

HEAVY METAL PRESENTS

THEODORE STURGEON'S

MORE THAN HUMAN

THE GRAPHIC STORY VERSION



ADAPTED BY ALEX NINO AND DOUG MOENCH
PRODUCED BY BYRON PREISS VISUAL PUBLICATIONS, INC.

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DOUG MOENCH

ADAPTOR

ALEX NINO

ILLUSTRATOR

Produced by
BYRON PREISS VISUAL PUBLICATIONS, INC.

Art Director: John Workman
Managing Editor: Julie Simmons
Copy Editor: Susan Devins

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LONE

He was the town idiot—scorned, assaulted, rebuked. He never spoke, but within him he felt the emotions of a thousand children.

JANIE

She was the army brat—the neglected child, but she could move doors, lift boxes, and paint pictures with her mind.

BEANIE AND BONNIE

They were twins—giggly and adorable—but they could vanish and reappear in the blink of an eye.

GERRY

He was an orphan, a delinquent, and a refugee, with the mind of a genius and the morals of a madman.

HIP

He was the smart student, the ambitious officer—but he was trapped, searching for a fantastic secret he did not remember.

BABY

He had the face of a child and the mind of a computer.

They met. They joined talents.

THEY WERE MORE THAN HUMAN.

A fantasy.

FOREWORD

In its original review of Theodore Sturgeon's *More Than Human*, the *Chicago Tribune* said, "This is an irritating but significant science fiction novel because it treats the possibility of vast latent powers in the human mind."

In the years since the *Tribune* review, Ted's fantasy has been both influential in the development of a genre and a predecessor to the "psychic child" fantasies that have populated the screen and the bookstores with everything from Stephen King's novels to feature films by Brian De Palma and Robert Wise. Of course, occult and supernatural themes have taken over the role played by Ted's gestalt underpinnings, but many of the characterizations have survived.

Ted's story is a fantasy, a psychological fantasy, and its construction insidiously brings into focus the strange, incredible hypothesis of his work. The most vital component of the book is the children—Beanie and Bonnie, Hip, Janie, Lone, and Gerry. We care about them because Ted has written about them with such warmth. He is a writer who is truly in touch with his characters—and though we are able to resist the shocking fantasy in which they are entangled, we still have affection for the children themselves.

Why tackle a book as ostensibly nonvisual and subtle as *More Than Human*? It has been approached precisely for the challenge of visualizing characterization as opposed to action. The graphic story has focused almost exclusively in the past forty years on *slam-bang* action in feature-length form. (There's a reason for that, too—people are bored by the sight of a hundred pages of nothing but talking heads.) We are faced now with the growth of the graphic story form; magazines such as *Heavy Metal* have attracted an adult audience. With this growth it is important to experiment, to play out graphic approaches to different types of fiction. Perhaps *More Than Human* can be best viewed as a "foreign film" graphic story. Both its content and approach are alien to American comics. The illustrations by Alex Nino and adaptation by award-winning writer Doug Moench are unconventional. They are *subtle*; the drama is to be found primarily in the characters and in the staging. There is also humor—Alex's playful interpretation of the twins is representative of this element.

I would like to thank Charles Vess and Susan Devins for their assistance with the illustrations and copy editing, respectively.

Ted Sturgeon plays magician in this story—he toys with psychology and physics. He juggles immoral acts, including the most horrendous—murder—between characters who would be sweet and sympathetic in a simpler book. He makes us love the children for their humanity. He twists and turns three stories into a novel.

Remember: it's only a fantasy.

INTRODUCTION

Some time in the spring of 1952, living in a little stone house in the woods in Rockland County, New York, I sat down and knocked out yet another story because by that time I knew how to knock out stories. As I recall, I hadn't a clear idea in my head as to what it was going to be about, except that I had recently read a novel by Pearl Buck called *Pavilion of Women*, in which there was a minor character, a Chinese monk, who took care of a ragged passel of kids in a cave somewhere in the wilderness. The image would not scrape off, and I knew I was going into something similar somehow. It took about eight days and I sent it off to Horace Gold at *Galaxy* magazine. He bought it and I paid some rent and bought some furnace oil and hamburger and paper towels and the like for my wives and children, and got to work on something else.

Next thing you know it was October, and the story, called "Baby Is Three," was in print, and to my immense and total astonishment began pulling rave mail from all over. Truly, I had an "I didn't know it was loaded" feeling about the whole thing—not that I felt it was a bad job, but I really had no idea it would hit that hard. Anthology requests began to come in almost immediately here and from England, France, and Latin America. The mail was just lovely.

A year or so later, a book publisher asked me for a novel. The only thing I wanted to write about at that length was something about where the people in "Baby Is Three" came from, and something more about where they went to. I went to New York and had lunch with some people and we worked out a deal whereby if I wrote 30,000 words of events before "Baby," and thirty more after, but wrote them in such a way that each could stand as a separate novelette, then they would undertake to sell them to high-paying slick-paper magazines before book publication. (That way, I suspect, they could save their consciences about the miniscule advance they were willing to pay.) I chuntered around with ideas for a few months, then suddenly sat down and wrote the first part, "The Fabulous Idiot," and the third part, "Morality," in about three weeks.

I lugged the two stories in to New York and found that, as is often the practice with publishers, all the people I had dealt with had been fired, transferred, or kicked upstairs, and their replacements didn't know anything about any handshake agreement to sell the stories to magazines first. They just wrapped up the whole thing and published it as a book.

I teach writing sometimes now, and believe me, I would never advise anyone that the way to sell a successful novel is to write Part Two before Parts One and Three, to construct each part as a separate entity, and to present a finished product scored across like a Hershey bar. "Try that," I would say, "and you'll get booted out of their offices,

and you'd better pray they threw the manuscript out first so you could land on it." And for a while I thought something of the sort had happened. The book was announced but never really advertised, and the hard-cover house remaindered it nine months after publication. You could get one in used-book stores, brand new, for forty-nine cents. The paperback, co-published at the same time, disappeared pretty rapidly on its first printing; after that it was reissued spasmodically every once in a while for years, during most of which time it couldn't be found anywhere.

But now the miracle—a slow one, but nevertheless a real miracle. It got an English edition. French. Italian. Spanish, Portuguese. German. One of my greatest joys lies in the simple fact of the publication of four Japanese editions, indicating that what the book had to say (not how prettily it may have been written—that could never have survived translation) was able to cross not only a language barrier but a cultural one, and be read and applauded in the Eastern orientation. With the publication of the Hungarian edition in 1979, *More Than Human* appears in its eighteenth language.

And that isn't all. I have at this writing recorded (for Caedmon Records) two of the three sections of the book, and am due to leave for France to make the movie with a famous French director and shoot it in Ireland with English-speaking actors. This time it seems for real (though in this business one never knows!); and if it is, it is only the last in a series of *eleven* options. The weirdest of these involves one of the greatest directors of all time (I won't tell you his name) and me, who wrote a screenplay and two complete revisions in only twenty-eight days, when all of a sudden the company blew apart and the great man showed up four days later in Rome. I haven't seen him since.

More Than Human won the International Fantasy Award (the precursor of the Hugo and Nebula Awards in science fiction), and the trophy was presented by the late, great Henry Kuttner. It has caused me grief and joy, lawsuits, and hopes fulfilled and hopes dashed. And now it is off on other new adventures—one of which is its appearance in the new, modern form of the graphic novel, beautifully visualized by Alex Nino—the book you are looking at now. And I have the feeling it will go on and on for years to come, in other versions, other lands, maybe even other worlds—why not? It says that for humans, there is more beyond, still more beyond that, but growth and change need not alter the basic humanity of humankind or the distinction and worth of every individual.

Theodore Sturgeon
Los Angeles, 1978

The idiot lived in a black and gray world, punctuated by the white lighting of hunger and the flickering of fear. His eyes were calm. His face was dead. He was twenty-five years old.



In the woods, he moved like an animal, beautifully. He hunted like an animal, without hate and without joy. He ate like an animal, only enough and never more. He fed himself when he could and did without when he could. If he could do neither, he was fed by the first person who came face-to-face with him. He never knew why, and never wondered.



Sometimes they would speak to him; they would speak to each other about him. He heard the sounds, but they had no meaning to him. His eyes were excellent, and could readily distinguish between a smile and a snarl, but neither expression could have any impact on a creature who himself had never laughed or scorned. He was incapable of anticipating anything—the stick that raised, the stone that flew found him unaware. But at their touch he would respond.

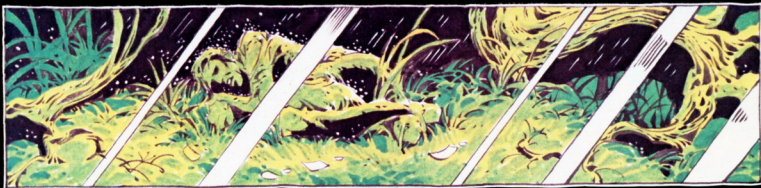


He would escape.



His experience spanned from terror to contentment. He slept like an animal, well and lightly, faced in the opposite direction from a man; for a man going to sleep is

about to escape into it while animals are prepared to escape out of it. Like a stone in a peach, a yolk in an egg, he carried another thing.



Passive, receptive, awake, alive. It had no function specific to the idiot. He was unaware of this strange inner thing because it was useless to him. This was a thing which only received and recorded. It did this

without words, without a code system of any kind. All around it, to its special sense, was a murmur—a sending—in which it soaked itself, absorbed, or perhaps simply fed. The idiot was unaware, but the thing inside—



Without words: Warm when the wet comes for a little but not enough for long enough. (Sadly): Never dark again. A feeling of pleasure. A sense of subtle crushing and take away the pink, the scratchy. Wait, wait, you can go back, yes, you can go back. Different but almost as good. (Sleep feelings): Yes, that's it! That's the—oh! (Alarm): You've gone too far, come

back, come back, come—(a twisting, a sudden cessation, and one less "voice"). . . . It all rushes up, faster, faster, carrying me. Answer: No, no. Nothing rushes. It's still, something pulls you down on to it, that's all. (Fury): They don't hear us, stupid, stupid . . . they do . . . they don't, only crying, only noises.



All impression, depression, dialogue. Radiation, fields of awareness. Murmuring, sending, speaking, sharing from thousands of voices. None, though, for the idiot. Nothing that related to him. Nothing that he could use.

He was a poor example of a man, but he was a man; and these voices, they were the voices of children, the very young children, who had not yet learned to stop crying to be heard.



Only crying, only noises.

"I am the very best of fathers and I know all the evil there is, Alicia. You know all the evil which must be avoided, but your sister knows no evil at all." It was Alicia's nineteenth birthday and Mr. Kew had been saying as much to her since she was four, since her mother died giving birth to Evelyn, cursing her husband, indignation at last awake and greater than the agony and fear.



"Your sister is purity triple-distilled." When she was sixteen, Alicia heard her father explain how a man went mad if he was alone with a woman. At thirteen, she told him she had a trouble, and with tears in his eyes, Mr. Kew said that it was because she had been thinking about her body. He punished her body until Alicia wished it never existed.



They lived in a place cut off and apart. Behind the house there was a brook and a pond, bracketed by bars and cement. This closed circle and the sky above it were Evelyn's entire world.



Evelyn had never been in the library where her sister spoke with her father. She had not been taught to read. Knowledge was given to her when they decided she was ready for it. She had been taught to obey.

Evelyn sat by the pond, glimpsed her ankle, and gasped. She covered it quickly, as Alicia would. The flesh must be disciplined. Father said so.



It was the moment of spring when all the world, full of dreamcolors, races for beauty. But there was also a sweet stillness, and that was the puzzle, the delicious tingle . . .

Evelyn longed for more of it.

Mr. Kew could not know that even here, in this sheltered rectangle, touches of the forbidden seeped in. Evelyn breathed the enchanted air and wept joy because it was too beautiful to bear.



The idiot was in the woods when he . . . felt it.

A blow to his face could have been no more forceful—

—and he who had never been called, nor responded—

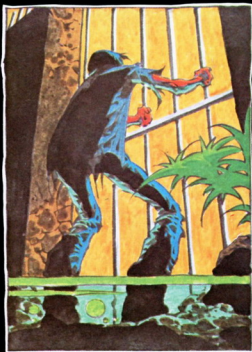
—followed the call, hunting, harking.



The inner seed burst, spreading across his internal gulf, linking his alive and independent core to the half-dead animal around it. Still without words, something spoke to him, now, in his own tongue.



It came to him after a long time, slowly. *The barrier would not yield.*



His hands stopped trying, but his eyes would not surrender. They yearned through the iron.



He moved along the bars, an animal pacing the wrong side of the cage, an inner need unable to turn away.



It rained for a day, a night, and half the next day. Evelyn watched and sang, even though she did not know music. She had heard only the chirping of birds and the whisper of wind, and so these things were the sounds of her singing . . .



*But I never touch the gladness
May not touch the gladness
Beauty, oh beauty of touchness
Spread like a leaf, nothing between me
and the sky but light
Rain touches me, wind touches me
Leaves, other leaves, touch and touch me . . .*

What are you doing, Evelyn? Button up your collar. Were you talking?

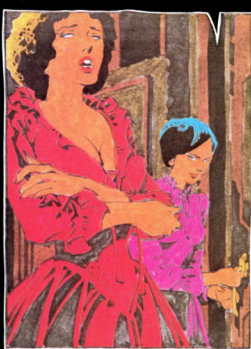
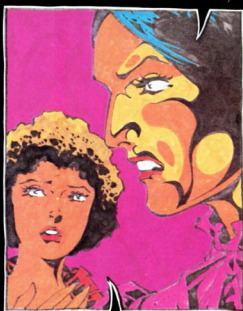


Talking? Yes, but not to you. *Touch me, Alicia . . . just . . . touch me.*

Touch you? We don't *touch* one another! It's *wicked*.

Silly. Then it would be *light* in your bath. We would see our *skin* that way.

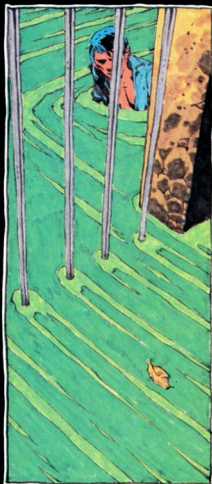
Stop it, Evelyn! I shall have to tell *Father!*



Dark here. There's so much *sun*—I want the sun on me, like a bath, warm all over.

Touch me, Alicia, or I will touch *myself*. I want to . . .

The idiot found himself following the leaf, not knowing why, where it led him . . .



One bar rattled. He did not realize it was weakened by rust; it was simply *different*. When it snapped, he inhaled water, coughed pain. The other bars would not move, so he sat hopelessly. Then—



It was that *voice*, the need, the bridge, the awareness. For the first time, the idiot applied reason to a problem.



It began to rain . . . all day, all night, half the next day . . .

Touch me . . . I want to . . . touch me.

She was here . . . and she wanted me to touch her.



Evil, evil—I thought it could be filtered out, but it can't. You're evil, Alicia, because a woman touched you for four years. But not Evelyn—it's in the *blood* and the blood must be *let*. Where is she, do you think?

Perhaps outdoors—she likes the pond. I'll go *with* you.



This is for me to do. Stay here. You, too, but *later*.

Father . . .



When Evelyn reached the pond, something—an invisible smoke, a magic—lay over it. She was filled with a sense of

nearness and she welcomed it, reaching out to the blossoming.



He came up from the magic and she was spellbound, trembling. She had known him for days, of course, but only now did their silent hunger and gladness meet and mingle . . .

Touch me. They did not know what a kiss was, but they had a better thing. They lived in each other, silently, their inner currents surging inward, outward, filling the gulfs of a single need . . .

They heard nothing, not the footsteps, nor the gasp, nor the terrible bellow of outrage. They were aware of nothing but each other . . .



Then Evelyn's father raised the whip . . .



NOOO!!



AARH!!

Evil—EVIL!!

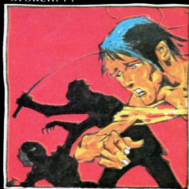
Then, as the whip-handle crushed the consciousness from the girl, something else was broken . . .



...and the idiot was again the animal, seeking nothing but escape . . .



NO! STOP! COME BACK!!



When Alicia saw her father returning, it was not his clothes or his ruined eye. It was something else . . .



Father! You're hurt—!



She followed him into the library, where he stood at the cabinets she had never seen opened before . . .



His one good eye pierced her, held her like a squirming insect . . .



. . . and she knew, horrified, that he did not see her at all, but looked at some unknowable horror of his own.



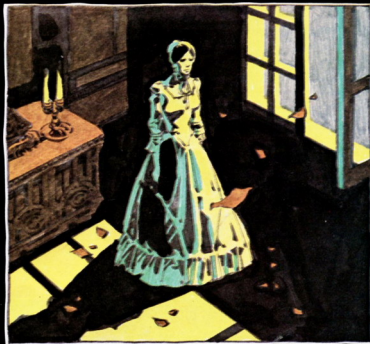
She was never to forget that look. It would be with her forever, even after he pulled the trigger and she screamed his name.



Two whole hours passed, simply black and lost, filled with a pain and silence.



Then aimless whimpering. "What? What's that you say?" The house did not answer.



She found Evelyn by the pool.

"Father hit me," she said calmly. "I'm going to sleep." Alicia whimpered. "What is it called when a person needs a . . . person . . . and the two are like one thing and there isn't anything at all anywhere?"

Love—it's a madness. It's bad.

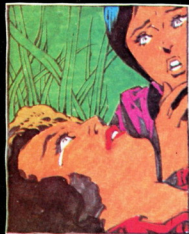


"It isn't bad. I had it. Now I'll sleep and I won't ever wake up. I wanted to do something and now I won't be able to do it. Will you do it for me, Alicia?" Her sister nodded. "For me, Alicia. You won't want to!" Alicia nodded again. "When the sun is bright, take a bath in it. Be in the sun like that . . . move, run. Run and . . . jump high. Make a wind

with running and moving. I so wanted that. I didn't know until now that I wanted it and now I . . . oh, Alicia! There it is, don't you see? The love—with the sun on its body!" The soft eyes were wide, looking on the darkling sky. Alicia looked up.



She did not see what Evelyn saw and when she looked down again, Alicia knew Evelyn was no longer seeing anymore.

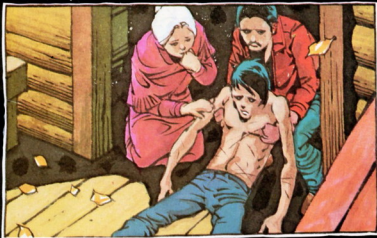


Far off, in the woods beyond the fence there was a rush of weeping. It followed her and followed her, almost to the door, and even then it seemed to go on inside her.

to be continued. . .

When Mrs. Prodd heard hoof thuds in the yard, she muttered under her breath and peered out between the dimity curtains. By the starlight she discerned the horse and stoneboat, with her husband plodding beside it, coming through. Then, quicker than she expected, he was at the kitchen door.

"What is it, Prodd?" she asked, alarmed.



"Gimme a blanket! Get a rag, hot water! Hurry now. Feller hurt bad. Picked him up in the woods."

In a moment he was back, carrying a man. "Here," said Mrs. Prodd. She flung open the door to Jack's room. When Prodd hesitated, she said, "Go on, go on, never mind the spread. It'll wash."

He gently lifted off the blanket in the light. "Oh, my God," he grunted. "He won't last the night."

"We got to try," she said softly.

He lasted the night. He lasted the week, too, and it was only then that the Prodds began to have hope for him. He lay motionless in the room called Jack's room, interested in nothing, aware of nothing except perhaps the light. He would stare out as he lay, perhaps seeing, perhaps watching, perhaps not. There was little to be seen out there. His inner self was encysted and silent in sorrow. His outer self seemed shrunken, unreachably.

"He say anything yet?" Prodd would ask, and his wife would shake her head. After ten days he had a thought; after two weeks he voiced it. "You don't suppose he's tetch'd, do you, Ma?"

She was unaccountably angry. "How do you mean, tetch'd?"

He gestured. "You know. Like feeble-minded, I mean. Maybe he don't talk because he can't."

"No!" she said positively. She looked up to see the question in Prodd's face. She said, "You ever look in his eyes? He's no idiot."

He had noticed the eyes. They disturbed him. "Well, I wish he'd say something"



"I guess sometimes the world's too much to live with, and a body sort of has to turn away from it to rest."

The weeks went by, and broken tissues knit and the wide, flat body soaked up nourishment like a cactus absorbing moisture. Never in his life had he had rest and food and...

She sat with him, talked to him. She sang songs. She was a little *brown woman* with colorless hair and bleached eyes, and there was about her a hunger very like the one he had felt. She chattered out everything that was in her mind, except about Jack.

He never smiled nor answered, and the only difference it made in him was that he kept his eyes on her face when she was in the room and patiently on the door when she was not. What a profound difference this was, she could not know; but the flat, starved body tissues were not all that were filling out.

A day came at last when the Prodds were at lunch and there was a fumbling at the inside of the door of Jack's

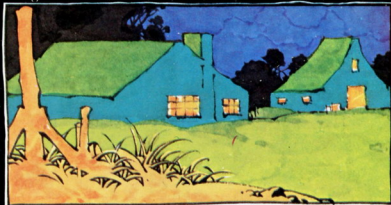


room. Prodd exchanged a glance with his wife, then rose and opened it. "Here, now, you can't come out like that! Ma, throw in my other overalls."

The ailing man was weak and uncertain, but he was on his feet. They helped him to the table and he slumped there, his eyes cloaked and stupid, ignoring the food until Mrs. Prodd tantalized him with a spoonful. She patted his shoulder and told him it was just wonderful how well he did.

"Well, Ma, you don't have to treat him like a two-year-old," said Prodd.

Later in the night, when he thought she was asleep, she said suddenly, "I do so have to treat him like a two-year-old, maybe even younger. It's like growing up all over again. Faster, but the same road."



He was quiet for a time. Then, "What'll we call him?" "Not Jack," she said before she could stop herself. "We'll bide our time about that."

He thought about it for a long time. He said, "Ma, I hope we're doing the right thing." But by then she was asleep.

