



WHEREVER YOU

Even today machinery can be repaired with hairpins and kept running with a kick—and harder kicks will mean more power!

MATT refused to believe it. Vacant incredulity paralyzed him for a moment as he stared after the fleeing, bounding tire. Then, with a sudden release, he sprinted after it. "Stop!" he yelled futilely. "Stop, damn it!"

With what seemed like sadistic glee, the tire bounced high in the air and landed going faster than ever. Matt pounded down the hot dusty road for a hundred yards before he pulled up even with it. He knocked it over on its

side. The tire lay there, spinning and frustrate, like a turtle on its back. Matt glared at it suspiciously. Sweat trickled down his neck.

A tinkling of little silver bells. Laughter? Matt looked up quickly, angrily. The woods were thin along the top of this Ozark ridge. Descending to the lake, sparkling cool and blue far below, they grew thicker, but the only one near was the young girl shuffling through the dust several hundred yards beyond the crippled car. And her head was bent down to



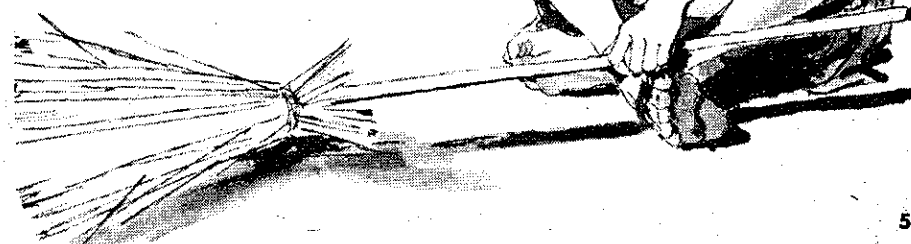
MAY BE

By
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Illustrated by SIBLEY

watch her way.

Matt shrugged and wiped the sweat from his forehead with his shirt sleeve. A late June afternoon in southern Missouri was too hot for this kind of work, for any kind of work. Matt wondered if it had been a mistake.



GALAXY SCIENCE FICTION

IN shimmering heat waves and a slowly settling haze of red dust, he righted the tire and began to roll it back toward the green Ford with one bare metal wheel drum pointing upward at a slight angle. The tire rolled easily, as if it repented its brief dash for freedom, but it was a dirty job and Matt's hands and clothes were soiled red when he reached the car.

With one hand clutching the tire, Matt studied the road for a moment. He could have sworn that he had stopped on one of the few level stretches in these hills, but the tire had straightened up from the side of the car and started rolling as if the car were parked on a steep incline.

Matt reflected bitterly on the luck that had turned a slow leak into a flat only twenty-five miles from the cabin. It couldn't have happened on the highway, ten miles back, where he'd have been able to pull into a service station. No, it had to wait until he couldn't get out of this rutted cow track. The tire's escapade had been only the most recent of a series of annoyances and irritations to which bruised shins and scraped knuckles were painful affidavits.

He sighed. After all, he had wanted isolation. Guy's offer of a hunting cabin in which to finish his thesis had seemed like a god-

send at the time, but now Matt wasn't so certain. If this was a fair sample, Matt was beginning to see how much of his time would be wasted just on the problems of existence.

Cautiously, Matt rolled the tire to the rear of the car, laid it carefully on its side, and completed pulling the spare from the trunk. Warily, he maneuvered the spare to the left rear wheel, knelt, lifted it, fitted it over the bolts, and stepped back. He sighed again, but this time with relief.

Kling-ng! Klang! Rattle!

Matt hastily looked down. His foot was at least two inches from the hub cap, but it was rocking now, empty. Matt saw the last nut roll under the car.

Matt's swearing was vigorous, systematic, and exhaustive. It concerned itself chiefly with the perversity of inanimate objects.

There was something about machines and the things they made which was basically alien to the human spirit. They might disguise themselves for a time as willing slaves, but eventually, inevitably, they turned against their masters. At the psychological moment, they rebelled.

Or perhaps it was the difference in people. For some people, things always went wrong—their cakes fell; their lumber split; their golf balls sliced into the rough. Others established a mysterious

sympathy with their tools.

Luck? Skill? Coordination? Experience?

It was, he felt, something more conscious and malignant.

MATT remembered a near-disastrous brush with chemistry; he had barely passed qualitative analysis. For him the tests had been worse than useless. Faithfully he had gone through every step of the endless ritual: precipitate, filter, dissolve, precipitate . . . And then he would take his painfully secured, neatly written results to—what was his name?—Wadsworth, and the little chemistry professor would study his analysis and look up, frowning.

"Didn't you find any whatyou-maycallit oxide?" he would ask.

"Whatyoumaycallit oxide?" Startled. "Oh, there wasn't any whatyoumaycallit oxide."

And Wadsworth would make a simple test and, sure enough, there would be the whatyoumaycallit oxide.

There was the inexplicably misshapen gear Matt had made on the milling machine, the drafting pen that would not draw a smooth line no matter how much he sanded the point . . .

