "Just feel it." She reached out for Wymann's hand. He was standing a foot or slightly more to her left. He resisted momentarily, but she smiled and guided his hand to the

work.

"You can see that there's order," she said, "even if you can't quite grasp it. Order covering something else ..."

Martie didn't know when she stopped talking. He knew, his hand knew, what she meant. Order over something wild and unordered, ungraspable. Something unpredictable. Something that began to emerge, that overcame the order with disorder, distorting the lines. The feeling was not visual. His hand seemed to feel the subliminally skewed order. Rain. Snow. Wind. The imperfections became greater, a deliberate deterioration of order, exposing the inexplicable, almost fearful inside. A nightmare quality now, changing, always changing, faster now. Grosser changes. A peak too thin to support itself, falling sideways, striking another lesser peak, cracking off the needle end of it. Lying at the base, weathering into sand, running away in a stream of red-yellow water, leaving a clean basalt base. Deeper channels being cut into the thing, halving it, dividing it into smaller and smaller bits, each isolated from the rest, each yielding to the elements, faster, faster. A glimpse of something hard and smooth, a gleam of the same red and yellow, but firm, not giving, not yielding. A section exposed, the quartzite, polished and gleaming. Larger segments of it now, a corner, squared, perfect, sharp. Even more unknowable than the shifting sandstone, untouched by the erosion.

But it would go, too. Eventually. Slowly, imperceptibly it would give. And ultimately there would be only the basalt, until in some distant future it would be gone too.

Martie opened his eyes, feeling as if he had been standing there for

a very long time. Julia was watching him serenely. He blinked at her. "It's good," he said. Not enough, but he couldn't say anything more then.

Wymann pulled his hand from the stone and thrust it deep inside his pocket. "Why build something that you know will erode away? Isn't it like ice sculpture, only slower?"

"Exactly like it. But we will have a chance to look at it before it is gone. And feel it." She turned toward the door and waited for them to finish looking. "Next year, if you look at it, it will be different, and ten years from now, and twenty years from now. Each change means something, you know. Each change will tell you something about yourself, and your world, that you didn't know before." She laughed. "At least, I hope so."

They were silent as they returned to the house and the dancing fire. Martie made drinks for Wymann and himself, and Julia had a glass of milk. Wymann drank his Scotch quickly. He had opened his coat but hadn't taken it off. "It reeks of death," he said suddenly. "Death and decay and dissolution. All the things we are dedicated to eradicating."

"And mystery and wonder and awe," Martie said. "If you also kill those things, what's left? Will man be an animal again, clever with his hands and the tools he's made, but an animal without a dream. Inward that's what it means. Isn't that right, Julia? Inward is the only direction that matters."

"It itself is what it means," she said, helplessly almost. "I tried to explain what it means, but if I could say it, I wouldn't have had to do it. Inward. Yes. A particular way of looking, of experiencing the

world, my life in it. When it doesn't apply any longer, it should be gone. Others will reinterpret the world, their lives. Always new interpretations, new ways of seeing. Letting new sensations pass into the unconscious, into the larger thing that uses these impressions and also learns." She drained her glass. "I'll see you in a week at the latest, Doctor. I promise. You personally will deliver my baby."

Why? Why? Why? Martie paced and watched the fire burn itself out and paced some more in the darkened, cooling room. Snow was falling softly, lazily, turning the back yard into an alien world. Why did she promise to go to them? Why to Wymann? What had he felt out there in the barn? Martie flung himself down in an easy chair, and eventually, toward dawn, fell asleep.

The hospital. The same dream, over and over, the same dream. He tried to wake up from it, but while he was aware of himself dreaming, he couldn't alter anything, could only wander through corridors, searching for her. Calling her. Endless corridors, strange rooms, an eternity of rooms to search . . .

"Julia is in good condition. Dilating already. Three or four days probably, but she could go into labor any time. I recommend that she stay here, Sayre. She is leaving it up to you."