He got a name. The night he cried, he discovered consciously that he could absorb a message, a meaning, from those about him. He began to hold and turn this ability, as he had once held and turned the ball of yarn. The sounds called

speech still meant little to him, and he never really learned to hear them; instead, ideas were transmitted to him directly. Ideas themselves are formless and it is hardly surprising that he learned very slowly to give ideas the form of speech . . .



"What's your name?" Prodd asked him suddenly one day.



They were filling the horse trough and there was that about water running in the sun which tugged deeply at the idiot. Utterly absorbed, he was jolted by the question.

Name. He made a reaching, and it came to him as pure concept. "*Name*" is the single thing which is me and what I have done and been and learned. He said, "Ul . . ."



"What is it, son?" *All alone.* It was all there, the hunger, the loss, waiting for a symbol, a name. He strained, and gasped. "*Ul . . . ul . . . lone . . .*"



"Lone?" said Prodd, and it could be seen that the syllable meant something to him, though far less than intended. But it would do. The idiot nodded. It was his first conversation; another miracle.



It took him five years to learn to talk and always he preferred not to. He never did learn to read. He was simply not equipped.

There were miracles. The Prodds thought of them as achievements, as successes, but they were miracles . . .



There was the time when Prodd found two strong hands at the other end of a 12 x 12 . . .



. . . and the time Mrs. Prodd found her patient holding a ball of yarn, looking at it only because it was red.



There was the time he found a full bucket by the pump and brought it inside. It was a long while, however, before he learned to work the handle.



When he had been there a year, Mrs. Prodd remembered and baked a cake. Impulsively she put four candles on it.

The Prodds beamed at him as he stared at the little flames, fascinated. His strange eyes caught hers, then Prodd's. "Blow it out, son."



Perhaps he visualized the act. Perhaps it was the result of the warmth from the couple. They laughed together and Mrs. Prodd kissed his cheek.

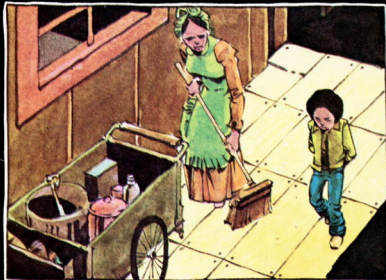


Suddenly something twisted inside. This wasn't the call. It was not even like the exchange he had experienced with Evelyn. But because he could now feel to such a degree, he was aware of the emptiness, and so he did what he had done when he had first lost the girl. He cried.



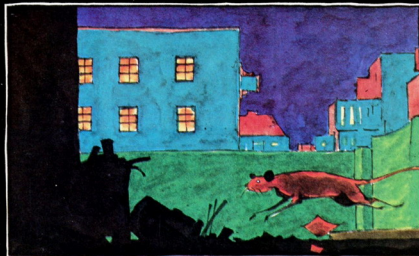
It was the same tortured weeping that had led Prodd to him in the woods a year ago, and when it stopped, there was something new in his face. "I'm sorry," Prodd said. "Reckon we did something wrong." But his wife said, "It wasn't wrong. You'll see."

There were two boys for whom the smell of disinfectant on tile was the smell of hate. For Gerry Thompson it was the smell of hunger, too, and of loneliness. Hatred was his only warmth in the world, and at six Gerry was very largely a man.



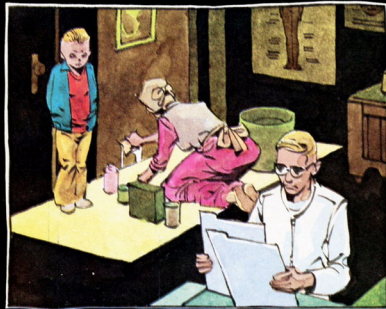
He lived like this for two years. Then he ran away from the state orphanage, to live by himself, to be the color of gutters

and garbage so he would not be picked up, so he would not be cornered. Gerry Thompson was alone.



For Hip Barrows there was no hunger and no precocious maturity. But there was the smell of hate, surrounding his father the doctor, the deft and merciless hands, the somber clothes. Even Hip's memory of Dr. Barrows's voice was the memory of chlorine and carbolic.

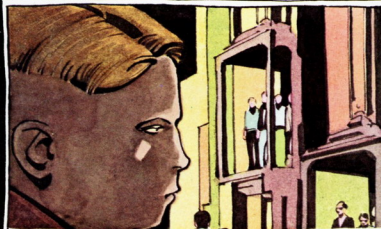
Little Hip Barrows was a brilliant and beautiful child, to whom the world refused to be a straight, hard path of disinfected tile. Everything came easily to him, except control of his curiosity—and "everything" included the cold injections of rectitude administered by his father the doctor.



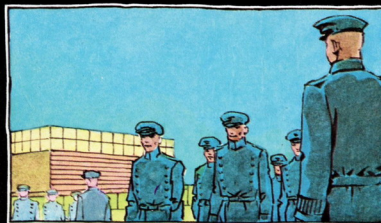
He rose through childhood like a rocket, burnished, swift, afire. His gifts brought him anything a young man might want, friends and honors; but such was the philos-



He was eight when he built his first radio, a crystal set for which he even wound the coils. His father the doctor discovered it and forbade him ever touching so much as a piece of wire again.



He was a brilliant fifteen when he was expelled from pre-medical school for playfully cross-wiring the relays in the staff elevators so that every touch of a control button was an unappreciated adventure.



He even had time for the ROTC. Through it, he eventually learned that in the Air Force it is the majority, not the minority, who tend to regard physical perfection, conversational brilliance, and easy achievement as defects rather than assets.

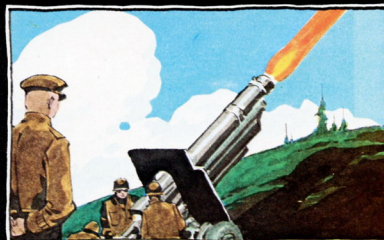
ophy of his father the doctor, who had worked for everything, that Hip's early gained friendships and honors also brought him uneasiness and a sick humility of which he was quite unaware.



He was nine when his father the doctor located his cache of radio and electronics texts and magazines and piled them all up in front of the fireplace and made him burn them, one by one; they were up all night.



At sixteen he was attending engineering school. He always had time to talk and read and think, time to listen to those who valued his listening.



He found himself alone more than he liked and avoided more than he could bear. It was on the anti-aircraft range that he found an answer, a dream, and a disaster

Alicia Kew stood in the deepest shade by the edge of the meadow. "Father, Father, forgive me!" she cried.



She sank down on the grass, blind with grief and terror, torn, shaken with conflict.

Devil, she thought, why won't you be dead? Five years ago you killed yourself, you killed my sister, and still it's



"Father, forgive me." Sadist, pervert, murderer, devil . . . *man*, dirty, poisonous *man*!

I've come a long way, she thought, I've come no way at all. How I ran from gentle lawyer Jacobs when he came to help with the bodies; oh, how I ran, so that he might not go mad and poison me. How I fled from his wife, too, thinking women were evil and must not touch me. They had a time with me, indeed they did; it was so long before I could understand that I was mad, not they. . . . In the cab, when I screamed and couldn't stop, for the people (the hurry), so many *bodies*, all touching and so achingly visible; bodies



on the streets, the stairs, men holding women who laughed and were brazenly unfrightened Dr. Rothstein, who explained that there must be men and

women else there would be no people at all . . . I had to learn this, dear devil Father, because of you; because of you I had never seen an automobile or a breast or a railroad train or a restaurant or a bathing suit or the hair on—oh, forgive me, Father.

I'm not afraid of a whip, I'm afraid of hands and eyes, thank you, Father. But one day I shall live with people all around me; I shall go among thousands on a beach without walls, with a tiny strip of cloth here and there, and let them see my navel; I shall meet a man with white teeth and round, strong arms, Father, and I shall, oh, what have I become, Father, forgive me. I live in a house you never saw, where bright cars whisper past and children play outside the hedge which is not a wall. I look through the curtains whenever I choose, and see strangers. There is no way to make the bathroom black dark, and there is a mirror as tall as I am; and one day, Father, I shall leave the towel off.

But all that will come later, the moving about among strangers, the touchings without fear. Now I must live alone, and think; I must read of the world and its workings, yes, and of twisted madmen like you, Father; Dr. Rothstein insists that you were not the only one, that you were so rare, really, only because you were so rich.

Evelyn . . . Evelyn never knew her father was mad. Evelyn never saw the pictures of the poisoned flesh. I lived in a world different from this one, but her world was just as different, the world Father and I made for her, to keep her pure. . . .



The picture of her father, dead, calmed her strangely. She rose and looked back into the woods, looked carefully around the meadow, shadow by shadow, tree by tree.



She slid out of underwear and stockings with a single movement. The air stirred and its touch on her body was indescribable; it seemed to blow through her.



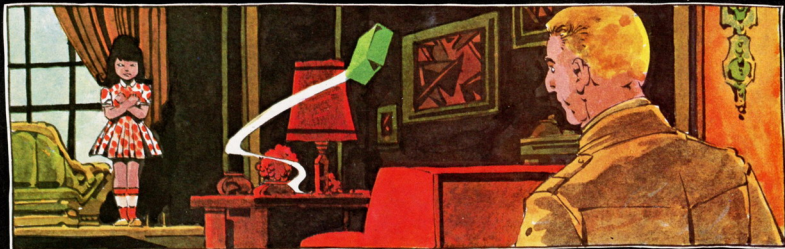
All right, Evelyn, I will, I will.



She took a deep breath. She shut her eyes so tight there was red in the blackness. Her hands flickered over the buttons on her dress.



She stepped forward into the sun, and with tears of terror pressing through her closed lids, she danced naked, for Evelyn, and begged her dead father's pardon.



When Janie was four, she hurled a paperweight at a lieutenant because of a feeling that he had no business around the house while her father was overseas. The lieutenant's skull was fractured and he was forever unable to recall the fact that Janie stood ten feet away from the

object when she threw it. Janie's mother later *whaled* the *tar* out of her for it, which Janie accepted with her usual composure. Strength without control, she sensed once again, had its demerits.

"She gives me the creeps," her mother told her other lieutenant later. "I can't stand her. You think there's something wrong with me for talking like that, don't you?"



No. You smell like Major Grenfell. And don't you ever do that again.



W-Wima . . . this child is . . . telepathic.

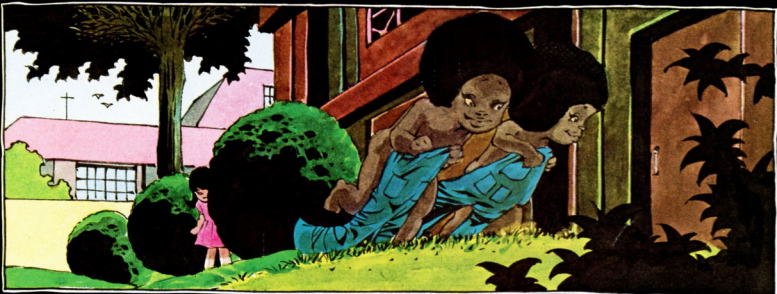
"No, I don't," said the other Lieutenant, who did. So she invited him to see the child for himself. "Hel-lo, Janie," he tried. "Are we going to be friends?"



Nonsense. She gets her vitamins every single day—Wait. Where are you going?



Janie achieved a wolfish smile. The Lieutenant left early and never came back.



When Janie was five she began playing with some other little girls. They were toddlers, perhaps two and a half years old, and they looked like twins. On warm days, they would

skin out of their rompers faster than the eye could follow, casting deliciously frightened glances at the basement door.

Janie discovered that with a little concentration she could move the rompers. To the twins' horror, the clothing rose from the ground in a steep climbing turn—



It seemed hours—weeks—of fascinated anticipation before Janie saw the basement door open. Out came the janitor, "Bonnie!" he bellowed, "Branie! Look at yee! Where's yo' clothes?"



"Catch you doing that once more, I'll get Mr. Milton come punch yo' ears fulla holes. Heah?" They shrank together, their eyes round, as he lurched back to the door.



—and fluttered to the sill of a first-floor window. The twins jumped up and down in agitation, stretching and craning, twittering . . .



He swooped down on them, "Tryin' th'ow away yo' expensive clothes? Oh, I'm goin' to whup you good!" Janie giggled.



The twins went to the shadows by the wall and whispered to one another . . .



There was no more fun for Janie that day, or for three more . . .

Across the street from Janie's apartment house was a park. In a copse of dwarf oak was a hidden patch of bare earth, known only to Janie. From a certain low branch it was an eight-inch drop to the earthen floor . . .



"He-hee," said the other twin, and Janie did what she had done to the Lieutenant. "Eeep," said the twin—



She hurled a bolt of hatred at them the like of which she had never even imagined before. "Oop," said one. The other said "Eeep." Then they were both gone.



They're only three years old, she told herself. Then, "They knew who it was all along, that moved those rompers," she said aloud, in admiration "Ho-Ho! Four days ago they

. . . but this time, the very instant her fingers left the branch, she struck the ground flat on her stomach. "Ho-ho," said a voice, and she received a stinging blow on the rump.



—and disappeared. "Ho-ho," There she was, on a branch above. Both twins were grinning widely.



"Ho-ho," It was very distant, and something made her look across the street. Two little figures sat like gargoyles on the courtyard wall. They waved to her.



couldn't even reach a six-foot sill or get away from a spanking—and now look."

In the vestibule, Janie pressed the shiny brass button marked *Janitor*. "Who push that? You push that?" His voice filled the world.



Janie made her voice all croony the way her mother did. "Mister Widdlecombe, my mother says I can play with your girls."

Well, that's mighty *nice*, but don't you let 'em get in any mischief – and see if you can't keep them clothes on 'em.



Janie's whole life shaped itself from that afternoon. It was a time of belonging, of thinking alike, of transcendent sharing. She spoke hardly a word, and the twins had not yet learned to talk, but this was incidental to another kind of communion. Janie showed them how she



could get chocolates from the box without going there, and how she could throw a pillow clear up to the ceiling without touching it, though the paint box and easel impressed them most. It was a thing together, a sudden opening, a binding.



The afternoon slid by, smooth and soft and lovely, and when the hall door banged open and Wima's voice clanged out, the twins were still there. "Dear God," she said, "she's got the place filled with niggers!"



"They're going home now," said Janie resolutely, as Wima said to the man, "Honest to God, Pete, this is the first time this ever happened. What kind of a place you must think I run here! Get them the hell out!" She was screaming at the end.



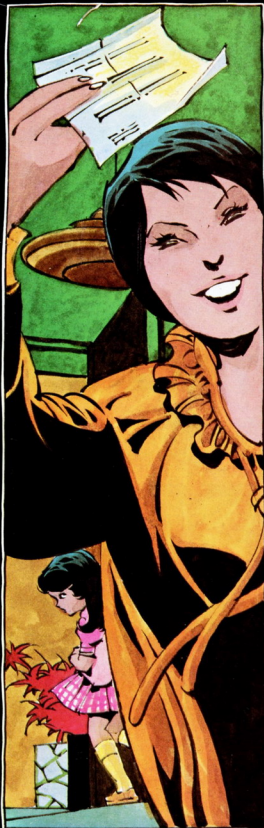
Janie lay in bed as stiff and smooth and contained as a round toothpick. Nothing would get in, nothing could get out; somewhere she had found this surface that went all the way through, and as long as she had it, nothing was going to happen.

But if anything happens, came a whisper, you'll break.

But if I don't break, nothing will happen, she answered.

But if anything.

The dark hours came and grew black, and the black hours labored by.



Her door crashed open and the light blazed. "He's gone and baby, have I got business with you!"

Janie pushed back the covers and thumped her feet down. Without understanding quite why, she began to get dressed in her good plaid dress.

Wima was pounding her fist. "You wrecked my celebration, so you ought to know what I'm celebrating. You don't know it, but I've had a big trouble and I didn't know how to handle it, and now it's all done for me. And I'll tell you all about it right now, baby Miss Big Ears. Because your father—I can handle him any time—but what was I going to do with your big mouth going day and night? That was my trouble, what was I going to do about your big mouth when he got back? Well, it's all fixed, he won't be back, the war fixed it up for me.

She drank from a square-stemmed glass, and waved a yellow sheet. "Smart girls know this is a telegram, and it says here, 'Regret to inform you that your husband.' They shot your father, that's what they regret to say, and now this is the way it's going to be from now on between you and me. Whatever I want to do I do, an' whatever you want to nose into, nose away. Now isn't that fair?"

She turned for an answer but there was none. Janie was gone.

Wima stood in the middle of the living room, not knowing which way to go. She whispered, "Janie?"

She put her hands on the sides of her face and lifted her face away from it. She turned around and around, and asked, "What's the matter with me?"





Lone sensed the change before anyone else, even before Mrs. Prodd. It was a difference in the nature of one of her silences. It was a treasure-proud silence, and Lone felt it change as a man's kind of pride might change when he turned from a jewel he treasured to a green shoot he treasured. He said nothing and concluded nothing; he just knew.

So the day Prodd came down to the south meadow, where Lone was stepping and turning tirelessly, a very part of his whispering scythe, Lone knew what it was that he wanted to say.

Understanding was hardly one of his troubles any more, but niceties of expression were. He had to rehearse his tongue, still thick and unwieldy after eight years here. But suddenly, Lone found it. "Been thinking," he said. "I should go." That wasn't quite it. "Move along," he corrected. That was better. And he added, without speaking, *Because you want me to go.*

Prodd didn't hear that, of course, so he said, "Well," and he kicked a stone. "When we came here, we built Jack's—*your*—room, the room you're using. We call it Jack's room. You know why, you know who Jack is?"

Yes, Lone thought. He said nothing. "Jack's our son. I guess it sounds funny. Jack was the little guy we were so sure about, but Jack, he . . . never got born. He's coming *now*, though. We're a bit old for it, but . . . Lone, listen to me. I don't want you to feel we're turning you out. We got a lot to thank you for. . . ."

"Said I was going—fore you told me," *I knew.*

"Well . . . good then," Prodd smiled.

"Good," said Lone. "About Jack." He nodded vehemently. "Good." And he picked up the scythe.

He worked a bit, then looked after Prodd. *Walks slower than he used to*, he thought. It was true, and there were more wrinkles on Prodd's face, too.

But they were mostly from smiling. Especially these days.

Lone did not smile.



Lone's next conscious thought was, *Well, that's finished.* Cooking and warmth and work. A birthday cake. A bed. . .



It was cold at the foot of the dwarf oak, and as dark as the chambers of a dead man's heart. Something had happened, and Janie had broken.

Little animals ran on her face. They whispered and cooed. One stroked her cheek. "*Ho-ho,*" it said.



On the other side, something soft snuggled against her. It said, "*Hee-hee,*" and she put one arm around Bonnie and one around Beanie and began to cry.



Lone came back to borrow an ax. He could do just so much with his bare hands. When he came out from the woods he saw the difference in the farm. All the colors were brighter; the smells were clearer. Things were alive. Prodd looked happy. . . .

Horse dropped dead. Truck's all right, but I wish I could keep *this* from happening. Spend half my time diggin' it out.



Lone! Man, I thought I wouldn't see you *again*, going off like you did. Come help me get *unstuck*, Lone-boy!



You'd think that would bother me, losing the horse, but *nothing* bothers me these days. Wait'll *Ma* sees you! Had *breakfast*?

When Ma saw Lone, she hugged him hard. Something uncomfortable stirred in Lone. He wanted an ax. He thought all these other things were settled. "You sit right down there and I'll get you some breakfast."



Lone knew he was not good with conversation, sounds, and laughter so he just said yes, ate, asked Prodd for the ax, and went out.



Prodd asked, "What you doing now, Lone?" Lone said, "Working Up there." He moved his hand. "In the woods, Lone? Doing what-trapping?"



Janie read as slowly and as carefully as she could. She didn't have to read aloud, but only carefully enough so the twins could understand. She reached the part where the woman tied up the man and—want the one with the pictures, came the silent message. So she changed books and they were happy again.



This house was just the happiest thing of all. It was a big house on a hill with a big wall around it. Bonnie had found it. They'd had a terrible time finding some way to get Janie in, though, until Beanie fell into the brook where it went through the fence, and came up inside.



There were plenty of places for hide-and-seek, and there was even a little room with chains on the walls, and bars.



Down in the cold cellar rooms, they had found canned vegetables and bottles of wine, which they smashed. It tasted bad but smelled just wonderful.



They had been happy ever since they got here and much of the hectic time before that. They had learned that the twins could appear inside a space, like a store at night, and unlock the door from the inside when it was fastened with some kind of lock that Janie couldn't move.



The best thing they had learned, though, was the way the twins could attract attention when someone was chasing Janie—appearing under their feet to trip them, be suddenly sitting on their shoulders, and wetting into their collars while Janie was just ordinarily running. Ho-ho.



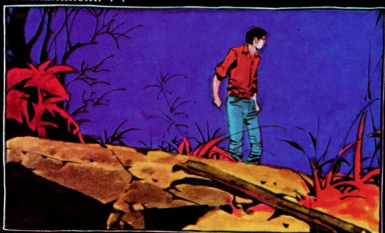
It went much faster with the ax. Lone wanted to be able to be only what he knew he was—alone. But eight years at the farm had changed his life. He needed shelter. The

more he looked at his hidden place, the more homey it seemed. At first, his work on it was primitive, but soon he had a wonderful cabin-cave.



He was hunting for stones for the fireplace when an invisible something began to tug at him. He recoiled as if burned. It was sweet and needful, yes; but it was also the restimulation of a stinging lash, a crushing kick, and the greatest loss he had ever known.

For half an hour he tried to ignore the call . . . and he failed. He rose, and began to walk to the call in a dreamlike world. The longer he walked, the more irresistible the call became, the deeper his enchantment. . .



... and by the time he reached the clearing, he was nearly somnambulant. There was a little girl on the bank, in a torn plaid dress. She was about six. He had one moment of clear, conscious determination: to get out of this terrible place. Even as he felt this touch of reason, he heard the brook. . . .

Yes, the opening was still here, and the call . . . like the one he had heard before—it was a hunger, an aloneness, a wanting. The difference was in what it wanted. It said without words that it was afraid and burdened.



It said, *Who will take care of me now?* She was looking directly at him. "Bonnie!" she called sharply, and he felt a great surge of relief. She did not want him.