It had convinced Matt that his hands were too clumsy to belong to an engineer. He had transferred his ambitions to a field where

tools were less tangible. Now he wondered.

Kobolds? Accident prone?

Some time he would have to write it up. It would make a good paper for the *Journal of*—

Laughter! This time there was no possible doubt. It came from right behind him.

Matt whirled. The girl stood there, hugging her ribs to keep the laughter in. She was a young little thing, not much over five feet tall, in a shapeless, faded, blue dress. Her feet were small and bare and dirty. Her hair, in long braids, was mouse-colored. Her pale face was saved from plainness only by her large, blue eyes.

Matt flushed. "What the devil are you laughing at?"

"You!" she got out between chuckles. "Whyn't you get a horse?"

"Did that remark just arrive here?"

He swallowed his irritation, turned, and got down on his hands and knees to peer under the car. One by one he gathered up the nuts, but the last one, inevitably, was out of reach. Sweating, he crawled all the way under.

WHEN he came out, the girl was still there. "What are you waiting for?" he asked bitingly.

"Nothin'." But she stood with her feet planted firmly in the red dust.

Kibitzers annoyed Matt, but he couldn't think of anything to do about it. He twirled the nuts onto the bolts and tightened them up, his neck itching. It might have been the effect of sweat and dust, but he was not going to give the girl the satisfaction of seeing him rub it. That annoyed him even more. He tapped the hub cap into place and stood up.

"Why don't you go home?" he asked sourly.

"Cain't," she said.

He went to the rear of the car and released the jack. "Why not?"

"I run away." Her voice was quietly tragic.

Matt turned to look at her. Her blue eyes were large and moist. As he watched, a single tear gathered and traced a muddy path down her cheek.

Matt hardened his heart. "Tough." He picked up the flat and stuffed it into the trunk and slammed the lid. The sun was getting lower, and on this forgotten lane to nowhere it might take him the better part of an hour to drive the twenty-five miles.

He slid into the driver's seat and punched the starter button. After one last look at the forlorn little figure in the middle of the road, he shook his head savagely

and let in the clutch.

"Mister! Hey, mister!"

He slammed on the brakes and stuck his head out the window. "Now what do you want?"

"Nothin'," she said mournfully. "Only you forgot your jack."

Matt jammed the gear shift into reverse and backed up rapidly. Silently, he got out, picked up the jack, opened the trunk, tossed in the jack, slammed the lid. But as he brushed past her again, he hesitated. "Where are you going?"

"No place," she said.

"What do you mean 'no place'? Don't you have any relatives?" She shook her head. "Friends?" he asked hopefully. She shook her head again. "All right, then, go on home!"

He slid into the car and banged the door. She was not his concern. The car jerked into motion. No doubt she would go home when she got hungry enough. He shifted into second, grinding the gears. Even if she didn't, someone would take her in. After all, he was no welfare agency.

He grudgingly slowed, then angrily backed up and skidded to a stop beside the girl.

"Get in," he said.

TRYING to keep the car out of the ruts was trouble enough, but the girl jumped up and down on the seat beside him, squealing happily.

"Careful of those notes," he said, indicating the bulging manila folders on the seat between them. "There's over a year's work in those."

Her eyes were wide as she watched him place the folders in the back seat on top of the portable typewriter that rested between the twenty-pound sack of flour and the case of eggs.

"A year's work?" she echoed wonderingly.

"Notes. For the thesis I'm going to write."

"You write stories?"

"A research paper I have to do to get my degree." He glanced at her blank expression and then looked back at the road. "It's called," he said with a nasty superior smile, "'The Psychodynamics of Witchcraft, with Special Reference to the Salem Trials of 1692.'"

"Oh," she said wisely.

"Witches." As if she knew all about witches.

Matt felt unreasonably annoyed. "All right, where do you live?"

She stopped bouncing and got very quiet. "I cain't go home."

"Why not?" he demanded. "And don't tell me 'I run away,'" he imitated nasally.

"Paw'd beat me again. He'd purty nigh skin me alive, I guess."

"You mean he *hits* you?"

"He don't use his fists—not

often. He uses his belt mostly. Look." She pulled up the hem of her dress and the leg of a pair of baggy drawers that appeared to be made from some kind of sack-
ing.

Matt looked quickly and glanced away. Across the back of one thigh was an ugly dark bruise. But the leg seemed unusually well rounded for a girl so small and young. Matt frowned thoughtfully. Did girls in the hills *mature* that early?

He cleared his throat. "Why does he do that?"

"He's just mean."

"He must have some reason."

"Well," she said thoughtfully, "he beats me when he's drunk 'cause he's drunk, and he beats me when he's sober 'cause he ain't drunk. That covers it mostly."

"But what does he say?"

She glanced at him shyly. "Oh, I cain't repeat it."

"I mean what does he want you to do?"

"Oh, that!" She brooded over it. "He thinks I ought to get married. He wants me to catch some strong young feller who'll do the work when he moves in with us. A gal don't bring in no money, he says, leastwise not a good one. That kind only eats and wants things."

"Married?" Matt said. "But you're much too young to get married."