Martie nodded. "I want to see her before we decide." He pulled a folded section of newspaper from his pocket and tossed it down on Wymann's desk. "Now you tell me something. Why did Dr. Fischer

jump out of his window?"

"I don't know. There wasn't a note."

"Fischer was the doctor who, quote, examined me, unquote, wasn't he? The one who added that charming little note to my personal data record, that I'm schizophrenic? A psychiatrist."

"Yes. You met him here."

"I remember, Wymann. And you can't tell me why he jumped. Maybe I can tell you. He dried up, didn't he? A psychiatrist without intuition, without dreams, without an unconscious working for and with him. When he reached in, he closed on emptiness, didn't he? Don't all of you!"

"I don't know what you're talking about. Conant has scheduled you for testing starting tomorrow morning. If positive ..."

"Go to hell, Wymann. You, Conant, the rest of you. Go to hell!"

"All right. Maybe that's rushing it. We'll wait until Julia has delivered. You'll want to be with your child. We'll wait. Julia's in room four-nineteen. You can go up whenever you want."

He tapped lightly on the door. Julia pulled it open, laughing, with tears on her cheeks. "I know. I know. You're going to be all right," she cried.

"Me? I came to tell you that *you'd* be all right."

"I've known that for a long time now. Martie, are you sure? Of course you are. You've seen. He, Wymann, doesn't realize yet. I don't think many of them do. . . ."

"Honey, stop. You're six jumps ahead of me. What are you talking

about?"

"You'll catch up. It, the thing, the collective unconscious, whatever it is, has withdrawn from them. They're pariahs to it. Empty. They think that it's a reaction to the RNA, but it isn't. They want babies desperately, but already the reason for wanting the babies is getting dimmer. . . ." She stopped suddenly and pressed her hand against her stomach. A startled look crossed her face. "You'd better see if he's still in the building."

"She'll be all right. A few hours more." Dr. Wymann sat down in the waiting room with Martie. "Tell me something, Sayre. Why did she make that stone thing? Why do any of them make the things they do, write poetry, plays, paint? Why?"

Martie laughed.

"Funny," Wymann said, rubbing his eyes, "I feel that I should know. Maybe that I did know, once. Well, I should look in on her now and then." He stood up. "By the way, I found a memo on my desk, telling me to remind you of your appointment with Dr. Conant in the morning. Are you sick or something?"

"I'm fine, Doctor. Just fine."

"Good. Good. See you in a little while."

He walked down the hallways, glancing into rooms here and there, all equally strange. "Martie, down here. I'm down here." He turned toward the sound of her voice and followed it. "It's a boy, darling. Big, husky boy." He bowed his head and felt tears warm on his cheeks. When Wymann came out to tell him about his son, he found

Martie sound asleep, smiling.

He stood over him for a minute, frowning. There was something else that he had to do. Something else. He couldn't remember what it was. Perfect delivery. No complications. Good baby. Good mother. No trouble at all. He shrugged and tiptoed from the room and went home, leaving Martie sleeping. The nurse would wake him as soon as Julia was ready to see him.

"Darling, you're beautiful. Very, very beautiful. I brought you a Christmas present after all." He held it out for her to take. A stuffed dog, one eye closed in a wink, a ridiculous grin on its face. "You knew how it would be just like I knew about our son, didn't you?"

"I just knew. It was threatened. Any other way of countering the threat would have endangered it even more. We have all those terrible things that we would have used on each other. No one would have survived the war that would have come. It left them. That awful vacuum in Wymann, in Conant, all of them. They do what they are trained to do, no more. They do it very well." She patted her newly flat stomach.

"You did it. You, others like you. The ones who could open to it, accept, and be possessed wholly. A two-way communication must take place during such times. That cultural explosion, all over the world. You at the one end of the spectrum, Wymann, them, at the other, from total possession to total absence."

"It will take some time to search the records, find our babies. . . ."

"They'll help us now. They need guidance. They'll have to be protected. . . ."

"Forever and ever."

The End