Away went the restimulation. Back into the past went the whip and the bellowing, the magic and the loss—remembered still, but back where they belonged, with their raw-nerve tendrils severed so that never again could they reach into his present.



He had not known . . . he had not *known* the size of his burden! The call was no maelstrom of blood and emotion, but the aimless chunterings of a hungry brat.



He turned his back on the call, went back to his work.



When he got back to his shelter, there was a small, naked child, about four years old, squatting in front of his door. "Hee-hee!" she said happily.

"Ho-ho." Now there were two little girls.

Lone possessed an advantage; he had no impulse whatever to question his sanity, but when he reached out to grab them. . .



. . . he was astonished—a strange thing in itself, for he had seldom been interested enough in anything to be astonished. "Ho-ho," and "Hee-hee!"

Once, years ago, he had run to catch a deer. Once he had reached up to catch a bird. Once he had plunged into a stream after a trout. *Once.*



Inside, Lone wished he had more carrots.

So did the little girls with the big eyes who were sometimes not there. . .

He would be crafty this time, ignoring them, letting them come closer and closer to the seething pot. . .



. . . while he edged closer to the door.

Then, when they . . . they were gone.
fairly drooled. . .



And at length he ate. He had reached the point of licking his fingers when a sharp knock on the door caused him to bolt upright, so utterly unexpected was it. . . .

He put on the inner bar and slowly circled the room. Nothing. He shrugged.



Good evening. I was passing by and thought I would come to call. You are at home? You see, being good neighbors, we are willing to *share dinner* with you. . . .



Please? We're hungry. The stuff in the cans, it's all gone. *Please.* . .

"You're a real cheap, stingy son of a bitch. Well, we didn't want any of your old. . ." But then the girl's voice broke and they left.



He saw Mrs. Prodd. "Now you set right down and have some breakfast." He leapt up—



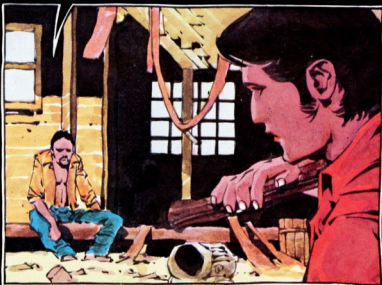
—and sent his flat, harsh voice hurtling out: "Wait!"

The corn should have been husked. Out in the fallow field, the truck lay forlornly, bogged. The half-door into the barn, askew and perverted amid the misery, hollowly applauded.

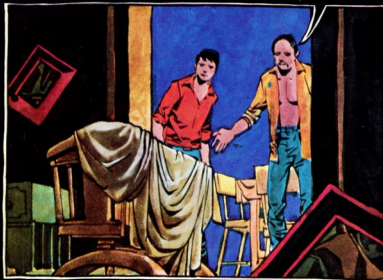
Well, Lone, boy. Corn's for husking. Ain't missed a mill-kin'. Sure miss that horse, though. Bothers me. Ma's gone east. Come inside the house?



Have a look, Lone boy. Go right on in, have a look. Fine little feller, just fine. But Ma, she had to go off lookin' for Jack, I reckon. . . .

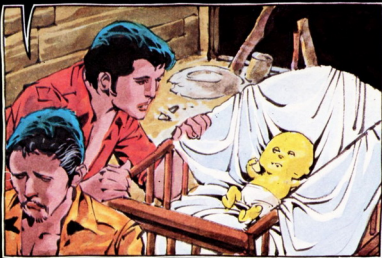


See, he's not Jack, that's the one blessing. What that in there is, that's what the doctor calls a mongoloid. Can't shovel him into the ground now, can you? That was all right for Ma, way she loved flowers and all.

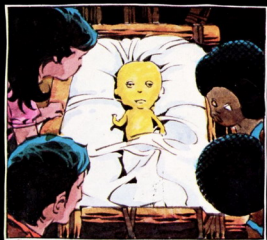
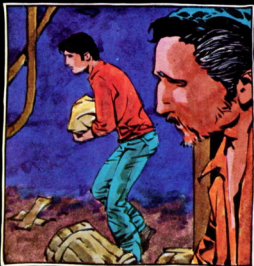


Too many words. Lone brought his eyes to Prodd's and found out what Prodd wanted. When he was finished he rasped, "Mind you fix that barn door. I'll come back."

The night was sun-stained by the time he got home. Janie jumped up. "What's that? What'd you bring?"



Lone put it down carefully. "It's a baby," said Janie. "Is it a baby?" Lone nodded.



Janie looked again. "Nastiest one I ever saw."



"You're a kidnapper," said Janie. "Know that?"

"What's a kidnapper?"

"Man that steals babies, that's what!"

"Well," said Lone, "ain't nobody going to find out. Only man knows about it, I fixed it so he's forgotten. That's the daddy. The ma, she's dead, but he don't know that either. He thinks she's back East."

The baby lay still with its dull button eyes open, breathing too loudly. Janie stood before the fire, staring thoughtfully at the stepot. Finally she dipped into it with a ladle and dribbled the juice into a tin can. "Milk," she said while she worked. "You got to start swiping milk for him, Lone."

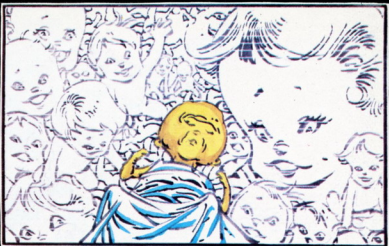
Janie slopped the broth on the baby's disinterested mouth. "He's getting some," Janie said optimistically.

"Maybe through his ears," said Lone, without humor.

Janie pulled at the baby's shirt and half sat him up. She frowned, then suddenly said, "Oh, maybe I can!" as if answering a comment. The twins giggled and jumped up and down.

Janie drew the tin can a few inches away from the baby's face and narrowed her eyes. The baby immediately started to choke.

"That's not quite right but I'll get it," said Janie. She spent half an hour trying. Then the baby went to sleep.



One afternoon Lone watched for a while and then prodded Janie with his toe. "What's going on there?"

She looked. "Baby's talking to them."

Lone pondered. "I used to hear babies."

Bonnie says all babies can do it, and you were a baby, weren't you?"

"What I mean is," said Lone laboriously, "when I was growned I could hear babies."

"You must've been an idiot, then," said Janie. "Idiots can't understand people but can understand babies. Bonnie told me."

"Baby's s'posed to be some kind of idiot."

"Yes, Beanie says he's different. He's like an adding machine."

"What's a *adding machine*?"

Janie exaggerated her patience. "It's a thing you push buttons and it gives you the right answer. If you have three cents and four cents, you push a button for *three* and a button for *four* and then you pull a handle. The machine tells you how many you got altogether."

Lone sorted all this out, then waved toward the orange crate that was now Baby's bassinet. "He got no buttons."

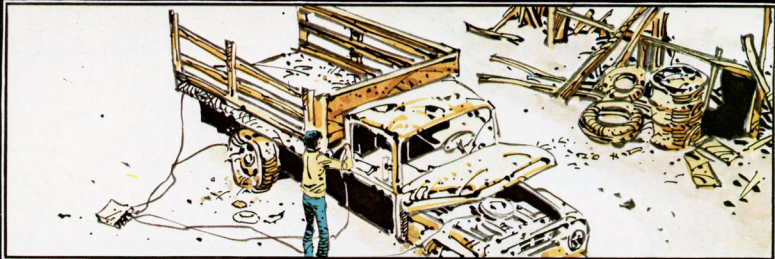
"That was just a finger of speech," Janie said loftily.

"Look, you tell Baby some things and he will put the somethings together and tell you what they come out to, just like the adding machine does with numbers. I got to tell you every little thing four times. Now listen, if you want to know something, you tell me and I'll tell Baby and he'll get the answer and tell the twins and they'll tell me and I'll tell you."

Lone sat and thought. "Suppose I got a truck," he said a half hour later. "It gets stuck in a field all the time; the ground's too tore up. Suppose I want to fix it so it won't stick no more. Baby tell me a thing like that?"

"Of course," said Janie sharply. She turned and looked at Baby. In a moment, she looked at the twins. "He says stop driving on the field and you won't get stuck. You could have thought of that yourself, you dumbhead."





Lone said, "Well, suppose you *got* to use it there, then what?"

Janie sighed. The next answer was, "Put great big wheels on it."

"Suppose you ain't got time nor money nor tools for that?"

This time it was, "Make it real heavy where the ground is hard and real light where the ground is soft."

Janie very nearly went on strike when Lone demanded to know how this could be accomplished. Lone rejected the suggestion of loading and unloading rocks. The day's impasse was reached when it was determined that there was a way, but it could be expressed only by facts not in Lone's or Janie's possession. Janie said it sounded like radio tubes and with that to go on, Lone proceeded by entering a radio service shop the next night and stealing a heavy armload of literature. For days, Janie scanned elementary electricity and radio texts, which meant nothing to her but which apparently Baby could absorb faster than she scanned.

At last the specifications were met: something which Lone could make himself, which would involve only a small knob you pushed to make the truck heavier and pulled to make it lighter—according to Baby, a *sine qua non*.

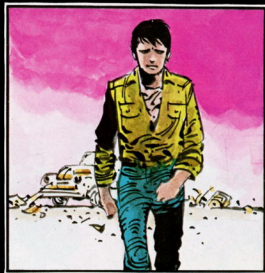
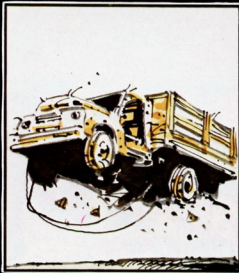
With the help of two tongue-tied infants, a mongoloid baby, and a sharp-tongued child who seemed to despise him but never failed him, Lone built the device. He did it because an old man who had taught him something he could not name was mad with bereavement and needed to work and could not afford a horse.

The truck stood bogged in the field. Lone unwound the device from around his neck and shoulders and began to attach it according to Baby's instructions. There wasn't much to do. Just the little box with its four silvery cables: the box clamped to steering post, and each cable leading to a corner of the frame.

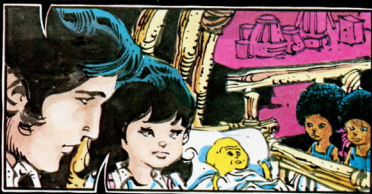
He got in and pulled the knob toward him. The frame creaked as the truck seemed to raise itself on tiptoe. He pushed the knob forward. The truck settled its front axle and differential housing on solid ground with a bump that made his head rock. He scanned the other controls there, the ones that came with the truck: pedals and knobs and sticks and buttons. He sighed. He wished he had wit enough to drive a truck.

Lone got out and climbed the hill to Prodd's house. He wasn't there. The kitchen door swung in the breeze. There was a smell of mildew. Otherwise it was fairly the same as the last time he was here. The only new thing was a paper nailed to the wall by all four corners. It had writing all over it. Lone sighed. He wished he had sense enough to read.

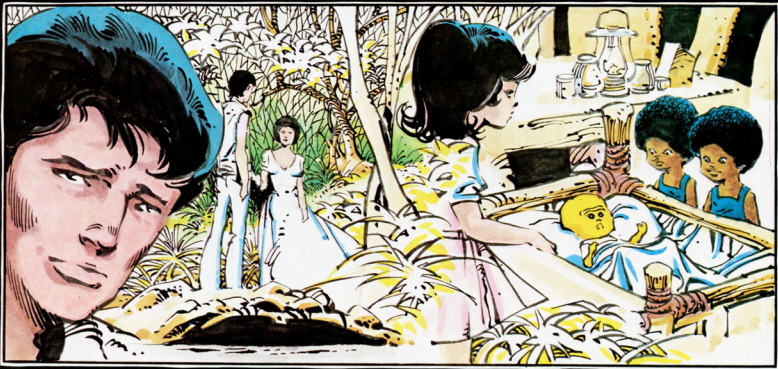
He plunged into the forest without looking back. He never returned. The truck stood out in the sun, slowly deteriorating, slowly falling to pieces around the bright, strange silver cables. Powered by the slow release of atomic binding energy, the device was the practical solution of flight without wings, the simple key to a new era in transportation and interplanetary travel. Made by an idiot, harnessed to replace a spavined horse, stupidly left, numbly forgotten . . . earth's first anti-gravity generator. The *idiot!*



Ask Baby what is a friend.



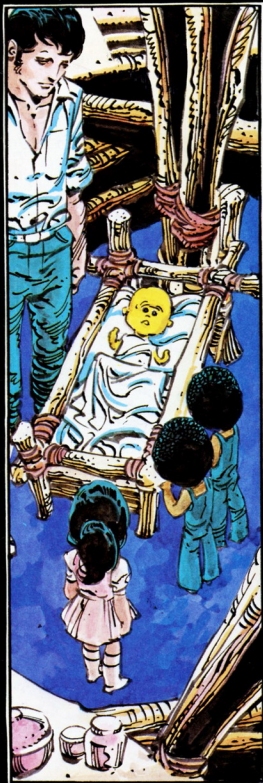
"He says only if you love yourself."



guards or screens or barriers—no language to stumble over, no ideas to misunderstand, nothing at all but a merging. What had he been then? What was it Janie had said? Idiot. An idiot.

An idiot, she had said, was a grown person who could hear only babies' silent speech. Then . . . what was the creature with whom he had merged? "Ask Baby what is a grown person who can *talk* like babies."

"He says, an *innocent*."



He had been an idiot who could hear the soundless murmur. She had been an innocent who, as an adult, could speak it. "Ask Baby what if an idiot and an innocent are close together?"

"He says when they so much as touched, the innocent would stop being an innocent and the idiot would stop being an idiot." Lone thought: then what's so beautiful about being an innocent? The answer came: *It's the waiting that's beautiful.*



Waiting for the end of innocence—and an idiot is waiting for the end of idiocy, too. So each ends in their meeting! *What am I doing?* he thought wildly. *Trying to find out what I am and what I belong to . . . is this another aspect of being . . . different?*



"Ask Baby what kind of people are constantly trying to find out what they are and what they belong to."

"He says, *every* kind."

"What kind," Lone whispered, "am I?" A minute later he roared, "*What kind?*"



"Shut up. He doesn't have a way to . . . *wait*. He says he is a figure-outer brain and I am a body and the twins are arms and legs and you are the head. He says the 'I' is all of us."

Lone thought his heart would burst. "I belong! Part of you, you, and you, too! And we'll grow! We just got born!"



"He says not on your life. Not with a head like that. We can do practically *anything*, but we most likely won't. He says we're a thing, all right, but the thing is an idiot."

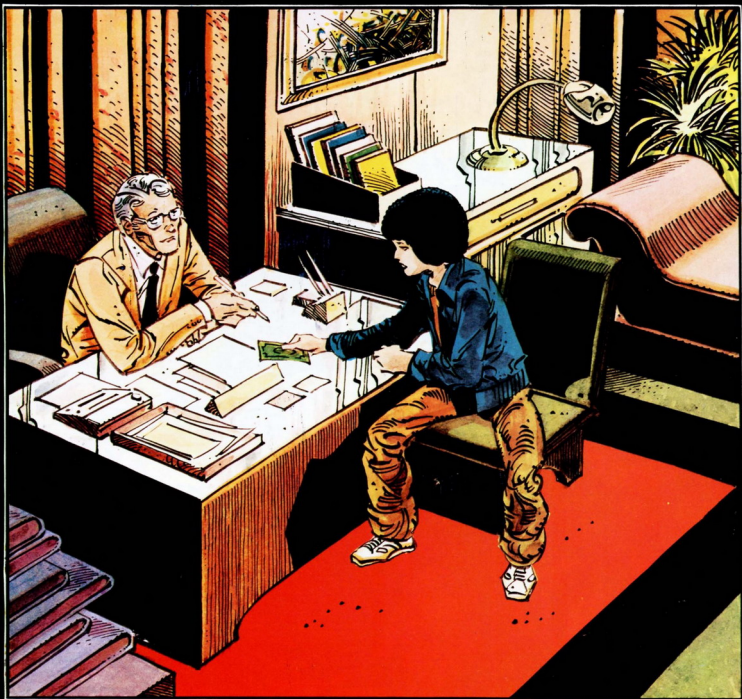
I finally got in to see this Stern. He wasn't an old man at all. He looked up from his desk, flicked his eyes over me, and picked up a pencil. "Sit over there, Sonny."

I stood where I was until he looked up again. Then I said, "Look, if a midget walks in here, what do you say—sit over there, Shorty?"

He put the pencil down and stood up. He smiled. His smile was as quick and sharp as his eyes. "I was wrong," he said, "but how am I supposed to know you don't want to be called Sonny?"

That was better, but I was still mad. "I'm fifteen and I don't have to like it. Don't rub my nose in it."

He smiled again.



"What's your name?"

"Gerard."

"First or last?"

"Both," I said.

"Is that the truth?"

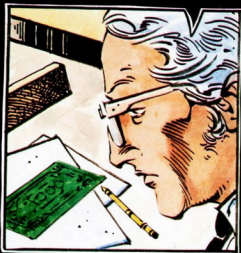
I said, "No. And don't ask me where I live either."

He put the pencil down again. "We're not going to get very far this way."

It was my turn to smile.

"So what else is bothering you? How you're going to get paid?" I took out a thousand-dollar bill and laid it on the desk. "That's so you won't have to bill me. *You* keep track of it. Tell me when it's used up and I'll give you more. So you don't need my address. Wait," I said, when he reached toward the money. "Let it lay there. I want to be sure you and I are going to get along."

You make things difficult, don't you? Where did you get a thousand dollars?



Before we start—if we start—I got to know something. The things I say to you, is that just between us, like a priest or a lawyer?

I won a contest. Twenty-five words or less on how much fun it is to do my daintier things with Sudso.



"Absolutely," he said. I watched him when he said it. I believed him.

"Pick up your money," I said. "How do we start?"

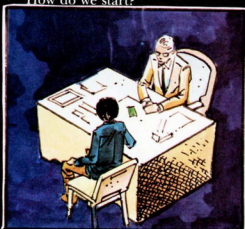
"Good," he said. I was surprised, but he didn't say anything more. Just waited.



We started when you walked in here.



All right, you got me. All I had was an opening. I didn't know where you would go from there, so I couldn't be there ahead of you.



Always.

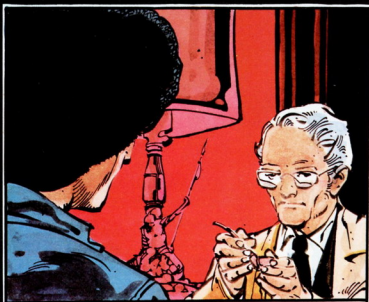
You answer that and I won't have to come back here. Look, this isn't getting us anywhere is it?



That's very interesting. Do you usually figure everything out in advance?

How often are you correct?

Depends on where you want to go.



Stern took out a blackened pipe, smelled it, and turned it over while looking at me. "No one really knows what's the matter with you but yourself; no one can find a cure for it but you; no one but you can identify it as a cure; and once you find it, no one but you can do anything about it."

"What are you here for?"

"To listen."

"I don't have to pay somebody a day's wages every hour just to *listen*."

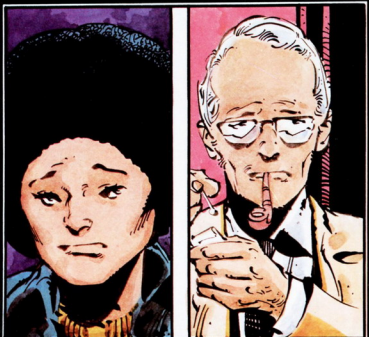
"True. But you're convinced that I listen selectively."

"Am I?" I wondered about it. "I guess I am. Well, don't you?"

"No, but you'll never believe me."

I laughed. He asked me what that was for. I said, "You're not calling me Sonny."

"Not you." He shook his head slowly. He was watching me while he did it, so his eyes slid in their sockets as his head moved. "What is it you want to know about yourself that made you worried I might tell people?"



"I want to find out why I killed somebody," I said right away.

It didn't faze him a bit. "Lie down over there."

I got up. "On that couch?"

He nodded.



As I stretched out, he said, "You can quit testing, Sonny. I'm good enough for your purposes."

I clenched my jaw so hard, my back teeth hurt. Then I relaxed all over. It was wonderful. "All right," I said. "I'm sorry." He didn't say anything, but I had a feeling that he was laughing. Not at me, though.

"How old are you?" he asked suddenly.

"Uh—fifteen."

"Uh—fifteen," he repeated. "What does the 'uh' mean?"

"Nothing. I'm fifteen."

"When I asked your age, you hesitated because some other number popped up. You discarded that and substituted fifteen."

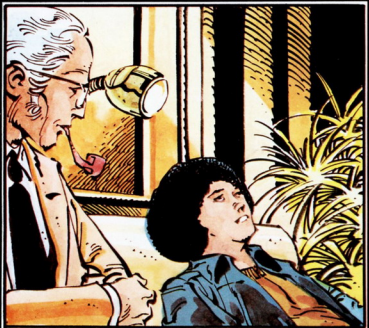
"The hell I did! I am fifteen!"

"I didn't say you weren't. Now what was the other number?"

"I'm fifteen," I said defiantly, and then, "I don't like being only fifteen. You know that. I'm not trying to insist I'm fifteen."

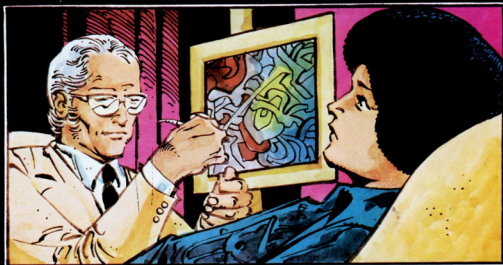
He just waited. Silent.

I felt defeated. "The number was eight."



"So you're eight. And your name?"

"Gerry." I got up on one elbow, twisting my neck around so I could see him.
"Gerry, without no 'uh!'"



Eight. Eight, plate, state, hate. I ate from the plate of the state and I hate.

I snapped my eyes open. The ceiling was still gray. It was all right. Stern was all right.

I took two deep breaths, three, and let my eyes close. Eight years old. Eight, hate. Years, fears. Old, cold.

"All right," he said mildly. I leaned back and closed my eyes. Eight, I thought.



It's cold in here.