SHE glanced at him out of the corner of her eye. "I'm sixteen," she said. "Most girls my age got a couple of young 'uns. One, anyways."

Matt looked at her sharply. Sixteen? It seemed impossible. The dress was shapeless enough to hide almost anything—but sixteen! Then he remembered the thigh.

She frowned. "Get married, get married! You'd think I didn't want to get married. 'Tain't my fault no feller wants me."

"I can't understand that," Matt said sarcastically.

She smiled at him. "You're nice."

She looked almost pretty when she smiled. For a hill girl.

"What seems to be the trouble?" Matt asked hurriedly.

"Partly Paw," she said. "No one'd want to have him around. But mostly I guess I'm just unlucky." She sighed. "One feller I went with purty near a year. He busted his leg. Another nigh drowned when he fell in the lake. Don't seem right they should blame me, even if we did have words."

"Blame you?"

She nodded vigorously. "Them as don't hate me say it's courtin' disaster 'stead of a gal. The others weren't so nice. Fellers stopped comin'. One of 'em said he'd rather marry up with a cata-

mount. You married, Mister—Mister—?"

"Matthew Wright. No, I'm not married."

She nodded thoughtfully. "Wright. Abigail Wright. That's purty."

"Abigail Wright?"

"Did I say that? Now, ain't that funny? My name's Jenkins."

Matt gulped. "You're going home," he said with unshakable conviction. "You can tell me how to get there or you can climb out of the car right now."

"But Paw—"

"Where the devil did you think I was taking you?"

"Wherever you're going," she said, wide-eyed.

"For God's sake, you can't go with me! It wouldn't be decent."

"Why not?" she asked innocently.

In silence, Matt began to apply the brakes.

"All right," she sighed. She wore an expression the early Christians must have worn before they were marched into the arena. "Turn right at the next cross road."

CHICKENS scattered in front of the wheels, fluttering and squawking; pigs squealed in a pen beside the house. Matt stopped in front of the shanty, appalled. If the two rooms and sagging porch had ever known paint, they

had enjoyed only a nodding acquaintance, and that a generation before.

A large brooding figure sat on the porch, rocking slowly in a rickety chair. He was dark, with a full black beard and a tall head of hair.

"That's Paw," Abigail whispered in fright.

Matt waited uneasily, but the broad figure of her father kept on rocking as if strangers brought back his daughter every day. *Maybe they do*, Matt thought with irritation.

"Well," he said nervously, "here you are."

"I cain't get out," Abigail said. "Not till I find out if Paw's goin' to whale me. Go talk to him. See if he's mad at me."

"Not me," Matt stated with certainty, glancing again at the big, black figure rocking slowly, ominously silent. "I've done my duty in bringing you home. Good-by. I won't say it's been a pleasure knowing you."

"You're nice and mighty handsome. I'd hate to tell Paw you'd taken advantage of me. He's a terror when he's riled."

For one horrified moment, Matt stared at Abigail. Then, as she opened her mouth, he opened the door and stepped out. Slowly he walked up to the porch and put one foot on its uneven edge.

"Uh," he said. "I met your

daughter on the road."

Jenkins kept on rocking.

"She'd run away," Matt went on.

Jenkins was silent. Matt studied the portion of Jenkins's face that wasn't covered with hair. There wasn't much of it, but what there was Matt didn't like.

"I brought her back," Matt finished desperately.

Jenkins rocked and said nothing. Matt spun around and walked quickly back to the car. He went around to the window where Abigail sat. He reached through the window, opened the glove compartment, and drew out a full pint bottle.

"Remind me," he said, "never to see you again." He marched back to the porch. "Care for a little drink?"

ONE large hand reached out, smothered the pint, and brought it close to faded blue overalls. The cap was twisted off by the other hand. The bottle was tilted toward the unpainted porch ceiling as soon as the neck disappeared into the matted whiskers. The bottle gurgled. When it was lowered, it was only half full.

"Weak," the beard said. But the hand that held the bottle held it tight.

"I brought your daughter back," Matt said, starting again.

"Why?" he asked.

"She had no place to go. I mean—after all, this is her home."

"She run away," the beard said. Matt found the experience extremely unnerving.

"Look, Mr. Jenkins, I realize that teen-age daughters can be a nuisance, and after meeting your daughter I think I can understand how you feel. Still in all, she is your daughter."

"Got my doubts."

Matt gulped and tried once more. "A happy family demands a lot of compromise, give-and-take on both sides. Your daughter may have given you good cause to lose your temper, but beating a child is never sound psychology. Now if you—"

"Beat her?" Jenkins rose from his chair. It was an awesome thing, like Neptune rising out of the sea in all his majesty, gigantic, bearded, and powerful. Even subtracting the height of the porch, Jenkins loomed several inches over Matt's near six feet. "Never laid a hand to her. Dassn't."

My God, thought Matt, the man is trembling!

"Come in here," said Jenkins. He waved the pint toward the open door, a dark rectangle.

Uneasily, Matt walked into the room. Under his feet, things gritted and cracked.