Damn it! I twisted and twisted on the couch, trying to keep the cold out. I ate from the plate of—



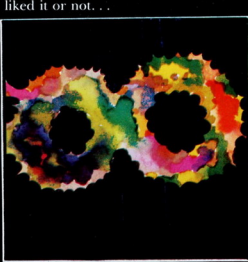
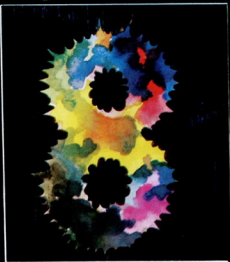
I grunted, and with my mind I took all the eights and all the rhymes and everything they stood for, and made it all black.



But it wouldn't stay black. I had to put something there, so I made a great, big luminous figure eight and just let it hang there.



But it turned on its side and inside the loops it began to shimmer. It was like one of those movie shots through the binoculars. I'd have to see whether I liked it or not. . .



Suddenly I quit fighting it and let it wash over me. The binoculars came close, closer, and then I was there. Eight. Eight years old, cold. Cold as a bitch in the ditch. The ditch was by a railroad.

Last year's weeds were scratchy straw. The ground was red, and frozen hard like a flowerpot, dusted with hoarfrost, cold as the winter light. At night the lights were warm, but only in other people's houses.



I was dying in that ditch. Last night it was as good a place as any to sleep, and this morning it was as good a place to die. Just as well. After a while I rolled my eyes upward. A big shoe appeared. There was an ankle in the shoe, and another shoe close by. I lay there waiting to get trampled. Not that I cared

much any more, but it was such a shame. All these months on my own, they'd never caught up with me, never even come close—and now this. It was such a shame that I started to cry. . . .



When nothing happened, I looked higher. There was a man standing over me and he was a mile high. His face was shaggy, like the guys who can't grow a beard but still don't shave. He said, "Get up."

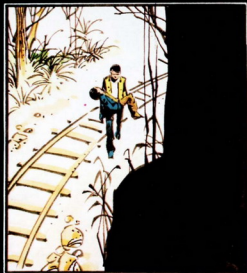
I started to cuss at him, but he just turned and walked toward the tracks. He put his chin on his shoulder and said, "Come on, will you?" He didn't chase me, so I didn't run. He didn't hit me, so I didn't get mad. I went along after him.



The track was level, but as I turned my head to scan it, it appeared as a hill which grew steeper and steeper and finally turned over above me. Suddenly I was lying flat on my back looking up at the cold sky.



"All right," I said. He picked me up and carried me down the track. I dozed off.



The first thing I looked for was the door. I saw it and jumped over and put my back against the wall beside it, just in case I wanted to leave. The air was hazy and was filled with a wonderful, heartbreaking, candy-and-crackling smell of food that a little hose squirted inside



Don't sleep. You're frozen stiff and weak with hunger. I want to take you home and get you warmed up and fed. But it's a long haul up that way, and you won't make it by yourself. If I carry you, will that be the same to you as if you walked it?



I woke up once when he dove into the woods. There was no path. My eyes became bleary again.



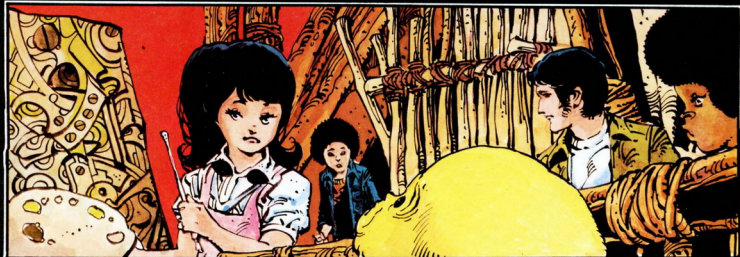
Finally he put me down. There was a big room—very warm.



my mouth. The man said, "What have I got here, Baby?" The girl at the easel looked at me and then at the baby. The baby just kicked and drooled. The girl said, "His name's Gerry. He's mad."

The man kept asking the baby questions and the girl kept answering. Craziest thing I ever saw. "What's he mad

at?" the man asked. "Everything," said the girl. "Everything and everybody."



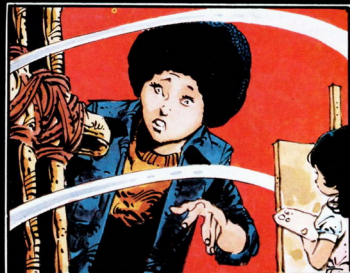
"He ran away from a state school. They fed him enough, but no one bled with him." I opened the door. "You louse," I said to the man, "you're from the school."

"Close the door, Janie," said the man. The girl at the easel didn't move, but the door banged shut.



I think you ought to stand in the corner. Stand him in the corner, Janie.

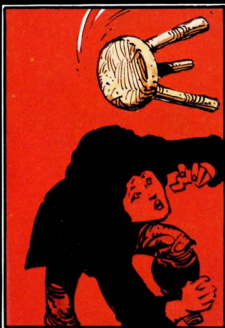
It nudged me. I jumped. It came after me.



I dodged to the side into the corner. The stool held me there.



Janie looked at me and a stool sailed across the room toward me, hanging in midair.



Thank you, Janie. And you just stand there and be quiet, you.

Then, to the baby, he said, "He got anything we need?" Janie answered, "Sure. He's the one."

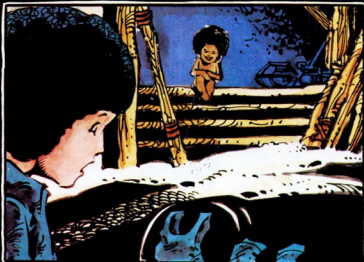
Well, what do you know! Gerry, you can live here. I don't come from no school. I'll never turn you in.

"He hates you," said Janie. She looked into the bassinet. "Feed him."



The man nodded and began fiddling around the fire. Meanwhile, the little black girl was staring at me and I snapped back, "What the hell are you gawking at?" She grinned. "Gerry ho-ho," she said. . .

. . . and disappeared. I mean, she went out like a light. And then—"Gerry hee-hee!"—I looked up and there she was, stark naked up on the storage shelves.



—But the second I saw her she disappeared again! "Gerry ho-ho!" Now she was under the table.

"Gerry hee-hee!" This time I yelled. She was right in the corner with me. "How did you do that?" I gasped.

Janie said, "It's easy. She's really twins." I said, "Oh."



That's Bonnie and Beanie. This is Baby and that's Lone. And I'm Janie.

"That's all?" said Stern. "How old are you?" From a dream I said, "Fifteen."

I looked at him. "You don't believe it happened, do you?" He shrugged. "Was it real to you?"

Me: "Hell, yes! I felt it all!" Him: "That's all that matters. You lived with those people?" Me: "Not since Baby was three."

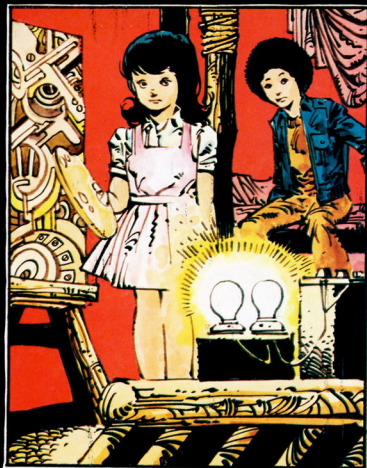
I froze. He said, "There's something that wants out. Let it come. Baby is three." I said, "Oh . . . that," and closed my eyes.



That might be it. Might, sight, night, light. I might have the sight of a light in the night. Maybe the baby. Maybe the sight of the baby at night in the light. . .

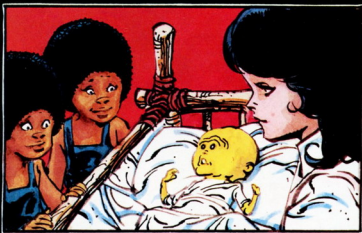
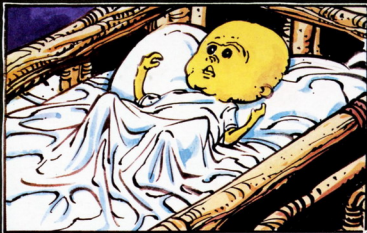
Something was going on all the time in Lone's house. It was always the same, night and day, the two old bulbs hanging from the battery. When they got dim, Janie fixed the battery and they got bright again.

Janie did everything no one else felt like doing. Everybody else did things, too. I did things myself, but I didn't do a thing that the others couldn't do, and they all did things I couldn't do. I was mad all the time about that, but it didn't keep us from bleshing. That was Janie's word. Baby told it to her. Lone said maybe it was a mixture of "blending" and "meshing," but it was a lot more than that.



Baby talked all the time, like a broadcasting station that runs twenty-four hours and you can tune in any time you want. But he didn't exactly *talk*. He semaphored mostly. You'd think those vague movements of his hands and legs and head were nothing, but they were semaphores; only the movements were whole thoughts.

Janie said she used to hear the twins thinking and they could hear Baby. So she would ask the twins, and they'd ask Baby, and then tell her his answer. But as they grew up, they began to lose the knack. Every kid does. So Baby learned to understand talking, and he'd answer with this semaphore stuff.



Lone couldn't read the stuff and neither could I. The twins didn't give a damn. Janie used to watch him all the time. He always knew if you wanted to ask him something, and he'd tell Janie and she'd say what it was. Part of

it, anyway. Nobody could get it all, not even Janie, but she'd sit there and paint her pictures and watch Baby, and sometimes she'd burst out laughing.



One time I went out with Lone to get some turpentine and a couple of picnic hams.

We went alone, but when we got to the general store, Beanie was already inside, opening up for us.

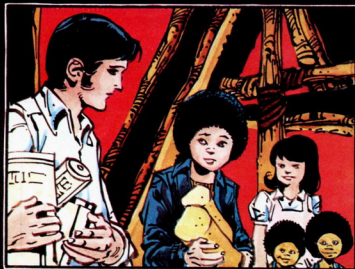
We found the stuff inside and Lone said, "Get home, Beanie, before you catch your death." She said, "Ho-ho," as she left.



I was there about three years. Lone was out a lot, but you could hardly tell the difference. We all did things. And we blessed.

I sat up on the couch suddenly. "This isn't getting me anywhere."

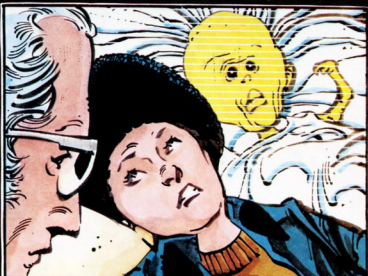
What was the difference between this session and the first?



"Plenty! The first one, I felt everything. It was all really happening. But this time—nothing. Just talk." He was thoughtful. "Suppose there was some episode so unpleasant that you wouldn't dare relive it? That 'Baby is three' phrase bounces you away. Why is that?"



"Baby is three. I went up to a big house with a winding drive. Baby is three. Baby—" His voice interrupted: "How old are you?" And without thinking, I said, "Thirty-three."



"What made me say thirty three? I ain't thirty-three. I'm fifteen. And about that 'Baby is three.' It's me saying it, but it's not my voice." He said, "Like thirty-three's not your age?"

"You mean I started to remember with ... somebody else's mind?" He said, "It means something. Let's try to find out what. Baby is three. ..."

"Baby is maybe. Me, three, thirty-three, me, you Kew you ... Kew?"



Kew!— Look, I think I know how to get to it, and this isn't the way! I'm going to try something else.



There, through the edges of the hedges, the ledges and wedges of windows were shouldering up to the sky. I didn't want to go to the house, but I had to. . . .



I hit on the door and it got snatched open by a tall, thin, colored woman. "What do you want?" I said I had to see Miss Kew.



Well, Miss Kew don't want to see the likes of you. You got a dirty face and—hey! Miss Alicia, look out! He'll kill us all! Get the police! Get the—



"Miriam!" There at the top of the stairs was this prune-faced woman who looked a lot older than she was. I guessed she was about thirty-three— *thirty-three* —with mean eyes and a small nose. "What is the meaning of this invasion?"



I got to speak to you alone, Miss Kew.

Little boy, you may say whatever you have to say in front of Miriam.



Like hell. Lone told me not to.

Who did you say? Lone? Miriam, that will be all.



And you wouldn't know it was the same woman, the way she said it.

The maid beat it and Miss Kew took me into a room as big as our swimming hole but with books all over. She pointed to a chair. "Sit there."

Now what is it? Where is Lone?

He died.

She pulled in her breath and stared until her eyes watered.



There was a flash flood last week and when he went out in that big wind, he walked under an oak tree that got gullied under and it came down on him. We planted him this morning. He was beginning to st—

"Stop!" She covered her face with her hands.

"What's the matter?"

"I'll be all right. Are you Lone's boy?"

"Yeah. He said to come to you. I'm Gerry."



Well, Gerry, how would you like to live with me in this nice house and have new clean clothes and . . . and everything?

"Well, that's the whole idea. Lone said you got a lot of dough and you owed him a favor—he done something for you once and you said some day you'd pay him back. This is it."

"What did he tell you about that?" She looked mad again.

"Not a damn thing." That made her happy and mad, but in a different way.



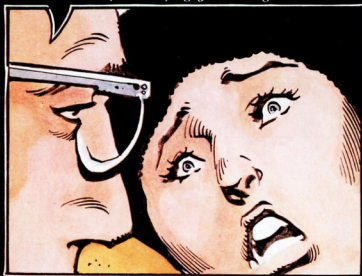
Please don't use that word. I promised and I'll do it. You can live here from now on. You'll be happy here. I'll see to that.

"Okay. Should I go get the other kids? This ain't just for me, you know. It's for all of us—the whole gang."

"Don't say 'ain't.' Now tell me about these . . . these other children."



Good boy. You found it. You haven't found out *what* it is, but now you know *where* it is. Just talk, but don't get too far into what you're saying. Just talk again.



In the library—what Lone said was, "There's a woman lives up on the hill, name of Kew. Do everything she tells you, only stay together, hear? Don't any one of you ever get away from the others. Aside from that, just keep Miss Kew happy and she'll keep you happy." Between every word was a link like steel cable, and it made something that couldn't be broken. Not by me, it couldn't.



There's Janie, eleven, like me. Bonnie and Beanie are eight, they're twins. And Baby is three. . .



He waited, then said quietly, "In the library. You told her about the other kids."

Yes, I told her about . . . and then she said . . . and something happened, and I screamed. But we're not thinking about that now. We're going to skip that. . .



Where are your sisters and the baby?



I'll bring 'em—be back soon.

EEEEEEEEEE!!



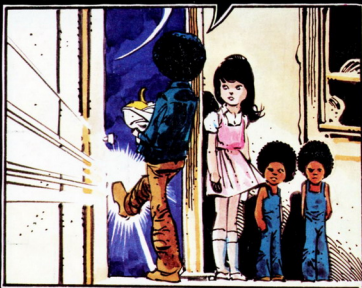
I went back and it was miserable. What did Lone have to get himself squashed for?

"We can't blesh no more," said Janie. It explained everything.

"Look," I said, "I've got to be Lone now. Let's go."



There's a woman here name of Miriam. She says anything, tell her to go to hell.



Go to hell.

Miss Kew opened her mouth and left it that way until something happened. Finally she said, "Dear, gentle Lord, preserve us!"



It was the first time Janie ever did anything I told her to.



At first they didn't want to move. Then I heard the bassinet creak. Janie was staring into it. "All right," she said. "Let's go." I had to face it; Baby was running things now.



The door opened and there was Miriam. She took one look at us, jumped back, and screamed, "Miss Kew! Miss Kew!"

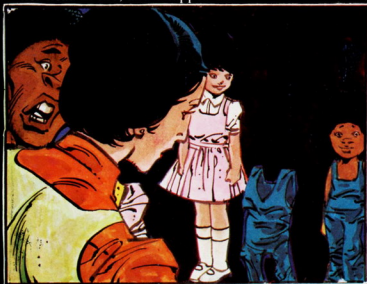


Miss Kew, if these are the children you said were going to live here, I quit.



Go to hell.

Just then Bonnie said, "Ho-ho," grinned enough to split her head in two, and disappeared.

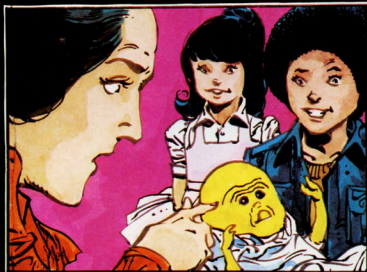


Then Miss Kew pulled herself up, stiffened, and pointed. "Gerard, what in heaven's name is that?"
"Oh," I said, "this is Baby."

There she was, naked as a jaybird, up on the banister. Miss Kew sat down plump on the steps and Miriam went down, too, like she'd been slugged.



Miriam, pull yourself together. Get a basin with some hot water and soap. Washcloth. Towels. Hurry!



Miriam staggered and grabbed at the wall, then ran out just as Bonnie and Beanie appeared in front of Miss Kew. She took it better this time—which was actually worse, in a way.



We do.

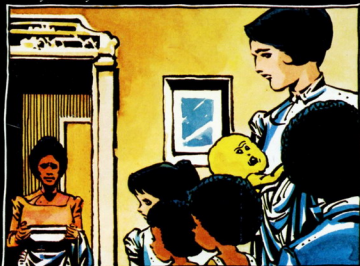


Gerard, I understood you to say that these children were your sisters. We don't have little colored girls for sisters.



Oh, there is a great deal to do.

Miriam came in with a big oval pan and towels. She was trembling. "You ain't safe, Miss Alicia. They ain't just dirty. They're crazy!"



They're victims of neglect, Miriam. Now, Gerard, you cannot live under this roof and continue to behave as you have. Do you understand that?



"You've agreed to do whatever I say. Now, if I told you to do whatever Miriam says, would you do it, too?"

I said to Janie, "What about that?"

"I'll ask Baby." Baby wobbled his hands and drooled. Janie said, "It's okay." Then Miss Kew said, "Gerard, I asked you a question."

"Keep your pants on," I said. "I got to find out, don't I? Yes, we'll listen to Miriam too."

Miriam looked at us and shook her head.



Then she held out her hands. For a second I thought she was going to look human. "Well," she said, "I guess it's all right."

Then we all went upstairs and they went to work on us, and for three years they never stopped.



It was hell. Lone had told us to do every last little thing Miss Kew said, but she and Miriam felt they had to push us every inch of the way. All they had to do was make us *understand* what they wanted, but when the orders are

something like, "Ah-ah language, language!" it just didn't mean a thing. I ask her what the hell she meant on that one, and then she finally spit it out.



Did it get easier as time went on?



We only had real trouble twice, once about the twins and once about Baby. First, after about a week, Janie and me noticed that we almost never got to see Bonnie and Beanie.



We'd all get turned out to play and then at lunch the twins were herded off to eat with Miriam while we ate with Miss Kew.



So Janie said, "Why don't the twins eat with us?" Miss Kew's mouth got all tight and she said, "They're little colored girls, Jane. Now eat your lunch."

But that didn't explain anything. I said, "I want 'em to eat with us. Lone told us to stay together." Miss Kew said we were together—in the same house—and there would be no further discussion.



Well, that was really nowhere, so I just rocked back my head and bellowed, "Bonnie! Beanie!" and bingo, there they were, ho-ho and all.



She said this was too much and she ordered us to leave. I went and got Baby and we all started marching out.

So all hell broke loose. Miss Kew screamed and Miriam came steaming in with their clothes and nobody could catch them. Miss Kew finally started honking at me.



Next thing you know, Miss Kew ran out after us. "Is this how you follow Lone's wishes?"



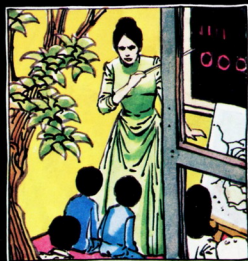
I told her yes. She said she thought Lone wanted us to stay with her and I said, "Yeah, but together." So she said come back in, we'd have a talk.

I see. Now tell me about the other trouble—with Baby.



That was a couple of months later. Things were already getting real smooth.

We'd learned all the routines by then, and she'd got us catching up with school—regular periods five days a week.



Janie had quit taking care of Baby, and the twins walked to wherever they went. That was funny. They could pop up right in front of Miss Kew's eyes and she wouldn't believe what she saw. She was too upset about them showing up bare. They quit doing it and she was happy.



But one nice day I woke up feeling weird. It was like someone had stolen something while I was asleep. I crawled out my window along the ledge, which I wasn't supposed to do.



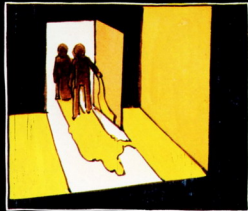
She was really happy about a lot of things. It'd been years since she'd seen anybody. But with us there, she began to liven up. She quit wearing those old-lady dresses and even began to look halfway human. Sometimes she actually smiled.



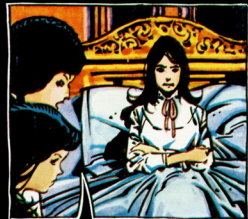
Janie was in bed, but I can still see her eyes when I woke her. I didn't have to tell her. She knew what was wrong. "Baby's gone!" she said.



We didn't care who woke up. We pounded down the hall to the room where Baby slept. Everything was gone, even the crib and rattles.



We spun around and hustled into Miss Kew's bedroom. She was wide awake before we could get across the room, giving us the cold eyes. "What is the meaning of this?"



WHERE'S BABY!

Janie said, "You better tell us where he is, Miss Kew," and it would have scared you to look at her when she said it. So all of a sudden Miss Kew took off the stone face and held out her hands to us. "Children, I'm sorry. But I've only done what is best. I've sent Baby away to live with other children like

him. We could never make him really happy here. You know that." Janie shouted, "That doesn't matter! You had no call to send him away." I said, "Yeah. You better bring him back, and quick."



Then she started to jump salty. "I have taught you never to dictate to your elders! Now get dressed for breakfast and we'll say no more about this." I told her, nice as I could, "Miss Kew, you're going to wish you brought him back right now, and you're going to bring him back soon. Or else."



She got the treatment from the second she slammed her door on us.