Jenkins lit a kerosene lamp and turned it up. The room was a

shambles. Broken dishes littered the floor. Wooden chairs were smashed and splintered. In the center of the room, a table on its back waved three rough legs helplessly in the air; the fourth leg sagged pitifully from its socket.

"She did this?" Matt asked weakly.

"This ain't nothin'." Jenkins' voice quavered; it was a terrible sound to come from that massive frame. "You should see the other room."

"But how? I mean *why*?"

"I ain't a-sayin' Ab done it," Jenkins said, shaking his head. His beard wobbled near Matt's nose. "But when she gets onhappy, things happen. And she was powerful onhappy when that Duncan boy tol' her he wan't comin' back. Them chairs come up from the floor and slam down. That table went dancin' round the room till it fell to pieces. Then dishes come a-flyin' through the air. Look!"

His voice was full of self-pity as he turned his head around and parted his long, matted hair. On the back of his head was a large, red swelling. "I hate to think what happened to that Duncan boy."

HE shook his head sorrowfully. "Now, mister, I guess I got ever' right to lay my hand to that gal. Ain't I?" he demanded fierce-

ly, but his voice broke.

Matt stared at him blankly.

"But whop her? Me? I sooner stick my hand in a nest of rattlers."

"You mean to say that those things happened all by themselves?"

"That's what I said. I guess it kinder sticks in your craw. Wouldn't have believe it myself, even seein' it and feelin' it—" he rubbed the back of his head—"if it ain't happen afore. Funny things happen around Ab, ever since she started fillin' out, five-six year ago."

"But she's only sixteen," Matt objected.

"Sixteen?" Jenkins glanced warily around the room and out the door toward the car. He lowered his voice to a harsh whisper. "Don't let on I tol' you, but Ab allus was a fibber. She's past eighteen!"

From a shelf, a single unbroken dish crashed to the floor at Jenkins' feet. He jumped and began to shake.

"See?" he whispered plaintively.

"It fell," Matt said.

"She's witched." Jenkins took a feverish swallow from the bottle. "Maybe I ain't been a good Paw to her. Ever since her Maw died, she run wild and got all kinda queer notions. 'Taint allus been bad. For years I ain't had to go

fer water. That barrel by the porch is allus filled. But ever since she got to the courtin' age and started bein' disappointed in fellers round about, she been mighty hard to live with. No one'll come nigh the place. And things keep a-movin' and a-jumpin' around till a man cain't trust his own chair to set still under him. It gets you, son. A man kin only stand so much!"

To Matt's dismay, Jenkins' eyes began to fill with large tears. "Got no friend no more to offer me a drink now and again, sociable-like, or help me with the chores, times I got the misery in my back. I ain't a well man, son. Times it's more'n I kin do to get outa bed in the mornin'.

"Look, son," Jenkins said, turning to Matt pleadingly. "Yore a city feller. Yore right nice-lookin' with manners and edyagation. I reckon Ab likes you. Whyn't you take her with you?" Matt started retreating toward the door. "She's right purty when she fixes up and she kin cook right smart. You'd think a skillet was part of her hand, the way she kin handle one, and you don't even have to marry up with her."

MATT backed away, white-faced and incredulous. "You must be mad. You can't give a girl away like that." He turned to make a dash for the door.

A heavy hand fell on Matt's shoulder and spun him around. "Son," Jenkins said, his voice heavy with menace, "any man that's alone with a gal more'n twenty minutes, it's thought proper they should get married up quick. Since yore a stranger, I ain't holdin' you to it. But when Ab left me, she stopped bein' my daughter. Nobody asked you to bring her back. That gal," he said woefully, "eats more'n I do."

Matt reached into his hip pocket. He pulled out his billfold and extracted a five dollar bill.

"Here," he said, extending it toward Jenkins, "maybe this will make life a little more pleasant."

Jenkins looked at the money wistfully, started to reach for it, and jerked his hand away.

"I cain't do it," he moaned. "It ain't worth it. You brought her back. You kin take her away."

Matt glanced out the doorway toward the car and shuddered. He added another five to the one in his hand.

Jenkins sweated. His hand crept out. Finally, desperately, he crumpled the bills into his palm. "All right," he said hoarsely.

"Them's ten mighty powerful reasons."

Matt ran to the car as if he had escaped from bedlam. He opened the door and slipped in. "Get out," he said sharply. "You're home."

"But Paw—"

"From now on, he'll be a dotting father." Matt reached across and opened the door for her. "Good-by."

Slowly Abigail got out. She rounded the car and walked up to the porch, dragging her feet. But when she reached the porch, she straightened up. Jenkins, who was standing in the doorway, shrank back from his five-foot-tall daughter as she approached.

"Dirty, nasty old man," Abigail hissed.

Jenkins flinched. After she had passed, he raised the bottle hastily to his beard. His hand must have slipped. By some unaccountable mischance, the bottle kept rising in the air, mouth downward. The bourbon gushed over his head.

Pathetically, looking more like Neptune than ever, Jenkins peered toward the car and shook his head.

Feverishly, Matt turned the car around and jumped the car out of the yard. It had undoubtedly been an optical illusion. A bottle does not hang in the air without support.

GUY'S cabin should not have been so difficult to find. Although the night was dark, the directions were explicit. But for two hours Matt bounced back and forth along the dirt roads of

the hills. He got tired and hungry.

For the fourth time, he passed the cabin which fitted the directions in every way but one—it was occupied. Lights streamed from the windows into the night. Matt turned into the steep driveway. He could, at least, ask directions.

As he walked toward the door, the odor of frying ham drifted from the house to tantalize him. Matt knocked, his mouth watering. Perhaps he could even get an invitation to supper.

The door swung open. "Come on in. What kept you?"

Matt blinked. "Oh, no!" he cried. For a frantic moment, it was like the old vaudeville routine of the drunk in the hotel who keeps staggering back to knock on the same door. Each time he is more indignantly ejected until finally he complains, "My God, are you in *all* the rooms?"

"What are you doing here?" Matt asked faintly. "How did you—How *could* you—?"

Abigail pulled him into the cabin. It looked bright and cheerful and clean. The floor was newly swept; a broom leaned in the corner. The two lower bunks on opposite walls were neatly made up. Two places were laid at the table. Food was cooking on the wood stove.

"Paw changed his mind," she said.

"But he couldn't! I gave him—"

"Oh, that." She reached into a pocket of her dress. "Here."

She handed him the two crumpled five dollar bills and a handful of silver and copper that Matt dazedly added up to one dollar and thirty-seven cents.

"Paw said he'd have sent more, but it was all he had. So he threw in some vittles."

He sat down in a chair heavily. "But you couldn't—I didn't know where the place was myself, exactly. I didn't tell you—"

"I always been good at finding things," she said. "Places, things that are lost. Like a cat, I guess."

"But—but—" Matt spluttered, "how did you get here?"

"I rode," she said. Instinctively, Matt's eyes switched to the broom in the corner. "Paw loaned me the mule. I let her go. She'll get home all right."

"But you can't stay here. It's impossible!"

"Now, Mr. Wright," Abigail said soothingly. "My Maw used to say a man should never make a decision on a empty stomach. You just sit there and relax. Supper's all ready. You must be nigh starved."

"There's no decision to be made!" Matt said, but he watched while she put things on the table—thick slices of fried ham with cream gravy, corn on the cob,

fluffy biscuits, butter, homemade jelly, strong black coffee that was steaming and fragrant. Abigail's cheeks were flushed from the stove, and her face was peaceful. She looked almost pretty.

"I can't eat a bite," Matt told her.

"Nonsense." Abigail filled his plate.

GLUMLY, Matt sliced off a bite of ham and put it in his mouth. It was so tender, it almost melted. Before long he was eating as fast as he could shovel the food into his mouth. The food was delicious; everything was cooked just as he liked it. He had never been able to tell anyone how to fix it that way. But that was the way it was.

He pushed himself back from the table, teetering against the wall on the back legs of his chair, lit a cigarette and watched Abigail pour him a third cup of coffee. He was swept by a wave of contentment.

"If I'd had time I'd have made a peach pie. I make real good peach pie," Abigail said.

Matt nodded lazily. There would be compensations in having someone around to—

"No!" he said violently, thumping down on the two front legs of his chair. "It won't work. You can't stay here. What would people say?"

"Who'd care? — Paw don't. Anyways, I could say we was married."

"No!" Matt said hoarsely. "Please don't do that!"

"Please, Mr. Wright," she pleaded, "let me cook and clean for you. I wouldn't be no trouble, Mr. Wright, honest I wouldn't."

"Look, Abbie!" He took her hand. It was soft and feminine. She stood beside his chair obediently, her eyes cast down. "You're a nice girl, and I like you. You can cook better than anyone I've ever known, and you'll make some man a good wife. But I think too much of you to let you ruin your name by staying here along with me. You'll have to go back to your father."

The life seemed to flow out of her. "All right," she said, so low that it was difficult to hear her.

Dazed at his sudden success, Matt got up and walked toward the door. She followed him, and Matt could almost feel the tears welling in her eyes.

Matt opened the car door for her and helped her in. He circled the front of the car and slid into the driver's seat. Abbie huddled against the far door, small and forlorn.

Since Matt's speech, she hadn't said a word. Suddenly, Matt felt very sorry for her and ashamed, as if he had hit a child. *The poor*

little thing! he thought. Then he caught himself. He shook his head. For a poor little thing, she had certainly managed to browbeat her father.

He thumbed the starter button, and the motor growled, but it didn't catch. Matt let it whine to a stop and pressed again. The motor moaned futilely. Matt checked the ignition. It was on. Again and again he pushed in the button. The moans got weaker. He tried to roll the car—but the brakes locked.

HE glanced suspiciously at Abigail. *But that's absurd,* he thought. Since he had met Abbie, his thoughts had taken a definite paranoid tinge. It was foolish to blame everything that went wrong on the girl.