Then we went back in. I hadn't known till then that she could cry. "You going to get Baby back here?" I asked. She just lay there and cried. It was real pathetic. Then she whispered, "What happened?" I told her, "You took Baby away, that's what happened."



Then she screamed at us. "Stop it! Stop talking about that mongoloid idiot! It's no good to anyone, not even itself! How could I ever make believe it's mine?" I said, "Get rats, Janie."



"Did you ever see anyone really go to pieces?" I asked Stern. He said, "Yes."



Whom did you kill?



The question caught me absolutely off guard. "Miss Kew." Then I cursed. "I didn't mean to tell you that."

"Don't worry about it," he said. "Why did you do it?" I told him, "That's what I came here to find out."



You must have really hated her.

There was a scuttling sound. Miss Kew covered her face. "Not rats," she said. "There are no rats here." Then something squeaked and she went all to pieces.



Anyway, it took a couple of hours for her to get straightened out enough so she could use the phone, but we had Baby back before lunch time.



I started to cry, and he gave me time to get it all out. Finally, even though my throat hurt, I could talk.



Do you know where I came from, Stern?

The earliest thing I can remember is a punch in the mouth. I can still see it coming. Because I was crying. Because I was hungry. Cold. After that, big dormitories, and whoever could steal the most got the most. Get the

hell kicked out of you if you're bad and a big reward if you're good. They leave you alone. Try to live like that, when the most wonderful thing in the whole damn world is just to have 'em leave you alone!



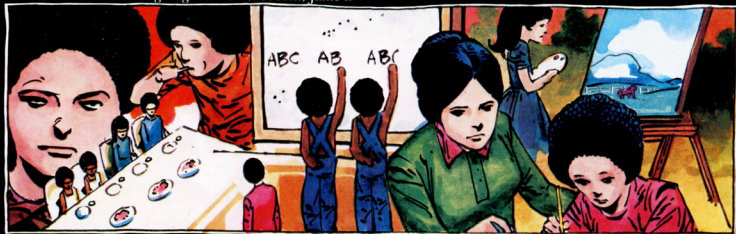
Then a spell with Lone and the kids. You belong. It never happened before. Two yellow bulbs and a fireplace and they light up the world. It's all you ever need.

Then the big change: clean clothes, cooked food, and school. Miss Kew . . . hell, she had too much control over herself ever to slobber over us, but it was there, that feeling. Lone took care of us because it was the way he lived. Miss Kew took care of us because she wanted to. She had a weird idea of "right" and a wrong idea of "wrong," but that last year was . . . good.



Listen, the day before I killed her, I woke up with the sheets crackly clean under me, the sunlight coming in. And there's a closet full of my clothes—*mine*—and downstairs there's Miriam clinking around with breakfast, and the twins laughing. In the next room, Janie is

moving around and singing. I get up. There's *hot* water, and the toothpaste bites my tongue. I go downstairs and they're glad to see me, and when Miss Kew comes down everyone calls out to her at once.



The morning goes by like that—the twins with the ends of their tongues stuck out, drawing the alphabet, and Janie painting a picture, a real picture of a cow with

trees and a yellow fence. Here I am lost between the two parts of a quadratic equation, and Miss Kew bending close to me, and I smell the sachet she has on her clothes.

And the afternoon goes by like that—more school and boiling out into the yard, laughing. The twins chasing each other, running on their own two feet. Janie dappling the leaves in her picture. Baby, he just watches and dribbles some, and gets packed full of food and kept as

clean as a new sheet of tinfoil. And in the evening, Miss Kew reading to us, changing her voice every time someone else talks in the story, reading fast and whispery when it embarrasses her, but reading every word all the same. And I had to go and kill her. And that's all.



I turned on my belly on the couch and looked at him. You could never tell what was going on with Stern, but I suddenly knew I was asking too much of him. I said slowly, "*We didn't blesh.*"



"You haven't said why," Stern said. I yelled, "*What are you—stupid?*" but he didn't say anything.



Blesh? Oh, you didn't after Lone died, either.

That was different. That was like a car running out of gas, but the car's still there—there's nothing wrong with it. It's just waiting. But after Miss Kew got done with us, the car was taken all to pieces, see?



It was his turn to think a while. Finally, he said, "*I can see the thing you're pointing at—that in order to preserve or to rebuild that peculiar bond between you kids, you had to get rid of Miss Kew. But I don't see the logic. I don't see that regaining 'bleshing' was worth destroying this newfound security you admit was enjoyable.*"

Yet it was, to you, because you did it. When you were moved to do it, the important thing was to destroy Miss Kew and regain this thing you'd had before. I don't see why and neither do you. Tell me what you did after you killed her, right up to the moment you came here.



"Didn't you have any trouble cashing the check?"

"I don't usually have trouble making people do what I want them to do," Gerry grunted. "I know what you're

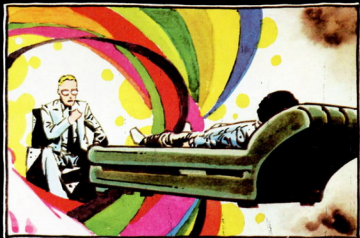
Not much. It was only last night. I took her checkbook. I went out. Walked a long time, trying to think. Went to the bank when it opened. Cashed a check for eleven hundred bucks. Got the idea of getting help from a psychiatrist, spent the day looking for one, and came here. That's all.



thinking—I couldn't make Ms. Kew do what I wanted her to do."



That's part of it.



I suddenly realized why he fooled with the pipe all the time—so he could look at it and you wouldn't be able to see his eyes. He said, "You know the single thing that makes people kill? Survival. And in this case that doesn't apply, because your setup with Miss Kew had far more survival value for you, singly and as a group, than the other setups."



If I'd done that, she wouldn't have been Miss Kew anymore. Now the banker—all I made him do was be a banker.



So maybe I didn't have a reason to kill her.

You had, because you did it. The answer is somewhere inside you. We have a pretty consecutive life-story here. There's fantasy mixed with fact, of course, but we have a beginning, middle, and end. Now the answer may be in that bridge you refused to cross a while back. Remember?



I heard him fumbling with something...

... suddenly, I heard my own voice. "Well, there's Janie, she's eleven like me,

I felt that sickness again, and again I pushed it away. He let me watch the ceiling for a while, then he said, "You're in the library. You're telling Miss Kew about the children." I lay very still. I got tense inside all over, from the bones out.



and Bonnie and Baby. Baby is Beanie are eight, three." they're twins—



Sputtering out of the darkness, I came up flailing with my fists. Strong hands caught my wrists. I quit struggling. "What happened?"

It worked wonders this time. I think I blew a fuse.



Lord, what a charge! I've had you on tape the whole time. When you wouldn't get into the recollection, I tried to nudge you into it by using your own voice as you recounted it before. It works wonders sometimes.

In effect, you did. You were on the verge of going into the thing you don't want to remember, and you let yourself go unconscious rather than do it. Last-ditch defense. We've got it now. Just one more try.

Now hold on. The last-ditch defense is that I drop dead.



You're trying to hypnotize me. I'm not going to let you do that!



... and Bonnie and Beanie are eight, they're twins, and Baby. Baby is three.

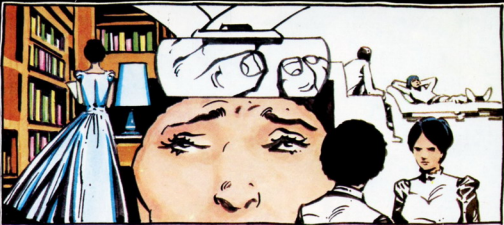


Baby is three ...

You won't. You know a lot more about yourself now than you did at the time. You can apply insight. You can evaluate it as it comes up, enough to protect yourself. Trust me. Just relax. Look at the ceiling. Be aware of your toes. Your toes, your big toes. Feel them. Count outward from your big toes, one count for each—



"You're going to hypnotize yourself. I just point the way. I point your toes to the path. Just point your toes. You want to go where your toes are pointed, where your toes are limp, where your ..." On and on and on. I'm eleven, split in two, and one part went back to the library ...



... a pressure, a stretching apart, and a ... a breakage. And with a tearing agony and a burst of triumph that drowned the pain, it was done.



And this is what was inside. In one flash, but all this ...

Baby is three? My baby would be three if there were a baby, which there never was.



Lone, I'm open to you. Open, is this open enough?

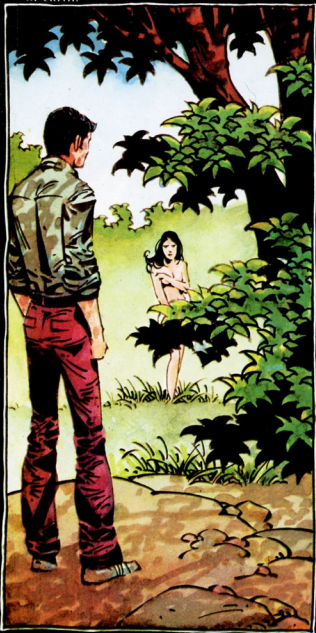
His irises like wheels. I'm sure they spin. The probe that passes invisibly from his brain, through his eyes into mine. Does he know what it means to me? He empties me and I fill as he directs me to: he drinks and waits and drinks again and never looks at the cup.



When I saw him first, I was dancing in the wind, in the wood, in the wild, and as I spun about . . .



... he stood there in the leafy shadows, watching me. I hated him for it. It was not my wood, not my gold-spangled, fern-tangling glen. But it was my dancing that he took, freezing it forever by being there. I hated the way he looked, the way he stood, looking like a tree with roots for feet and clothes the color of earth.



He knew what he had done and didn't care. Never to dance again, because never would I know the woods were free of eyes, free of uncaring dirty animal-men. He had seen me and, oh, how I hated him!



To dance alone, that was the single thing I hid to myself when I was known as the Victorian Miss Kew, correct and starched, lace and linen and lonely. Now I would be all they said, because he had robbed me of the one thing I dared to keep secret.



He walked toward me and I stood where I was, frozen inwardly and outwardly. When he stopped, I breathed again only because I had to. He said, "You read books?"



I couldn't move. He touched my jaw, held my eyes on his face. "You got to read some books for me. I got no time to find them."



"No. Let me go!" He wasn't holding me. He made me look up a bit more. His eyes, the irises were going to spin. . . . He said, "Open up in there. Open way up and let me see."



There were books in my head, and he was looking at the titles. . . but he couldn't read. He was looking at what I knew of the books. I suddenly felt: terribly useless, because I had only a fraction of what he wanted. "What's that?" he barked. I knew what he meant, even though I was unaware I'd had it in my mind. "Telekinesis," I said.

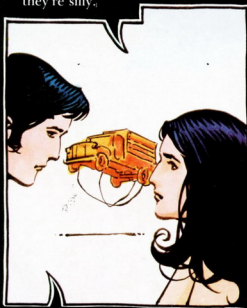
"How is it done?" I told him, "Nobody knows if it can be done, moving physical objects with the mind." He said, "It can be done. This one?" I answered, "Teleportation. The same thing—almost. Moving your own body with mind power."



And molecular interpenetration. Telepathy and clairvoyance. I don't know anything about them. I think they're silly.

"It was there, in my brain, on my lips—gestalt."
"What's that?"

Read about that, too. Read a whole lot about that. That's the most you got to read about. That's important.



Read about 'em. It don't matter if you understand or not. What's this?



Group. A cure for a lot of diseases with one kind of treatment. A lot of thoughts expressed in one phrase. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.



When his eyes came away from mine, it was like something breaking, so that I fell to one knee. He went off without looking back.

I got my things and ran home. There was anger, like a storm. There was fear, like a wind. I knew I would read the books. I knew I would never dance again.



Whether he came there every day to wait for me or only came when I did, I have no way of knowing. We did not have conversations; sometimes nothing would pass between us but this grunt of surprise or small, short hum of interest. He tore the books out of me the way he

So I read the books and I came back. Sometimes it was every day and sometimes, if I couldn't find a certain book, I might not come back for ten. He was always there, standing in the shadows, and he took what he wanted of the books and nothing of me.



would tear berries from a bush; he smelled of sweat and earth and the crushed green juices of the forest. If he learned anything from the books, it made no difference in his expression.



There came a day when he sat by me and puzzled something out. He said, "What book has something like this? You got a radio station, four or five receivers, each receiver fixed up to make something different happen—like one digs and one flies and one makes noise, but each one takes orders from one place. And each one has its own power and its own thing to do, but they are all apart. Now: is there life like that, instead of radio?"

"I don't think so, unless you mean social organizations, like a team, or a gang of men working, all taking orders from the same boss."

"No," he said immediately. "Not like that. Like one single animal."

I asked, "You mean a *gestalt* life-form?"

"No book has been written about that, huh?"

"None I ever heard of."

"I got to know about that," he said heavily. "There is such a thing. I want to know if it ever happened before."

I tried for days, but I couldn't find what he wanted. There was nothing about a . . . shall I call it a *gestalt* organism? To my own unscientific mind, there was nothing at all, except possibly a band marching together, everyone playing different instruments and different notes to make a single thing move along together. But he hadn't meant that.



He would have left me forever with not another thought; he didn't *care*! It wasn't cruelty; he was as uncaring as a cat is of a tulip bulb. "I failed you," I told him, "and you're angry." He looked at me so long I became uncomfortable. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said.



He gave that short, interested hum, "What do you want me to give you? I ain't got anything." I moved away from him. I felt . . . I don't know what I felt. I said, "I want you to—"



I could hardly speak. "I don't know. It's something that—I couldn't say if I knew it. You've read the books out of me; can't you read the . . . the me out of me?"

So I went back to him in the cool of an early fall evening and he took what little I had in my eyes, and turned from me angrily with a gross word I shall not permit myself to remember. "You can't find it," he told me. "Don't come back."



"You can know!" I screamed at him. "You know what I read. You must know what I think! I'm a woman! You've used me and you've given me nothing! You don't talk to me! You don't care! You put some sort of spell on me that I couldn't break, and then you're finished and you say, 'Don't come back.'"



"I ain't never tried." He held my face up and stepped close. "Here," he said. His eyes projected their strange probe at me and I screamed.



"Oh," he said. "Yeah, that."

He moved like a flash. There was a pressure, a stretching apart, and a . . . breakage. And with a tearing agony and a burst of triumph that drowned the pain, it was done.



"... quietly limp, your ankles and legs as limp as your toes, your belly goes soft, the back of your neck is as limp as your belly, it's quiet and limper than—"



I sat up and swung my legs to the floor. "Okay," I said. Stern looked a little annoyed. "This is going to work, but only if you—"

"It did work. The whole thing. A to Z." I snapped my fingers. "Like that. It was right there where you said, in the library. When I was eleven. When she said, 'Baby is three.' It knocked loose something that had been boiling around in her for three years, and it all came blasting out. I got it, full force. It had a pain in it like I never knew could be. A whole lot of things that happened over about four months, every bit of it. She knew Lone."

"You mean you experienced a whole *series* of episodes? All at once? In a split second?"

"That's right. Look, for that split second, I *was* her, don't you see? Everything she'd ever done and thought and felt. Everything. In just that one flash."

"*Gestalt*," he murmured.



"Aha!" I said, and thought about a whole lot of things. "Why didn't I know all this before?"

"You had a powerful block against recalling it. You say you felt pain in that episode. So you wouldn't go back into it for fear of the pain."



"Let me think. Yeah, that's part of it—that thing of going into someone's mind. She opened up to me because I reminded her of Lone. I went in. I wasn't ready; I'd never done it before, except maybe a little, against resistance. I went all the way in and it was too much; it

frightened me away from trying it for years. But as I grew older, the ability to do it got stronger and stronger, but I was still afraid to use it. And the more I grew, the more I felt. . . . Then I shouted, 'Do you know what I am?'"

"No," he said. "Like to tell me about it?"

I had to tell him, but I suddenly realized I didn't have enough words. I knew the things, but not the names for them. *Lone took the meanings and threw the words away.* Further back: "*You read books. Read books for me.*" The look of Stern's eyes. That "opening up" thing . . .



Stern read books. He'd read more books than I ever imagined had been written. I slipped in there, looking for what I wanted. It was easier for me to do than it had been for Lone.



I know. That's how Miss Kew felt when Lone did it to her.



What . . . are you?

I went over to him. He looked up at me; I bent close. First he was startled, then he tried to control it. "*I didn't look at your eyes before,*" he murmured. "*I could have sworn those irises spun like wheels. . .*"



Afterward, Stern looked sick and frightened. "*It's all right,*" I said. "*I needed some words. Come on, get professional.*" He gouged the tips of his fingers against his forehead and cheeks.



I'm the central ganglion of a complex organism, which is composed of Baby, a computer; Bonnie and Beanie, teleports; Janie, telekineticist; and myself, telepath and central control. It's all been documented: the teleportation of the yogi, the telekinetics of some gamblers, the idiot savant mathematicians, and the so-called poltergeist—the moving about of objects through the instrumentation of a young girl. Only in this case, every one of my parts delivers at peak performance.



We ran into the problem of what it was I valued more than the security Miss Kew gave us. Can't you see now what it was? My *gestalt* organism was at the point of death from that security. She had to be killed or it—I—would be. Oh, the parts would live on: two little black

girls with a speech impediment, one introspective girl with an artistic bent, one mongoloid idiot, and me—ninety percent short-circuited potentials and ten percent juvenile delinquent. Sure, she had to be killed. It was self-preservation for the *gestalt*.



Stern bobbled around with his mouth and finally got out: "I don't—"

I laughed. "You don't need to. This is wonderful. You're good, Stern—real good."

He touched his face. "So . . . now what?"

I shrugged. "Did the Peking man look at Homo sap walking erect and say, 'Now what?' We'll live, that's all. We'll feed and grow and experiment and breed. We'll defend ourselves. We'll do what comes naturally."

Stern was very pale.



Just what do you . . . want to do?

Everybody's had fun but me. The kind of fun everybody has is kicking someone around who can't fight back. Or they do you favors until they own you.

You've come a long way since you walked in here.



Know what? Ever since I was born, people been kicking me around, until Miss Kew took over. What happened then? She damn near killed me.



I'm just going to have fun.



You're a good headshrinker.

You figure you're all cured now, all adjusted and ready to roll, but a while back you said you'd been mad at everybody all your life. You were so alone. That's why being with the other kids, and then Miss Kew, meant so much.

"So? I've still got the kids."

He shook his head slowly. "You and the kids are a single creature. Unique. Unprecedented." He pointed his pipe-stem at me. "Alone." The blood started to pound in my ears.



Just think about it. You can do practically anything and none of it will keep you from being alone.



Shut up! Everybody's alone.

But some people learn how to live with it—because of something you don't know anything about, something that doesn't mean a thing to you. . .



... something called *morality*.



That's bastard terminology.



He crossed the quiet room and sat at the desk.



Guess you're right. I don't know what you're talking about. But you're afraid—afraid of *Homo gestalt*.



We're a bastard breed. Sit down over there.



I leaned close and he went to sleep with his eyes open.

Like reaching out a hand, I got Beanie. "Look good, now. What I want to do is erase all this tape. Go ask Baby." She blinked at me and looked at the recorder.



She vanished. I went to the door. Stern was still sitting at the desk, staring. "A good headshrinker," I murmured. I felt fine.



I went out. All the way down to the police station I grinned. They'd take my report on Miss Kew and like it.



Then she was gone . . .



Outside I waited, then went back in again. Stern looked up at me. "Sit over there, Sonny."



A few times I laughed, thinking about this Stern, how he'd figure the loss of an afternoon and the gain of a thousand bucks.

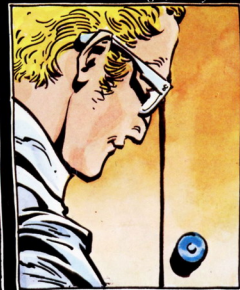


. . . and back again, turning knobs and pushing buttons. The tape raced swiftly, whining. "All right," I said. "Beat it."



"Gee, sorry, sir. I got in the wrong office."

He said, "That's all right, Sonny."



Much funnier than thinking about him being dead.



What the hell is morality, anyway?

"He's crazy," the sheriff said. "Did you know that, Miss Gerard? Slammin' his fist through a plate glass window. For nothing. He don't know his own name, hardly."

"May I see him?"

The sheriff uttered a growl and stood up. "Them Air Force psychos had any sense, they'd've put him where he would never even get near a jail. But if he's your cousin . . . this way."



The walls were steel plates like a ship's bulkhead, studded with rivets. Their footsteps echoed. It was a cold, unhappy place. They walked to a cell on the lower tier. "Snap out of it, Barrows. Lady to see you." The prisoner did not move.

"Let me in," she breathed. "Let me talk to him." The sheriff unlocked the door.

"Liable to get hurt," he warned. "Well, I'll stay in the area and you yell if you need help. S'help me, Barrows, I'll put a slug through your neck if you try anything."



Inside, she waited until he stepped away. "Hip," she murmured. "Hip Barrows." His dull eyes slid in their sockets until they approximated her direction. They blinked in a slow, numb way. She knelt beside him. "Mr. Barrows," she

whispered, "you don't know me. I told them I was your cousin. I want to help you." He was silent. She said, "I'm going to get you out of here. Don't you want to get out?" No response. Nothing.



He was silent for so long that she rose. "I'd better go. Don't forget me. I'll help you." She turned to the door.

"Why?"

She returned to him. "Because you're dirty and beaten and don't care—and because none of that can hide what you are. Now listen to me. Two men will come to see you. One is a doctor. The

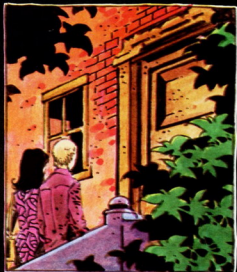
other is a lawyer. We'll have you out of here this evening." He raised his head and growled, "What type of doctor?" She said evenly, "For your arm. Not a psychiatrist. You'll never have to go through that again." He let his head drop back. She called the sheriff.



It was not difficult. The lawyer paid the fine for malicious mischief, and the girl was waiting outside. "Come on, Hip." He followed like a wound-up toy.

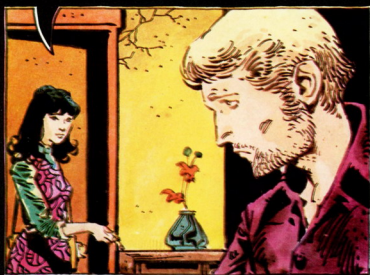
They walked five blocks and then up the stone steps of a house with a bay window.