But the car wouldn't move. He gave up.

"All right," he sighed. "I can't put you out this far from home. You can sleep here tonight."

Silently, she followed him into the cabin. She helped him tack blankets to the upper bunks on each side of the cabin. They made an effective curtain around the lower beds. As they worked, Matt discovered that he was unusually sensitive to her nearness. There was a sweet, womanly smell to her, and when she brushed against him the spot that was touched came to life—tingling awareness.

When they finished, Abbie reached down and grasped the hem of her dress to pull it off over her head.

"No, no," Matt said hurriedly. "Don't you have any modesty? Why do you think we tacked up those blankets?" He gestured to the bunk on the left hand wall. "Dress and undress in there."

She let the hem of her dress fall, nodded meekly, and climbed into the bunk.

Matt stared after her for a moment and released his breath. He turned and climbed into his own bunk, undressed, and slipped under the blanket. Then he remembered that he had forgotten to turn out the lamps.

He rose on one elbow and heard a soft padding on the floor. The lamps went out, one by one, and the padding faded to the other side of the room. Rustling sounds. Darkness and silence.

"Good night, Mr. Wright." It was a little child's voice in the night.

"Good night, Abbie," he said softly. And then after a moment, firmly, "But don't forget—back you go first thing in the morning."

Before the silence wove a pattern of sleep, Matt heard a little sound from the other bunk. He couldn't quite identify it.

A sob? A snore? Or a muffled titter?

THE odor of frying bacon and boiling coffee crept into Matt's nightmare of a terrifying pursuit by an implacable and invisible enemy. Matt opened his eyes. The bunk was bright with diffused sunlight; the dream faded. Matt sniffed hungrily and pushed aside the blanket to look out.

All the supplies from the car had been unloaded and neatly stowed away. On a little corner table by the window were his typewriter and precious manila folders, and a stack of blank white paper.

Matt dressed hurriedly in his cramped quarters. When he emerged from his cocoon, Abbie was humming happily as she set breakfast on the table. She wore a different dress this morning—a brown calico that did horrible things for her hair and coloring, but fitted better than the blue gingham. The dress revealed a slim but unsuspectedly mature figure.

How would she look, he wondered briefly, in good clothes and nylons, shoes, and make-up?

The thought crumbled before a fresh onslaught to his senses of the odor and sight of breakfast. The eggs were cooked just right, sunny side up, the white firm but not hard. It was strange how Abbie anticipated his preferences. At first he thought that she had overestimated his appetite, but

he stowed away three eggs while Abbie ate two, heartily.

He pushed back his plate with a sigh. "Well," he began. She got very quiet and stared at the floor. His heart melted. He felt too contented; a few hours more wouldn't make any difference. Tonight would be time enough for her to go back. "Well," he repeated, "I guess I'd better get to work."

Abbie sprang to clear the table. Matt walked to the corner where the typewriter was waiting. He sat down in the chair and rolled in a sheet of paper. The table was well arranged for light; it was the right height. Everything considered, it was just about perfect for working.

He stared at the blank sheet of paper. He leafed through his notes. He resisted an impulse to get up and walk around. He rested his fingers lightly on the keys and after a moment lifted them, crossed one leg over the other knee, put his right elbow on the raised leg, and began to finger his chin.

There was only one thing wrong: he didn't feel like working.

Finally he typed in the middle of the page:

THE PSYCHODYNAMICS OF
WITCHCRAFT

*With Special Reference to the
Salem Trials of 1692*

He double-spaced and stopped.

IT wasn't that Abbie was noisy; she was too quiet, with a kind of purposeful restraint that is worse than chaos. With one ear Matt listened to the sounds of dishwashing and stacking. And then silence.

Matt stood it as long as he could and turned. Abbie was seated at the table. She was sewing up a hole in the pocket of his other pair of pants. He could almost see the aura of bliss that surrounded her.

Like a child, Matt thought, *playing at domesticity*. But there was something mature about it, too; a mature and basic fulfillment. *If we could all be happy with so little. It's a pity, with so small an ambition, to have the real thing so elusive.*

As if she felt him looking at her, Abbie glanced around and beamed. Matt turned back to his typewriter. It still wouldn't come.

Witchcraft, he began hesitantly, *is the attempt of the primitive mind to bring order out of chaos. It is significant, therefore, that belief in witchcraft fades as an understanding of the natural workings of the physical universe grows more prevalent.*

He let his hands drop. It was all wrong, like an image seen in a distorted mirror. He swung around: "Who wrecked your father's house?"

"Libby," she said.

"Libby?" Matt echoed, "Who's Libby?"

"The other me," Abbie said calmly. "Mostly I keep her bottled up inside, but when I feel sad and unhappy I can't keep her in. Then she gets loose and just goes wild. I can't control her."

Good God! Matt thought, *Schizophrenia!* "Where did you get an idea like that?" he asked cautiously.

"When I was born," Abbie said, "I had a twin sister, only she died real quick. Maw said I was stronger and just crowded the life right out of her. When I was bad, Maw used to shake her head and say Libby'd never have been mean or cross or naughty. So when something happened, I started saying Libby done it. It didn't stop a licking, but it made me feel better."