For the first time he moved by himself. He turned around, slowly. "Your room?"



Yours. Here are your keys. There are clothes in the dresser and closet—soap, towels, and a razor in the bathroom. Get presentable, will you? I'll be back in fifteen minutes.

She slipped through the door and was gone. He scratched his nose, muttered, "Damn if I will," and then, somehow, he was in the bathroom, peering at himself in the mirror. He wet his hands, grunted, and reached for the soap.



He had found the razor and a robe by the time she elbowed the door open, smiling at him. "Come on, you haven't eaten in four days. It's all ready."



"I don't want nothing," he said, and abruptly fell to. There was nothing in the world then but the good food, the tingle of ale, the indescribable magic of the steak's charcoal crust.



When the plate was empty, it and the table suddenly wanted to fly upward to his head. He toppled forward. "It's all right," she said. "Lay back."

In time, his eyes opened. He grinned. She said, "You'd better turn in now. Good night!"

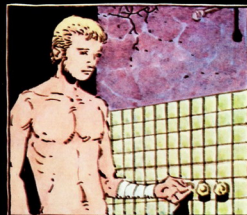
She was here, she was gone. She had been with him; he was alone. A change occurred too large to understand. Blackness came.



"Good morning. Drink your coffee." He looked at her. She had long, level, gray-green eyes. "Whoa," he said, smelling the coffee.

He drank. "Whoa." He looked at the sunlight now. Good. He drank more good coffee. "Shower." He was sweaty. The girl said, "Go ahead."

He let the water run on his head. *I'm so thin*, he thought. *Got to put some beef back on or I'll get sick and—the thought looped back on him: get good and sick, stay sick. Get sicker.* Angrily he demanded, "Who says I got to get sick?" but there was no answer.



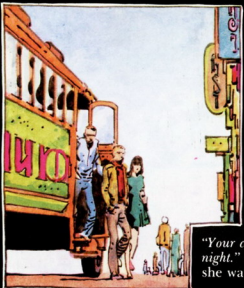
He came out. The girl had made eggs on a hotplate. Good coffee. As he ate and drank, she changed the soggy dressing on his left hand. "You can do without the sling now," she said, pleased.



Later, she rose. He stirred, went to her. They went out.



The next day was the day they rode on a bus and lunched in a restaurant.



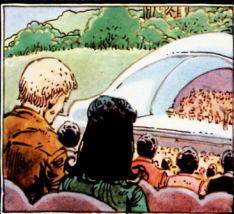
The girl sat with her hands aslumber and her eyes awake, while a pipe-cleaner man called Healing was growing a little, resting and growing.



They walked slowly to a place where there was a smooth, rolling land. It was a quiet time they had together.



The day after that was the one they stayed out a little later than usual to see a band concert.



"Your coffee." "Let's get these to the laundry." "Come." "Good night." These were the things she said to him. Otherwise she watched his face and, undemandingly, she waited.

When it grew dark, she brought him back to the room. After dinner, he yawned. She was on her feet immediately. "Good night," she said.



Then there was the day it rained and they went to a movie, which he watched wordlessly—not smiling, not frowning.



He awoke and it was too dark. The face was there. He roared at it and it smiled. He realized it was only in his mind. *Yes, but who is he? "I don't know, I don't know..."* And his voice became a moan.



He began to cry. Someone took his hands; it was the girl—she'd heard him. He was not alone. It made him cry harder. He looked up through darkness at her face and her hair and he wept.



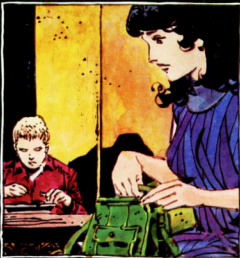
She stayed with him until he was finished, and for as long afterward he held her hands. When he released them he was asleep, and she tiptoed out.



In the morning she stood before him, waiting. At last he said, *"Have you had your breakfast yet?"* Something was kindled in her eyes. She shook her head. He looked down at the plate, puzzling something out. Finally he stood. *"You have this,"* he said. *"I'll fix some more."*



She considered him carefully, then reached for her handbag. She took out a short piece of metal tubing. It was flexible.



She turned his right hand palm up and put the tubing into it. He must have seen it, but his expression did not change.

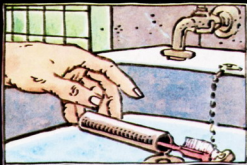


He had seen her smile but he had not noticed it before. Now it was as if the warmth of all her smiles was put together for this one. *"What's your name?"* he asked her, for the very first time. *"Janie Gerard,"* she replied. And he said, *"Oh."*

Finally the piece of tubing fell to the floor when he reached for a piece of toast. She said nothing.

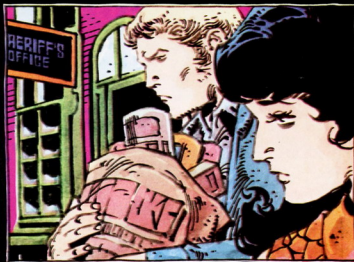


But after that first shared meal there was a difference. Never again did he ignore the fact that she was not eating. He went to the market with her and carried the packages. He remembered his name; he even remembered that the "Hip" was for "Hippocrates." He was, however, unable to remember how he came by the name, where he had been born, or anything else about himself. She did not urge him. She simply waited.



He began to remember small things and she relinquished her guidance until finally it was he who planned their days. Since he had no memory to draw on except his time with her, they were days of discovery.

There was another kind of discovery, too. One day he looked around the room and said, "*I was sick, wasn't I?*" And one day he stopped on the street, stared at the grim building on the other side. "*I was in there.*"

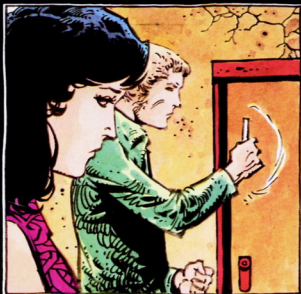


It was several days after that when he frowned and stood gazing into a men's shop. No, not into it, but at the window. Beside him, Janie watched his face. "*Here,*" she said. She pressed the tubing into his hand.

He grunted, looked at her, and seemed to only slowly recognize her. He closed his hand around the piece of metal. "*This is mine,*" he said. She nodded.

He said, "*I broke that window. And they put me in jail. And you got me out and I was sick and you brought me here till I was well again.*" She nodded again, expectantly, but that was all he could manage for the time.





Later, he still held the tubing, flexing it.

"It was in the envelope they were holding for you while you were in jail," Janie told him.

"Had it a long time." He paced. "I was looking for a guy who . . . *ah!*" he growled. "I can't remember."

"It's all right," she said gently.

"It isn't all right!" He straightened and looked at her. "I'm sorry, Janie. I didn't mean to yell at you."

She smiled at him. He said, "Where was that cave? Sort of a cave. Half cave, half log house. In the woods . . ."

"Don't worry about it, Hip."

"I *do* worry about it!" he said excitedly. "You got to understand, this is something I—I got to—"

He exploded. "What is this? What am I doing here? Who are you, Janie? What are you getting out of this?"

"I like seeing you get well."

"Yeah, get well," he growled. "I ought to be sick. Be sick and get sicker."

"Who told you that?" she rapped.

"Thompson," he barked, and then slumped with stupid amazement on his face. In the high, cracking voice of an adolescent he whimpered. "Thompson? Who's Thompson?"

She shrugged and he wagged the piece of tubing. "I saw him. Thompson. I wanted to beat . . . you see, he—he was—what's the matter with my *head?* *Head?* It's like . . . you see something rising up off the ground, you got to grab it; you jump so hard you can feel your kneebones crack; you stretch up and get just the tips of your fingers on it. . . ." His chest swelled and sank. "Hang there, like forever, knowing you'll never make it, never get a grip. Then you fall and you watch it going up and up, getting smaller and smaller, and you'll—" He sat and closed his eyes. "This must sound crazy to you, Janie. I'm sick," he whimpered.

She laughed. She pulled him to the dresser mirror and rapped it with her knuckles. "Who's sick?"

He looked at the firm-fleshed, well-boned face that stared out at him, genuinely astonished. "I look—I haven't looked this good in—not since I was in the . . . Janie, was I in the Army?"

"Were you?"

He looked into the mirror again. "Sure don't *look* sick. Who keeps telling me I'm sick?" He turned away. "I'd like to break that Thompson's back," he said. "Throw him, right through a—a plate glass window! That's it!" he shouted. "I saw him. I saw him standing right there on the street looking at me and I yelled and jumped him and . . . and . . ." He looked down at his scarred hand. He said, amazed, "I turned right around and hauled off and hit the window instead. That's what the jail was for and it was all over. Just lie there in that rotten jail, don't eat, don't move, get sick and sicker and it's all over."

"Well, it isn't all over, is it?"

He looked at her. "No. No, it isn't. Thanks to you." He looked at her eyes, her mouth. "Where do you live?"

She pointed. "Right across the hall."

"Oh," he said. He remembered the night he had cried. He turned away, hunting for a change of subject, any change. "Let's go out."

"All right." Was that relief he detected in her voice?

They rode on a roller coaster and ate cotton candy and danced in an outdoor pavilion. It was the first time he had consciously enjoyed being with Janie; it was an occasion,

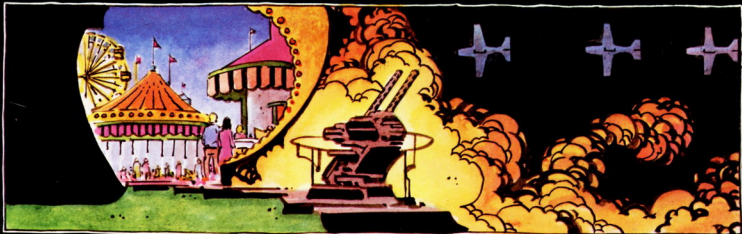
rather than a way of life. He had never known her to laugh so easily, to be so eager to ride this and taste that and go yonder to see what was there.



He smiled. *Why had she rescued him?* He found his gaze on the beach again. Once he had felt love, back somewhere in the mists, and with it his old, old reflex, *not until I've hunted him down and*—but he lost the thought. Whatever it was, it had been more important than love or marriage or a job or a colonelcy. (Colonelcy? Had he ever wanted to be a colonel?) He closed his eyes, seeing her face, the tilt of her head in that attentive silence; her slim, strong arms and lithe body; her magical, hungry mouth. Janie dancing, cleaving to him as if they were the gold leaves of an electroscope. *Where had he seen . . . worked with . . . an electroscope . . . oh, of course! In the evening.* Janie barely visible in the deep, churning dark, palely glowing through the flickering of his tears, strongly holding his hands until he quieted. Picture of Janie's mouth, bright, waiting. Picture of Janie's hands. Picture of Janie's body, surely as smooth as her shoulder, as firm as her forearms, warm and—they turned to each other. Their breath left them, hung as a promise, alive and merged. For two heavy heartbeats they had their planet in the lovers' cosmos; and then Janie's face twisted in concentration. A thing happened to him, as if a small sphere of vacuum had appeared deep within him. The magic around them whipped in with his breath to fill the vacuum which swallowed it, all of it. They stood still in the sunset, close, but the magic was gone, the melding; they were two, not one, and this was Janie quiet, Janie unkindled. But no—the real difference was in him. His hands no longer cared and his lips lost their grip on the unborn kiss. He stepped back. "Shall we go?" A swift ripple of regret came and went across Janie's face. He shared her regret—and then it was gone, dwindling high away from him.

They walked silently back to the midway and to the lights, with their pitiable thousands of candlepower; and to the amusement rides, their balky pretense at motion. Behind them, in the growing dark, they left all real radiance, all significant movement. To an elaborate stand

where a couple of war surplus servo-mechanisms rigged to simulate radar directors, Aircraft silhouettes were flashed across the ceiling. All in all, it was a fine conglomeration of gadgetry and dazzle, a truly high-level catchpenny.



Hip went first. He missed the first "plane" and the second; after that he had the fixed error of the gun calculated precisely and he banged away at every target as fast as they came and knocked out every one.

Janie clapped her hands like a child and the attendant awarded them a glittering statue of a dog worth all of a fift of the admission. Hip took it proudly and waved Janie to the trigger.



He said out of the corner of his mouth, "*Up forty on your right quadrant, corp'l, or the pixies'll degauss your fuses.*" Janie's eyes narrowed a trifle, perhaps to help her aiming. She did not answer. She knocked out the first target and the second and the third. She seemed to pull herself together, then let one go by and missed four in a row. "*Not too good,*" she said.



Good enough. You don't have to hit 'em these days, you know. Just get near. Your fuses take over from there—and this is the world's flakiest dog.



Hip, you're getting that sparkle stuff all over you. Let's give it away.

They found a solemn urchin sucking the memory of butter from a well-worn corn cob. The child ignored the extended gift and kept his frighteningly adult eyes on Janie. She shuddered. *"Oh, let's leave him alone."*



She whirled and Hip's eyes obviously deceived him, for he saw the corn cob turn ninety degrees and thump the urchin in the face. The child shrilled an unprintable suggestion at them.

"Whew! What clever ears you have, Grandma," Hip said, unsuccessfully covering an almost prissy embarrassment. *"I didn't hear a thing until that second broadside he threw."* Janie smiled. *"Come on, let's go home."*



A bus ride through the flickering night, and the familiar depot on the familiar street. It was *his* town now, and it felt good. They woke a taxi driver and gave him their address.



Can I be more alive than this? I mean, it's as if my whole world was once in a little place inside my head, so deep I couldn't see out; and then you made it as big as a room and then as big as a town and tonight as big as . . . well, a lot bigger. How much bigger can it get, Janie?



"Much bigger," she said. He pressed back into the seat. *"Janie,"* he said in a suddenly strange voice, *"I feel sick."* A tension came and went within him.



Him again. He's wrong. He's wrong. He'll never make me sick again.

Driver! Left. Turn left. Right here!

There. The house with the driveway, there where the big hedge is. A little further—pull over where I can see it.

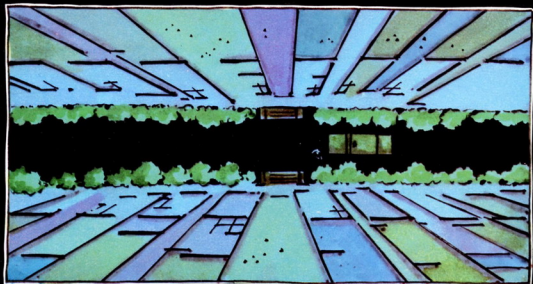


Hip stared through the driveway's gap at the faintly gleaming white house, its stately porch, its neat shutters and fanlit door. After a time he said, "Take us home."



When the cab stopped, Hip gave the driver a bill, accepted the change, pawed out a tip, and handed it back. Then he stood looking down at the money in his hand.

Janie? Let's go inside.



"It isn't mine," Hip said. "None of it's been mine. Not the roller coaster money or the shopping money or coffee in the mornings or . . . I suppose there's rent here."

She was silent. He continued: "That house. The instant I saw it I knew I'd been there before. I was there just before I got arrested. I remember. I knocked on the door and I was dirty and crazy and they told me to go around the back if I wanted something to eat. I didn't have any money then. All I had was . . ." Out of his pocket came the woven metal tube. He squeezed it, then pointed it at the night table. "Now I have money. In my left jacket pocket every day. I never wondered about it. It's your money, isn't it, Janie?"



"It's yours. Forget about it, Hip. It isn't important."

"What do you mean it's mine?" he barked. "Mine because you gave it to me?" He probed her silence with a bright beam of anger and nodded. "Thought so." Then he blurted, "You've got to understand, I'm not mad at you. I'm all mixed up again. Doing things, don't know why. Things I *got* to do, I don't know what. Like . . . like knowing this is wrong, being here, getting fed, but I don't know where I ever learned it's wrong. And . . . this thing about finding somebody and I don't know who it is and I don't know why. I said tonight . . ." He paused and filled the room with the hiss of breath between his teeth. "I said tonight my world is getting bigger all the time. It just now got big enough to take in that house where we stopped. We passed that corner and I knew the house was there and I had to look at it. I knew I'd been there before . . . knocked . . . they told me to go around back . . . I yelled at them . . . somebody else came. I asked them, I wanted to know about some—" (the silence, again the hissing breath) "—children who lived there, and no children lived there. I shouted again, I told them just tell me what I wanted to know. I'd go away. I said all right, no

children, then just let me talk to Alicia Kew."

He straightened up, his eyes alight. "You see? I remember her name, Alicia Kew!" His shoulders drooped. "They said Alicia Kew is dead. Then they said, oh *her* children. They told me where to go to find them. They wrote it down someplace . . ." He began to fumble through his pockets, then stopped and glared at Janie. "It was the old clothes; you have it, you've hidden it!" If she had explained, it would have been all right, but she only watched him. "All right," he gritted. "I remembered one thing and I can remember another. I don't need you." Her expression did not change, but he knew she was holding it still and that it was a terrible effort. He said gently, "I did need you. I'd've died without you. You've been. . ." He had no word for it, and went on. "It's just that I've gotten so I don't need you that way anymore. I have some things to find out but I have to do it myself. There can't be much more to find out."

"There's a lot more," she said sadly.

"I tell you, I *know*! Finding out about those children, about this Alicia Kew, and then the address where they'd moved—that was right at the end; that was the place where I got my fingertips on the—whatever it was I was trying to grab. Just that one more place, that address where the children are; that's all I need. That's where he'll



be—the one I've been looking for. His name is—" He leapt to his feet. "His name's—" He brought his fist into his palm, a murderous blow. "I forgot," he whispered. Suddenly he charged across the room, grabbed her wrists. "You know!" he shouted. "I *bet* you know! You know every damn thing, don't you? You have all along. Here I am going half out of my head wanting to know and you sit there watching me squirm!"

"Hip! Hip, my arms—"

He squeezed tighter, shook her. She began crying.

Then she was quiet, panting, sending through those impossible tears some tortured, thwarted message which he could not read. Slowly he sat on the bed. "Ah, Janie. Janie..."

She said, with her eyes closed, "I understand, Hip; I do understand. I want to help, I want to go on helping."

He got up heavily and went back to his chair. *When she wants something out of me, he thought viciously, she just sits and waits for it.* He looked at her. She had not moved. He waited.

She said, "You have to take my word. You'll have to trust me, Hip. When was the first time you remembered you had that piece of cable—remembered it was yours?"



He closed his eyes, frowned. "The window. The time I remembered breaking the window. I remembered that and then it... oh!" he said abruptly. "You put it in my hand."

"For eight days I'd been putting it in your hand, Hip. I put it in your shoe once. On your plate. In the soap dish. Once I stuck your toothbrush inside it. Every day, half a dozen times a day—eight days, Hip!"

"I don't believe you."

"Truly, Hip," she said intensely. "That's the way it was, and every time you touched the bit of cable, you refused to admit it existed, didn't know it was there!"

"Oc—" he said with effort, then "occlusion. That's what Bromfield called it." *Who was Bromfield?* But it escaped him; Janie was talking.

"That's right. Now listen carefully. When the time came for the occlusion to vanish, it did; and there you stood with the cable in your hand, knowing it was real. You said it yourself: the world got bigger for you, big enough to include this room, then big enough for a street, then a town. Your memory got big enough to include yesterday, and last week, and then the jail, and then the thing that got you into jail. At that moment the cable meant nothing to you, something important, but when it happened, for all

the time *after* it happened, the cable meant nothing—until the moment your memory could go back that far. Then it was real again." She dropped her eyes. "I knew about the cable. I could have explained it to you. I tried to bring it to your attention but you couldn't see it until you were ready. All right, so I know a lot more about you. But don't you see that if I told you, *you wouldn't be able to hear me?*"

"Come on now," he growled, "you don't mean I'd suddenly become deaf if you told me where I went to high school."

"Of course not. It's just that it wouldn't mean anything to you. It wouldn't relate." She bit her lip, concentrating. "Here's one: you've mentioned Bromfield."

"Who? Bromfield? I have not."

"Hip, you have. You mentioned him not five minutes ago."

"Did I?" He thought hard. I did! I guess I'm a little mixed up. Yeah... B-Bromfield."

"It will hardly stay with you. It won't mean anything to you until you go back that far and get it."

"Go back? Go back how?"

"Haven't you been going back and back—from being sick here to being in jail to getting arrested and, just before that, to your visit to that house?"



"Yeah, I went to the house searching for—what was it? Some children who could tell me where the half-wit was." He leapt up, laughed. "You see? I remembered! The half-wit, I'd been looking for him for years... forget why, but it doesn't matter now. I don't have to go all the way back; I've done all I need to do. Tomorrow I'm going back to that house and get the address and then I'll finish what I started to do when I lost the part of the—the—*what?*!"

"You see, Hip? You're not ready. If you go out there tomorrow," she paused, taking one deep breath, then said, "you'll be killed."

What? You tell me I can walk out of here tomorrow and find whatever it is I've been looking for—no, *living* for—and you tell me it'll kill me if I do. What do you want from me? What are you trying to tell me to do?



I didn't say anything will try to kill you. I said you *would* be killed.

"Just keep on with what you've been doing," she pleaded. "Haven't I been right so far?"

"No!" he snapped. "You can't talk me out of it." His face softened. "Janie," he said, "help me. If there's danger . . . if something is going to try to kill me, at least tell me what to look for."



He stood over her for a long time. Then he growled, "All right, I will. Thanks for everything, Janie. You better go." She turned to him with such a look of pity and sorrow that his heart was squeezed. But he set his jaw firm. She went, not looking back, dragging her feet. It was more than he could bear. But he let her go.