What a thing to tell a child! Matt thought.

"Purty soon I got to believing it, that Libby done the bad things that I got licked for, that Libby was part of me that I had to push deep down so she couldn't get out and get me in trouble. After I"—she blushed—"got older and funny things started happening, Libby come in real handy."

"Can you see her?" Matt ventured.

"Course not," Abbie said reproachfully. "She ain't real."

"Isn't."

"Isn't real, Abbie said. "Things happen when I feel bad. I can't do anything about it. But you got to explain it somehow . . . I use Libby."

Matt sighed. Abbie wasn't so crazy—or stupid either. "You can't control it—ever?"

"Well, maybe a little. Like when I felt kind of mean about that liquor you gave Paw, and I thought how nice it would be if Paw had something wet on the outside for a change."

"How about a tire and a hub cap full of nuts?"

She laughed. Again that tinkling of little silver bells. "You did look funny."

Matt frowned. But slowly his expression cleared and he began to chuckle. "I guess I did."

HE swung back to the typewriter before he realized that he was accepting the events of the last eighteen hours as physical facts and Abbie's explanation as theoretically possible. Did he actually believe that Abbie could—how was he going to express it?—move objects with some mysterious, intangible force? By wishing? Of course he didn't. He stared at the typewriter. Or did he?

He called up a picture of a pint bottle hanging unsupported in mid air, emptying its contents over Jenkins's head. He remem-

bered a dish that jumped from a shelf to shatter on the floor. He thought of a hub cap that dumped its contents into the dirt when his foot was two inches away. And he saw a tire straighten up and begin to roll down a level road.

You can't just dismiss things, he thought. In any comprehensive scheme of the universe, you must include all valid phenomena. If the accepted scheme of things cannot find a place for it, then the scheme must change.

Matt shivered. It was a disturbing thought.

The primitive mind believed that inanimate objects had spirits that must be propitiated. With a little sophistication came mythology and its personification—nymphs and sprites, Poseidon and Aeolus—and folklore, with its kobolds and poltergeists.

Sir James Frazer said something about the relationship between science and magic. Man, he said, associates ideas by similarity and by contiguity in space or time. If the association is legitimate, it is science; if illegitimate, it is magic, science's bastard sister.

But if the associations of magic are legitimate, then those of science must be illegitimate, and the two reverse their roles and the modern world is standing on its head.

Matt felt a little dizzy.

Suppose the primitive mind is wiser than we are. Suppose you can insure good luck by the proper ritual or kill your enemy by sticking a pin in a wax doll. Suppose you can prove it.

You had to have some kind of explanation of unnatural events, the square pegs that do not fit into any of science's round holes. Even Abbie recognized that.

Matt knew what the scientific explanation would be: illusion, delusion, hypnosis, anything which demanded the least possible rearrangement of accepted theory, anything which, in effect, denied the existence of the phenomenon.

BUT how could you really explain it? How could you explain Abbie? Did you believe in the spirits of inanimate objects, directed by Abbie when she was in the proper mood? Did you believe in poltergeists which Abbie ordered about? Did you believe in Libby, the intangible projectable, manipulative external soul?

You had to explain Abbie or your cosmology was worthless.

That man at Duke — Rhine, the parapsychologist — he had a word for it. Telekinesis. That was one attempt to incorporate psychic phenomena into the body of science, or, perhaps, to alter the theoretical universe in order

to fit those phenomena into it.

But it didn't explain anything.

Then Matt thought of electricity. *You don't have to explain something in order to use it. You don't have to understand it in order to control it. It helps, but it isn't essential. Understanding is a psychological necessity, not a physical one.*

Matt stared at the words he had written. The seventeenth century. Why was he wasting his time? Here was something immediate. He had stumbled on something that would set the whole world on its ear, or perhaps stand it on its feet again. It would not molder away, as the thesis would in a university library.

Matt turned around. Abbie was sitting at the table, her mending finished, staring placidly out the open doorway. Matt stood up and walked toward her. She turned her head to look at him, smiling slowly. Matt turned his head, searching the room.

"Kin I get you something?" Abbie asked anxiously.

Matt looked down at her. "Here!" he said. He plucked the needle from the spool of darning thread. He forced it lightly into the rough top of the table so that the needle stood upright. "Now," he said defiantly, "make it move."

Abbie stared at him. "Why?" "I want to see you do it," Matt said firmly. "Isn't that enough?"

"But I don't want to," Abbie objected. "I never wanted to do it. It just happened."

"Try!"

"No, Mr. Wright," Abbie said firmly. "It never brung me nothing but misery. It scared away all my fellers and all Paw's friends. Folks don't like people who can do things like that. I don't ever want it to happen again."

"If you want to stay here," Matt said flatly, "you'll do as I say."

"Please, Mr. Wright," she begged. "Don't make me do it. It'll spoil everything. It's bad enough when you can't help it, but it's worse when you do it a-purpose — something terrible will come of it."