He lay exhausted. *Go on, get sick. Curl up and die. All right,* he whispered. Might as well. Die or get killed, who cares? Not Janie. He saw the face. Its mouth said, *Just lie down and die, that's all,* and smiled. Then there was a pain; he threw up his head and grunted. His hand was cut. He

looked at the scars. "Thompson, I'm gonna kill that Thompson." Who was Thompson, who was Bromfield, and who was the half-wit in the cave . . . cave, with the children . . . no, it was children's . . . children's clothes . . . that's it! Clothes, old, torn rags; but that's how he— Janie . . . you will be killed. *Just lie down and die.*

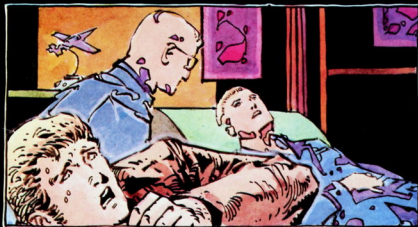


His tensions left him in a creeping lethargy. Someone said, "Up forty on your right quadrant, corp'r'l, or the pixies'll deguass your fuses." Who said that? He, Hip Barrows. He

said it. Who'd he say it to? Janie with her clever hand on the ack-ack gun. He snorted faintly. Janie wasn't a corporal.

"Reality isn't the most pleasant of atmospheres, Lieutenant, but we like to think we're engineered for it. Drag in an obsession and reality can't tolerate it. So kick the obsession out; function the way you were designed to function." Bromfield. The jerk! Trying to talk engineering to an engineer. "Cap'n Bromfield, if you'd only—" Ah, it doesn't matter.

It doesn't matter. Just curl up and . . . "No, by God," roared Hip Barrows. Thompson was not going to make him curl up and die. Janie had rid him of that one! She didn't want him to die. She just wants . . . to go back. Take time.



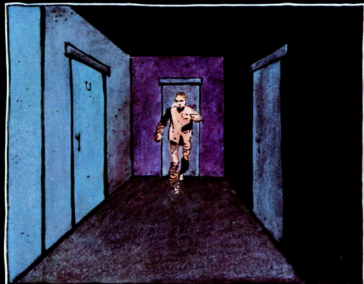
"Cave," he said aloud. He had found the cave. In it were children's clothes, and among them was the piece of paper that had led him to the house, right here in town. Another step backward, big because it proved he had seen what Bromfield claimed he had not seen. . . .

He had a piece of it! Of course! The piece of tubing had come from the cave, too. A deep excitement. She'd said, "Go back," and he had said no, it takes too long. But suppose he tried this going-back business head-on, rested—and with Janie to help?



He ran to the door, threw it open, bounded across the hall. "Janie, listen," he called, wildly excited. "Janie!"

He shoved the opposite door open. "Janie—" and his voice was cut off in a sharp gasp. He skidded to a stop, his feet scurrying and slipping, trying to get him back out into the hall again. "I beg your—excuse me," he bleated out of his shock.



He stumbled across the hall back to his own room, feeling like a gong which had just been struck. He saw the picture of it again, vividly, and he laughed, hot-faced and uncomfortable. "She should've told me."



"Bup-bup-bup-bup-bup. Wham-wham." (Oerlikons! Where'd they dredge those things up from? Is this an ack-ack station or a museum?) "Hip! Hip Barrows!" (For Pete's sake, when is that corporal going to learn to say "Lieutenant"?) Wham! Wham! "HIP!"

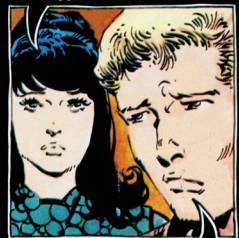


Walking. I had to think. I waited outside. I was afraid you might—you know. I wanted to follow you if . . . are you all right, Hip?

Hip, what are you talking about? What happened?



Oh sure. I just hope *she's* all right. I wish you'd told me you had somebody in there with you. I wouldn't have barged—



Oh boy. You came straight here—you haven't been to your room yet! I wish *she'd* told you about it rather than me.

He lay down, drove the embarrassing moment away, brought back the greater urgency. He had to talk with Janie. She'd know. Wait then. She'd come when she was ready. His eyes closed. Once he gave a small, foolish snicker, but the picture wasn't clear enough to divert him from sleep.



He sat palming his eyes, and the guns were knuckles on a door, and the corporal was Janie. "Come on in," he croaked, "Listen, Janie. I'm awful sorry about last night. Where you been?"



You see, I suddenly had to see you, so I charged into your room, never dreaming there'd be anyone else. . .



There was this friend of yours. The black woman. Young. Had to be someone you know, Janie. Burglars aren't likely to prance around naked.

Janie put a slow hand up to her mouth. "He's found us . . . we've got to get out of here." Her lips were white. "Now wait, Janie, I know it was embarrassing, but it can't be that—"



She whirled on him like a fighting animal. "Don't talk! Don't ask me. You wouldn't understand." With astonishing power, her hand closed on his arm and pulled.



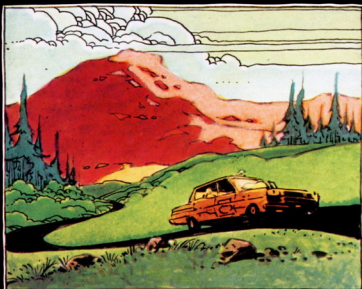
He found himself outside, rushing behind her. "Taxi!" she screamed.



She told the driver to go, just go, peering out the window the whole way, and finally she said, "Oh, Hip, I'm sorry; more sorry than I can say. I didn't expect this—not so soon. I'm afraid there's nothing I can do about it now."

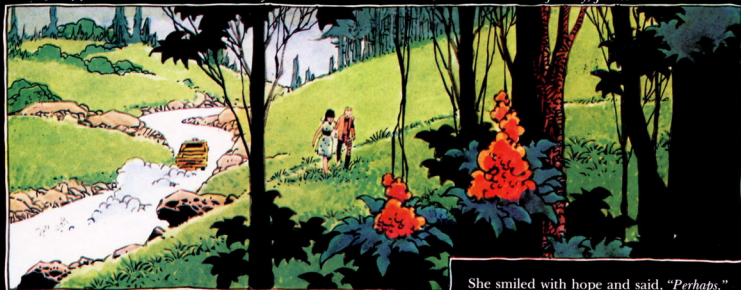


Beyond the town limits, she said, "Driver! This will do." The terror was still in her face.



She pointed to a knoll in the high meadows. "We'll be found," she said flatly, "but up there . . . if anything comes, we can see it coming. Oh Hip, I know you could do it, go all the way back, if only you had the time." He said, "Maybe we do have the

time, Janie. I found the cave this morning. That's two years back, and I did it without even trying." Her face began to glow. He continued, "Now I'll try. You say we have no more time. Maybe not weeks, but we do have half a day, Janie."



She smiled with hope and said, "Perhaps."

In the high breeze, they sat facing each other, each commanding half a horizon. Hip Barrows worked back and back, and Janie listened, her deep, clear eyes flicking from side to side over the open land. Back and back . . . dirty and mad, Hip Barrows had taken two years to find the house. For the piece of paper had a number

and a street, but no town, no city. Three years from the insane asylum to the cave. A year to the insane asylum from the county clerk's office. Six months to find the county clerk from the day of his discharge. Six months from the birth of his obsession until they threw him out of the service.



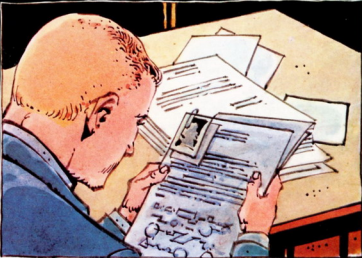
Seven plodding years from starch and schedules to a dim, guttering light in a jail cell. Now, he thought back through the seven years until he knew what he had been before they had started.

It was on the anti-aircraft range that he found an answer, a dream, and a disaster. Still young, still brilliant as ever, but surrounded by puzzling rejection, Lieutenant Barrows found himself with too much spare time.



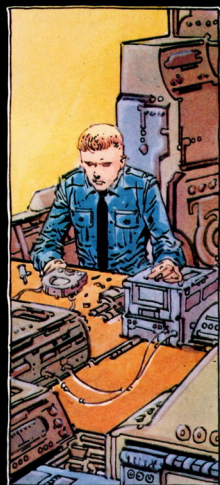
During a period of nothing to do, the lieutenant went rummaging into some files and came up with some old research figures on the efficiency of proximity fuses and the minimum elevations at which these ingenious missiles might be fired. It would seem that ack-ack officers would rather knock out a low-flying plane than have their shells predetonated by an intervening treetop.

Lieutenant Barrows's eye was one of those which pick up mathematical discrepancies. A certain quadrant in the range contained a tiny area over which passed more dud shells than the law of averages should allow. The scientific mind recoils at lawbreaking of this sort, and will pursue a guilty phenomenon as grimly as society ever hunted its delinquents.



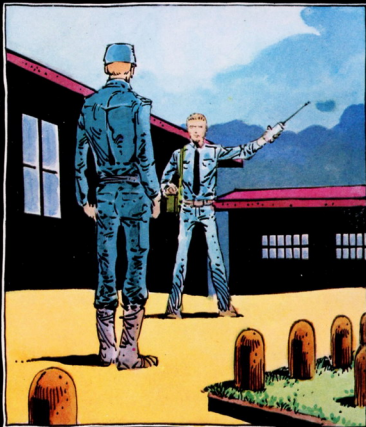


So Lieutenant Hip made a field trip on his own time and discovered an area wherein his pocket voltmeter would not work properly. It occurred to him that he had found something that inhibited magnetism. The proximity fused, to all purposes, ceased to exist when they passed this particular hillside lower than forty yards. Permanent magnets were damped just as electromagnets. Barrows's imaginative mind drank and drank of the phenomenon (Barrows Effect, perhaps?), and he saw visions of a field generator which would throw up an invisible wall of the force; aircraft and their communications failing with the failure of their many magnets. The perfect defensive weapon for the electromagnetic age. There would be the demonstrations, of course, the colonel introducing him to renowned scientists and military men. His genius would finally be accepted. But first he had to find what was doing it. He designed and built a *detector*. It was simple and ingenious and very carefully calibrated. While engaged in the work, his mind admired the fabulous concept of *contramagnetism*. He amused himself by warning his men against low elevation shelling over his area because "the pixies would degauss (demagnetize) their proximity fuses." This gave him a high delight, for he pictured himself telling them later that his fanciful remark had been nothing but the truth. He even had a paper printed in the *Journal of the Institute of Electrical Engineers*.



At last he finished his detector. It would detect the slightest changes in the field of his own magnet. It weighed about forty pounds, but this mattered not at all since he appointed as a volunteer the stupidest-looking Pfc he could find.

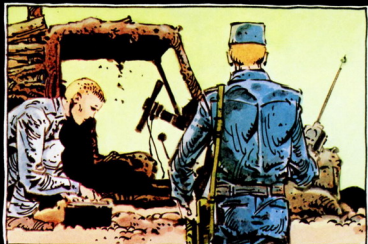
They located the center of the degaussing effect in a field on an old abandoned farm. In the middle of the field was an ancient truck in the last stages of oxidation. Drought and drift, rain and thaw had all but buried the machine.



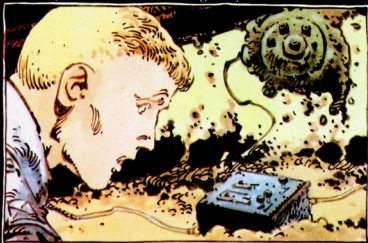
They excavated what was left of the truck and they found the source of the incredible field. From each corner of the frame ran a gleaming, silvery cable. They came together at the steering column and ran into a small box from which protruded a lever. There was no apparent source of the energy.



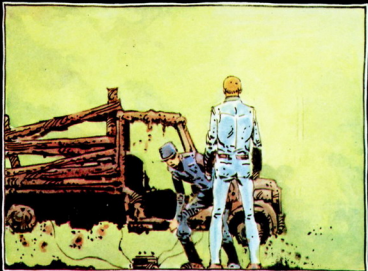
When Barrows pushed the lever forward, the twisted wreck groaned and sank noticeably into the soft ground. When he pulled the lever back, it lifted up to the limits of its broken springs and wanted to lift more.



He returned the lever to neutral and stepped back. This made practical the very wildest of his dreams. It was the degaussing generator, and it was much more. Lever forward, the truck was *heavier*. Lever back, *lighter*. It was a fantasy, a dream. It was anti-gravity!



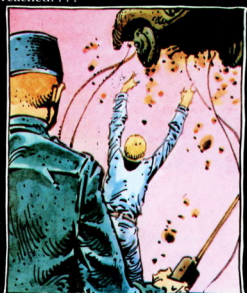
Here was an escape to the planets, to the galaxy perhaps. A new era in transportation, architecture, logistics, medicine, even dance.



Then the dull-witted Pfc stepped forward and yanked the lever full back. He smiled . . .

. . . and threw himself at Barrows's

Barrows kicked free, stood, sprang so his knees cracked. He stretched, reached. . .



The tips of his fingers touched the cool underside of one of the cables. It could not have lasted a tenth of a second; but for all the years Barrows was to live, part of him stayed in the frozen instant, his body floating



He fell. Nightmare. The madness of an ancient ruin rising out of its element, faster and faster, smaller and smaller, a patch in the darkening sky, a spot, a speck. From somewhere, laughter.



A time of mad, shouting arguments, words slurred into screams, laughing eyes, and a scuttling shape escaping him. *He did it and he tripped me besides.* Then the white helmets and the brassards: MP. Tell them, bring the colonel. No one else, only the colonel. *Colonel, it's anti-magnetron, to the satellite, and freight; no more jets!* Yeah, sure, Barrows, sure.

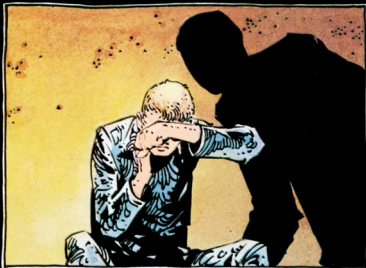


The nightmare lifted. "What happened?" The MP—"Search me, sir. Mostly you seemed to want to kill some Pfc. Kept telling everybody what he looks like." He put a forearm over his

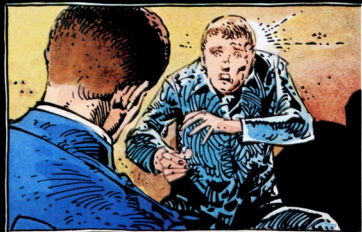
eyes. "Did you find him?" The MP: "Lieutenant, there ain't such a man on the roster. Honest. Security's been through every file we got. You better take it easy, sir."



A knock. The MP opened the door. Voices. That voice! Barrows pressed down on his forearm until sparks shone. Don't look—because if you're right, you'll kill him. Footsteps. "Evening, Lieutenant. I'm Major Thompson. Ever talk to a psychiatrist before?"

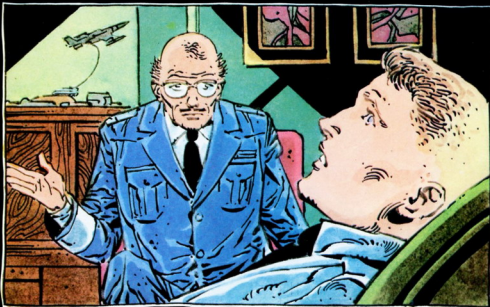


Slowly, in terror of the explosion he knew must come, Barrows lowered his arm. The last time he had seen this face, it belonged to a Pfc who had uncomplainingly hauled his heavy detector around for a whole, hot day; who had shared his discovery; and who had suddenly smiled at him, pulled the lever, let a wrecked truck and a lifetime dream fall away upwards into the sky.



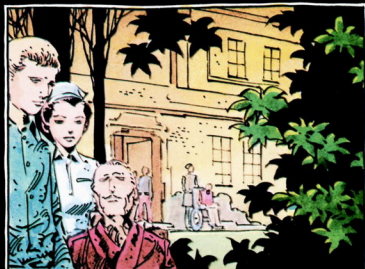
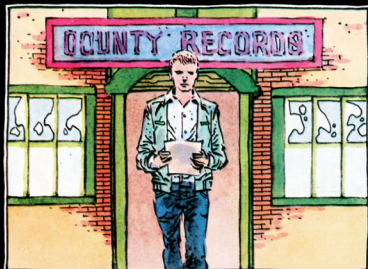
Barrows growled and leapt. The nightmare closed down again.

Then Bromfield, the new psychiatrist who did everything he could to help. He let Barrows check the files himself and prove there was no such Pfc. The "degaussing" effect? No observations of it. Of course, the lieutenant himself admitted he had taken all pertinent records to his quarters. No, they were not in the quarters. Yes, there was a hole in the ground out there and they'd found his "detector," though it made no sense to anyone; it merely tested the field of its own magnet. As to Major Thompson, we have witnesses who can prove he was in the air when it happened. If the lieutenant would only rid himself of the idea that Major Thompson is the missing Pfc, we'd get along much better; he isn't, you know; he couldn't be. *I know what I did. I know what I saw. I'll find that device or whoever made it and I'll find Thompson!* Bromfield was a good man, and heaven knows he tried, but these brilliant boys . . . they crack. So they kept him a while longer, satisfying themselves that Major Thompson was the only target. Then they wrote the major a word of warning and they kicked the lieutenant out. Too bad, they said.



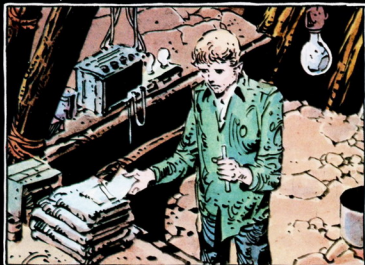
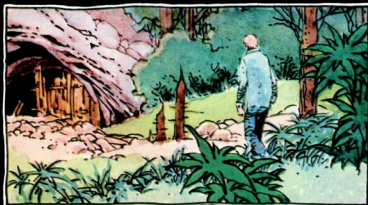
The first six months was a bad dream. First, the farm. The device was on the truck and the truck obviously belonged to a farmer. Find him and there's your answer. It took six months to find the town records (for the village had been preempted when the ack-ack range was added to the base) and to learn the names of the only two men who might tell him about the truck. A. Prodd, farmer. A

half-witted hired hand, name unknown, whereabouts unknown. Rumor took him to Pennsylvania and a hunch took him to the asylum a year later. From Prodd, he learned that the old man was waiting for his wife, that the hand called Lone maybe was an idiot, but nobody was better at getting the truck out of the mud, and that Lone was a good boy who lived in the woods with the animals.



Barrows went into the woods with the animals. For three and a half years, he combed those woods. He ate nuts and berries. He forgot engineering, nearly forgot his name. The only thing he cared to know was that to put such a device on such a truck was the act of an idiot and that this Lone was a half-wit.

He found the cave, some children's clothes, a scrap of the silvery cable, and an address.



He found the address. He learned where to find the children.

Then he ran into Thompson. Janie found him. *Seven years.*

He realized it was night. His head was in Janie's lap. She said, "*Now it's my turn, Hip. I have a lot to tell you . . . before we're found.*"



You found something in a field; you had your hands on it just long enough to know what it was. The man who was with you, the Pfc, made you lose it. The medical officer, Major Thompson, looked exactly like that Pfc. Witnesses claimed it couldn't be the same man because they were with Thompson in a plane. You had a sheaf of files which

showed a perturbation which affected proximity fuses over a certain area. They disappeared. Now, those three things—the missing Pfc, the missing files, and the resemblance of the major to the Pfc—were the things which discredited you. Suppose that Pfc pulled the lever on purpose?



The light was blinding. "Why didn't I ever think of that?" Bitterly, she said, "You weren't allowed to think of it. Now, just suppose someone did this to you. Can you reason out who it was—why he did it—how he did it?" He said immediately, "No. Eliminating the world's first and only anti-gravity generator

makes no sense at all. Picking on me to persecute, and doing it through such an elaborate method, makes even less sense. As to how he'd be able to get into locked rooms, hypnotize witnesses, and read minds. . .!" "He can," said Jamie. "He did."



She told him. She told him of Lone, of Bonnie and Beanie, and of herself; Miss Kew and Miriam, both dead now, and Gerry Thompson. She told how they had moved, after Miss Kew was killed, to a new place back in the woods, and how for a time they were very close.

"Then, Gerry got ambitious and decided to go through college. It was easy. He qualified as a psychiatrist. Those were good times. Gerry was interested in everything. He read. He was at Baby all the time for information. People, books, machines, history, art. I got a lot from it. All the information cleared through me."



"But then Gerry began to . . . I was going to say, get sick, but that's not quite right. He had it pretty rough when he was a kid, ran away from an orphanage when he was seven, and lived like a sewer rat until Lone picked him up. So it felt good to get honors in class and make money with a twist of the wrist. But he soon

realized he didn't have to prove anything to anyone. Proving it was just dull. So he quit studying. He quit playing the oboe. He gradually quit everything. Who knows what went on in his head? He'd spent weeks lying around, not talking."



"Our gestalt was an idiot, Hip, when it had Lone for a 'head.' When Gerry took over it was a new, strong, growing thing. But when this happened to him, it was in retreat, like a manic-depressive." Hip grunted. "A manic-depressive with enough power to run the world." Janie said, "He didn't want to run the world; he didn't see any reason why he should. Well, just like in his psych texts, he regressed. He got childish and pretty vicious. I



"He was interested, all right. He asked Baby about it and got the answer pronto. You see, Lone built that thing before Gerry came to live with us, for Prodd. That was just like Lone. A gravity generator for Prodd's old truck, all because Prodd's horse died. Well, Baby said this invention would turn the whole world upside down, worse than the industrial revolution. Seems that gravitics is the key to everything, leading to the addition of one more item to the unified field—what we now call psychic energy." Hip was awed. "Matter, energy, space, time, and psyche. That's the—the biggest thing I ever heard. So—Gerry decided us poor, half-

started to move around; I couldn't stand it at the house. In New York, I dated a fellow who was in the Institute of Electrical Engineers." Hip smiled. "Swell outfit. I used to be a member." "I know. This fellow told me about what you called 'an extrapolation of the attendant phenomena of magnetic flux in a gravity generator.' Yes, Hip, I did it to you. I didn't know then, of course. I just wanted to interest Gerry."



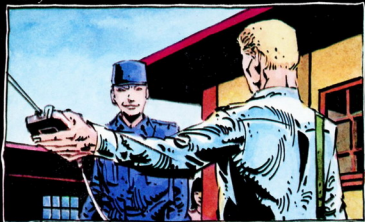
developed apes weren't worthy?" Janie seemed annoyed. "Not Gerry! He doesn't care what happens to you! He found out from Baby, though, that the device would be traced to us. You did it yourself but Central Intelligence would've taken seven weeks instead of seven years. That's what bothered Gerry. He was in retreat. He didn't want to be bothered. He wanted to stew in his own juices in his hideout in the woods. He got mad at Lone, who was dead, and he especially got mad at you." Hip shuddered. "Whew. He could've killed me. Why didn't he?"



"Same reason he didn't just go out and confiscate the device before you saw it. I tell you, he was vicious and vengeful—childish. You'd bothered him. He was going to fix you for it. I went with him to the base, simply glad to see him moving around again. Now, here's something you wouldn't remember. He walked right into

your lab while you were calibrating your detector. He looked you once in the eye and walked out again with all the information in your head, including the fact that you intended to—what was your phrase?—appoint a volunteer." Ruefully, Hip said, "Wasn't I a hotshot in those days?"

"Well, I saw you come out, Hip: your pretty tailored uniform, the sun on you . . . I was seventeen. Anyway, Gerry was waiting for you. You marched right up to him and handed him the detector. 'Come on, boy,' you said. 'You just volunteered for a picnic. You carry the lunch.'"



"That's it. Gerry saw that you were discredited. You claimed that the Pfc no one had ever seen was the psychiatrist Major Thompson—a real danger sign. Then he handed you a post-hypnotic suggestion making it impossible to relate him, as the major or the Pfc, to the device."



"Then he did it again!" she said furiously. "There you were, seven lost years later, with nothing left but a numb obsession. Yet you had enough of whatever it is that makes you what you are to drag through those seven years picking up the pieces, until you



"When you charged him he diverted you into that window with just a blink of those . . . rotten . . . poison . . . eyes of his . . . makes me so mad! He sent you flying into that window and

"What a stinker I was!" "I didn't think so. I thought you were sort of wonderful. Anyway, you know the rest. Gerry flashed Bonnie to get the files from your quarters. She threw them down to me and I burned them. I'm sorry, Hip. I didn't know what Gerry was planning."



When I found out what he'd done, I asked Baby how I could help. He said the command might be removed by reverse abreaction—moving backward, mentally, to the incident itself. It was a "from now on" suggestion; it couldn't stop you when you were traveling in reverse. But I couldn't find you. . . .



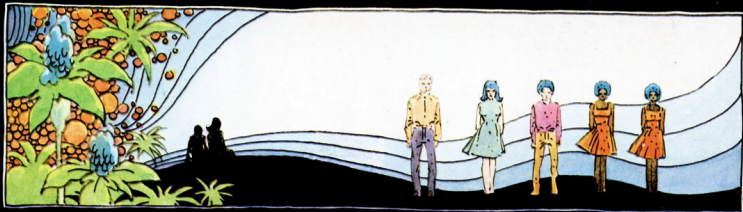
were right at his doorstep. When he saw you coming—it was an accident, he happened to be in town—he knew immediately what you were after."



he gave you that 'curl up and die' command. I saw him do it . . . s-so rotten! Maybe if it was the only one, I could have forgotten it . . . but yours wasn't the only case."

"Janie, I'll take your word for it. There were lots of us. But—why me? You went all out for me." She sighed, said, "Two reasons. First, I saw him make you charge the glass, thinking it was him. It was the last piece of casual viciousness I ever wanted to see. Second, it was—well, it was you. Listen," she said passionately, "we're not freaks. We're Homo gestalt. We weren't invented. We evolved. We're the next step up.

Did you ever see those museum exhibits of, say, horses, starting with the little Eohippus and coming right up the line, nineteen or twenty of them, to the Percheron? There's a lot of difference between number one and number nineteen, but what real difference is there between number fifteen and number sixteen? Damn little!" She stopped and panted. He waited.



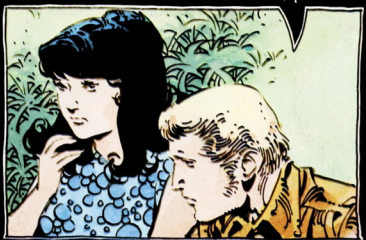
"Can't you see? Homo gestalt is something new. But the parts—just like the bones in those skeletons—they're the same as the step lower, or very little different. I'm me, I'm Janie. I saw you seven years ago, coming out into the sun. You were wide and tall and you walked like a big, glossy

stallion. You were shining armor and a dipping pennant and you were . . . I was seventeen, damn it, Barrows, whatever else I was. I was seventeen and all full of late spring and dreams that scared me."



Profoundly shaken, he whispered, "Janie . . ." "Get away from me!" she spat. "Not love at first sight. That's childish. I'm not talking about love. I'm talking about being seventeen and feeling all . . ." She covered her face. ". . . all . . . human."

Janie, I . . . I don't want to spoil you being seventeen . . . but when you saw me that day, I wasn't the knight in shining armor. I was going to discover something big, not for humanity's sake, but so they would . . . ask me to play the piano at the officers' club and slap me on the back and . . . well, that's all I wanted . . . selfish acceptance.



They were quiet for a long time. Finally she said, "What do you want now?"

"Not that type of acceptance," he whispered. He took her hands. "Something different now." He laughed suddenly. "Janie, I don't know what it is."

She squeezed his hands and released them. "Perhaps you'll find out. Hip, we'd better go home. My home." "Thompson's?"

She nodded. "He's got to learn something a computer can't teach him. He's got to learn to be ashamed. I don't know how moral systems operate, Hip. I don't know how you get them started. All I know about morals is that if they're violated, you feel ashamed. I'll start him with that. I want him to see you—what you are, the way you think. I want him to remember what you were before, how much brilliance, how much promise you had, so he'll know how much he has cost you. He'll have to face the fact



that he is not omnipotent and that he can't kill something better than he is just because he's stronger."

"You want him to try to kill me?"

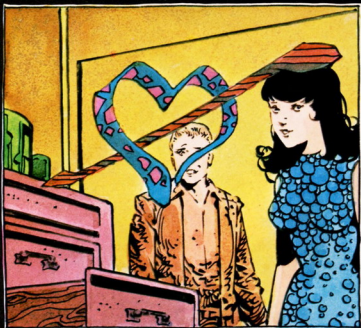
She laughed. "Don't worry about it, Hip. I am his only link with Baby. Do you think he'd perform a prefrontal lobotomy on himself? Do you think he'd risk cutting himself off from his memory? It isn't the kind of memory a man has, Hip. It's Homo gestalt's. It's all the information it has absorbed, plus computation of each fact. He can get along without Bonnie and Beanie, get things done at a distance in other ways. But he can't get along without Baby. He's had to ever since I began working with you. By this time he's frantic. He can touch Baby, lift him, talk to him, but he can't get a thing out of him unless he does it through me!"

"I'll come," Hip said quietly. Then he said, "You won't have to kill yourself."

They went first to their own house and Janie laughed and opened the locks without touching them. "I've wanted to do this for so long," she laughed. She pirouetted into his room. "Look!" she sang, and neckties whipped out of his drawer to hang in the air in a special shape. He shouted with laughter and said, "Why haven't I ever kissed you, Janie?"

Her face and body went quite still and in her eyes was an indescribable expression. He said, "I know why. You can add water to a closed container, Janie. Or take it away." It was not a

question. "When we poor males start pawing the ground and hornin' the low branches, it might be spring and it might be love. But it's always triggered by hydrostatic pressure in a tiny series of reservoirs smaller than my little fingernail. So when the moisture content of these reservoirs is suddenly lowered, I—we-uh . . . well, breathing becomes easier and the moon has no significance. That's what you've been doing to me." She gave him her eyes and a swift, rich arpeggio of laughter. "You can't say it was an immoral thing to do," she said.

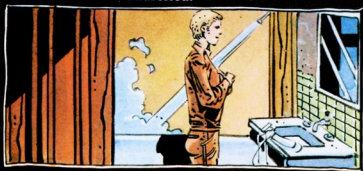


He gave her laughter back to her. "No nice girl would do a thing like that." She wrinkled her nose at him and slipped into her room. He looked at her closed door and probably through it, and then turned away. Smiling and shaking his



They stood in the road until after the taxi had gone and then Janie led the way into the woods. They made their way to a mossy cliff, and then Hip saw it was not a cliff but a

head in delight and wonderment encasing a small, cold ball of terror inside him with a new kind of calm he had found; puzzled, enchanted, terrified and thoughtful, he turned on the shower and undressed.

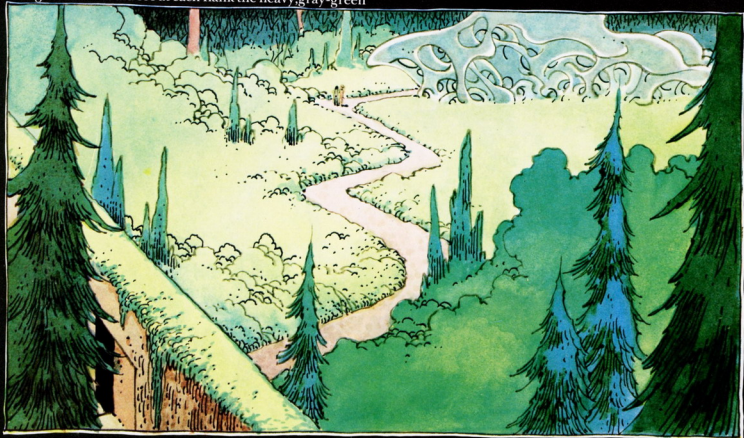


wall. A massive iron door clicked as they approached and something heavy slid. He looked at Janie and knew that she was doing it.



The gate closed behind them. Here the path was brick and took only two turns. The first made the wall invisible and the second revealed the house. It was too low and much too wide. Its roof was mounded rather than peaked or gabled. He could see at each flank the heavy, gray-green

wall, and he knew that this whole area was in prison. "I don't, either," said Janie. He was glad she watched his face. Gooble. Someone stood behind a twisted oak, peeping at them. "Wait here, Hip—just a moment."



Janie walked to the tree and spoke to someone. He heard her say, "You've got to. Do you want to see me dead?" That seemed to settle the argument. As Janie returned he peered at the tree, but now there seemed to be no one

there. "It was Beanie," said Janie. "You'll meet her later." The door was heavy oak planks. By itself—or at least without a physical touch—it swung back, silent as a cloud. They went inside.



When the door closed, there was a reverberation deep in the subsonic; he felt it in his belly. The air was cool, humid; the ceiling too close. The corridor seemed long but was not, for the walls came in and the ceiling drew

even lower while the floor rose in a disturbing, false perspective. "It's all right," said Janie. He wiped cold water from his upper lip.



Near the end door a section of the wall swung back, revealing an anteroom. "Wait here." She was completely composed. "I have to see him alone first. Trust me. He won't do anything, Hip."

He stepped through and the door swung shut behind him. There was no knob, no visible hinge or catch. The edges were hidden in the paneling.

He sat opposite the anteroom's other door, which led to the same place as the door at the corridor's end. In the silence, he thought about the mystery of the other side, of the face with its thick lenses, of Janie, without him, facing that face.



He quickly thought about something else. A girl, two tongue-tied black teen-agers, a mongoloid idiot, and a man with thick glasses. *Homo gestalt*—a psychic evolution instead of a physical? The fear in him was a survival instinct; it meant that somewhere hope was alive. He began to think about survival. Janie wanted gestalt to acquire a moral system so that people such as Hip would not get hurt, but she also wanted her gestalt to thrive; she was a part of it.

Morals—they're nothing more than a coded survival instinct—or are they? There must be a name for the code by

which an individual helps his species to survive. Let's define that as *ethos*. That's what *Homo gestalt* needs—an *ethos*. Should I sit here, my brains bubbling with fear, and devise a set of ethics for a superman? I'll try. It's all I can do. *Morals*: society's code for individual survival. *Ethics*: an individual's code for society's survival. As a group, *Homo gestalt* can solve his own problems, but as an entity—he can't have a morality because he is alone. He has no society, yet he has. He has no species; he is his own species. Could he select a code which would help all of humanity? Who am I to make positive conclusions about morality and



codes to help humanity? Who am I to make positive conclusions about morality? *Why—I'm the son of a doctor who chose to serve mankind and who was positive that this was right. He tried to make me serve in the same way because it was the only rightness he was sure of and for this I have hated him all my life . . . I see now, Dad! I see!*

He laughed as the old fury, the smell of disinfectant on tile, left him forever. It was as if the focus were sharper and as if his mind turned back to the immediate problem, his thought seemed to place its fingers better on the rising undersurface, sliding upward toward the beginning of a grip and—

The door opened, Janie said, "Hip—" He got up out of his chair cautiously. His thoughts reeled on, close to something. If he could get a grip, get his fingers curled over it. . . . "Coming." He stepped through the door and gasped. It was like a giant greenhouse; the huge panes overhead curved down and met the open lawn—more like a park outside. After the closeness and darkness it was shocking but it built in him like a delight. He saw the man coming. He stepped quickly forward, to be away from Janie if there should be an explosion. There was going to be an explosion.



Well, Lieutenant, I've been warned, but I can still say—this is a surprise.

Not to me. I've known for seven years that I'd find you.

I apologize, Janie. I really didn't believe you until now. He shows remarkable powers of recovery.

Homo sapiens a hardy beast, Major.

Thompson took off his glasses. He had wide round eyes. The irises looked as if they were just about to spin. . . .



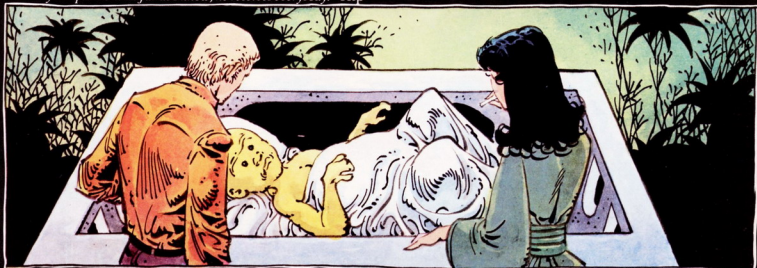
Behind him Janie said sharply, "Gerry!" Hip turned. Janie had a small glass cylinder hanging between her lips. "I warned you, Gerry. You know what this is. Touch him and I bite down on it—and then you can live with Baby and the twins like a monkey in a cage of squirrels."

Hip said, "I'd like to meet Baby." Thompson thawed; he had been staring at Janie. "You wouldn't like him." Hip smiled. "I want to ask him a question." Thompson laughed. "Nobody gets answers these days." Janie said quietly, "This way, Hip."



He followed her to a crib the size of a tub. He had not known that Baby was so fat. "Go ahead," said Janie, "just think your question. As far as I know, he receives everybody." Hip

looked into the crib. "Baby—once this gestalt had another head. It can get other telekines, teleports; but can you be replaced?"



He says yes, Hip. That nasty little telepath with the corncob—remember?



Hip turned slowly. The thought came closer, and his fingers actually rounded a curve. If Baby, the heart and core, the ego of this new being could be replaced, then *Homo gestalt* was both interdependent and independent. With a rush, he had it. He had it all.



Hip came running forward. His fist sank into the taut solar plexus and Thompson went out.



He said evenly, "I asked Baby if he could be replaced, if his memory banks and computing ability could be transferred." "Don't tell him that!" Janie screamed.



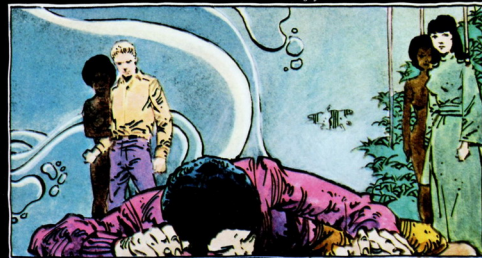
"Hip! Run—run!" Thompson's eyes fixed on Hip's. "No," he said mildly, "don't run." They were going to spin like wheels, like fans, like . . . like . . . Hip heard Janie scream and there was a crunching sound. Glass. Then the eyes were gone. There was a gabbling shriek in the room. Thompson was reeling, kicking, and elbowing backward. It was Bonnie, and it was from her the gabbling came.



Thompson had slipped into unnatural stillness. At last he said, "Baby said yes. I already know that, Janie, you knew this all along, didn't you?" She made a sound like a gasp. "You never told me. But of course, you wouldn't. Baby can't talk to me; the next one might. I can get the whole thing from the lieutenant's eyes right now. So go ahead with the dramatics, Janie. I don't need you."



The girl ran to him, grinning like the moon, squeezed his biceps affectionately, and gabbled. He turned. Another dark girl, just as sinewy and just as naked, supported Janie. "Janie!" he roared. "Bonnie, Beanie, whoever you are—did she—?" The girl holding her gabbled. Janie raised her eyes. And suddenly she smiled. "Did I? I never had a chance, once this butterfly landed on me."



Janie said, "It's the first time the twins ever touched him. He could have burned their brains."

"They're wonderful. Bonnie, get me a knife, a strip of black cloth, and rope." Bonnie disappeared. Hip said, "Janie, now it's your turn to trust me. Leave me alone with him for a while."

Janie hesitated, looked at him. Then she said, "All right, Hip."



Alone, he waited. He took his thought, all of it, and placed it like a patterned drape across the entrance to his mind. The pattern read: listen to me, orphan boy, I am a hated boy, too. You were persecuted; so was I. Listen to me, cave boy. You found a place to belong and you learned to be happy in it. So did I. Listen to me, Miss Kew's boy. You lost yourself for years until you went back and learned again. So did I. Listen to me, gestalt boy. You found power within you beyond your wildest dreams and you used it and loved it. So did I. Listen to me, Gerry. You discovered that no matter how incredible your ability, nobody wanted it. So did I. You want to be wanted. You want to be needed. So do I. Janie says you need morals. Morals are an obedience to rules that people laid down to help you live among them. You can obey no rules set down by your kind because there are no more of your kind. Nobody wants you and you are a monster. Nobody wanted me when I was a monster.

But Gerry, there is a set of rules for you. It is a set of rules that requires belief. It is called ethos. It is a love for your sources and your posterity. Help humanity, Gerry, for it is your mother and your father now; you never had them before. Humanity will help you, for it will produce more like you and then you will no longer be alone.

When there are enough of your kind, your ethics will be their morals and when their morals no longer suit their species, advanced ethics will vault further up the mainstream, respecting those before you, back and back to the first human who knew he was different because his heart leapt when he saw a star.

I was a monster and I found this ethos.
You are a monster.
It's up to you.

Gerry stirred. Hip set the knife. "This is Hip Barrows and that's a knife at your throat. Now tell me something, Gerry. Is it true you can snatch out of the whole of a man's thought just by meeting his eyes?" Gerry whispered, "Let me go. Let me see you."



After a long time, Gerry said, "No one ever . . . I never . . . I feel ashamed. No one ever made me feel ashamed." He looked at Hip with amazement. "I can find out most any information, but I never . . . how did you ever find out all that?"



Janie was in the little anteroom with the twins. She said, "You didn't kill him."

"No, he'll be all right now," Hip said. "He was ashamed. I'll clear out." He breathed once, deeply. "Lots to do. Track down

With the knife at the monster's throat, with this great house which could be his, with a girl waiting, Hip Barrows prepared his ethical act. He removed the blindfold, tossed the knife aside. He bent close. "Go ahead," he said softly. The irises were about to spin. . . .



"Fell into it," said Hip. "An ethic isn't a fact you can look up. It's a way of thinking." Gerry spoke into his hands. "What I've done . . . the things I could have. . ."

"The things you can do. You've paid quite a price for the things you've done. Does a superman have super loneliness, Gerry? I'd better go. Janie thinks maybe I killed you."

"Maybe you did."



my pension checks. Get a job." Janie said, "Hip, don't go away." "I can't stay, Janie. You're a part of something. I wouldn't want to be a part of someone who was . . . part of something."



Janie said, "The most human thing about anyone is a thing he learns and . . . and earns. It's a thing he can't have when he's very young; if he gets it at all, it's after a long search and a deep conviction. After that it's truly part of him as long as he lives."

"I—you mean I'm . . . I could be part of the . . . no,

Janie . . . what part?" She smiled. "The prissy person who can't forget the rules. The person with the insight called ethics who can change it to the habit called morals." He snorted. "The still small voice! I'll be damned!" She touched him. "I don't think so." He looked at the door to the glass room.

It was quiet in the glass room. For a long time the only sound was Gerry's difficult breathing. Suddenly even this stopped, as something—*spoke*. It came again. *Welcome*. The voice was silent. *It's new. Welcome!* Still another: *Well, well, well! We thought you'd never make it.* Gerry's eyes widened. Through his mind came a hush of music. There was warmth and laughter and wisdom, communion—crosscurrents of humor, pleasure, reciprocal thought, mutual achievement. *Welcome*. They were young, all of them, though not as young as Gerry. Their youth was in the resilience of their thinking. Although

some gave memories old in human terms, each entity had lived briefly in terms of years. Here was one who had whistled a phrase to Papa Haydn, and here one who had introduced William Morris to the Rossettis. Almost as if it were his own memory, Gerry saw Fermi being shown the streak of fission on a sensitive plate, a drowsy Ford with his mind suddenly lit by the picture of a line of men facing a line of machines. To form a question was to have an answer. Who are you? *Homo gestalt!* I'm part of belonging.



Is it the ethic? Is that what completed me? *Ethic is too simple a term, yes. As your parts know they are parts of you, so must you know that we are parts of humanity.* Gerry understood then that the things that shamed him were things that humans might do to humans, but that humanity could not do. He said, "I was punished." Are you... we... responsible for all humanity's accomplishments? *No! We share. We are humanity!* Humanity's trying to kill itself. (A wave of amusement and confidence.) *Today, this week, it might seem that way, but in terms of the history of a race, a war is a ripple on the broad face of the Amazon River.* Their memories flooded in to Gerry, until at

last he knew why the ethos he had learned was too small a concept. For here at last was power that could not corrupt, for such an insight could not be used for its own sake, or against itself. Here was humanity, troubled and dynamic, excited by its own destiny. He saw himself as an atom, his *gestalt* as a molecule, these others as a cell among cells. He felt a rising, and recognized it for what it has always been for mankind—self-respect. He stretched out his arms, and the tears streamed from his eyes. "Thank you," he answered them, and humbly, he joined their company.