Matt glowered at her. Her pleading eyes dropped. She bit her lip. She stared at the needle. Her smooth, young forehead tightened.

Nothing happened. The needle remained upright.

Abbie took a deep breath. "I cain't, Mr. Wright," she wailed. "I just cain't do it."

"Why not?" Matt demanded fiercely. "Why can't you do it?"

"I don't know," Abbie said. Automatically her hands began to smooth the pants laid across her lap. She looked down and blushed. "I guess it's 'cause I'm happy."

AFTER a morning of experimentation, Matt's only half-conscious need was still unsatisfied. He had offered Abbie an innumerable assortment of objects: a spool of thread, a fountain pen cap, a dime, a typewriter eraser, a three-by-five note card, a piece of folded paper, a bottle . . . The last Matt considered a stroke of genius. But tip it as he would, the bottle, like all the rest of the objects, remained stolidly unaffected.

He even got the spare tire out of the trunk and leaned it against the side of the car. Fifteen minutes later, it was still leaning there.

Finally, frowning darkly, Matt took a cup from the shelf and put it down on the table. "Here," he said. "You're so good at smashing dishes, smash this."

Abbie stared at the cup hopelessly. Her face seemed old and haggard. After a moment, her body seemed to collapse all at once. "I cain't," she moaned. "I cain't."

"Can't!" Matt shouted. "Can't! Are you so stupid you can't say that? Not 'cain't' — can't!"

Her large blue eyes lifted to Matt's in mute appeal. They began to fill with tears. "I can't," she said. A sob broke from her throat. She put her head down on her arms. Her thin shoulders began to quiver.



Moodily, Matt stared at her back. Was everything that he had seen merely an illusion? Or did this phenomenon only evidence itself under very rigid conditions? Did she have to be unhappy?

It was not without a certain logic. Neurotic children had played a large part in the history of witchcraft. In one of the English trials, children had reportedly fallen into fits and vomited crooked pins. They could not pronounce such holy names as "Lord," "Jesus," or "Christ," but they could readily speak the names "Satan" or "Devil." Between the middle of the fifteenth century and the middle of the sixteenth, 100,000 persons had been put to death for witchcraft.

How many had come to the rack, the stake, or the drowning pool, through the accusations of children? A child saw a hag at her door. The next moment she saw a hare run by and the woman had disappeared. On no more convincing evidence than that, the woman was accused of turning herself into a hare by witchcraft.

Why had the children done it? Suggestibility? A desire for attention?

Whatever the reason, it was tainted with abnormality.

In the field of psychic phenomena as well, the investigations of the Society of Psychical Research were full of instances in which neurotic children or neurotic young women played a distinct if inexplicable role.

Did Abbie have to be unhappy? Matt's lips twisted. *If it was true, it was hard on Abbie.*

"Get your things together," Matt said harshly. "You're going home to your father."

Abbie stiffened and looked up, her face tear-streaked but her eyes blazing. "I ain't."

"You are not," Matt corrected sharply.

"I are not," Abbie said fiercely. "I are not. I are not."

Suddenly the cup was sailing toward Matt's head. Instinctively, he put out his hand. The cup hit it and stuck. Matt looked at it

dazedly and back at Abbie. Her hands were still in her lap.

"YOU did it!" Matt shouted. "It's true."

Abbie looked pleased. "Do I have to go back to Paw?"

Matt thought a moment. "No," he said. "Not if you'll help me."

Abbie's lips tightened. "Ain't — isn't once enough, Mr. Wright? You know I can do it. Won't you leave it alone now? It's unlucky. Something awful will happen. I got a feeling." She looked up at his implacable face. "But I'll do it, if you want."

"It's important," Matt said gently. "Now. What did you feel just before the cup moved toward me?"

"Mad."

"No, no. I mean what did you feel physically or mentally not emotionally."

Abbie's eyebrows were thick. When she knit them, they made a straight line across the top of her nose. "Gosh, Mr. Wright, I cain't —" She looked at him quickly. "I can't find the words to tell about it. It's like I wanted to pick up the nearest thing and throw it at you, and then it was like I had thrown it. Kind of a push from all of me, instead of just my hand."

Matt frowned while he put the cup back on the table. "Try to feel exactly like that again."

Obediently, Abbie concentrated. Her face worked. Finally she sagged back in her chair. "I cai — I can't. I just don't feel like it."

"You're going back to your father!" Matt snapped.

The cup rocked.

"There!" Matt said quickly.

"Try it again before you forget!"

The cup spun around.

"Again!"

The cup rose an inch from the table and settled down.

Abbie sighed. "It was just a trick, wasn't it, Mr. Wright? You aren't really going to send me back?"

"No, but maybe you'll wish I had before we're through. You'll have to work and practice until you have full conscious control of whatever it is."

"All right," Abbie said submissively. "But it's terrible tiring work when you don't feel like it."

"Terribly," Matt corrected.

"Terribly," Abbie repeated.

"Now," Matt said. "Try it again."

ABBIE practiced until noon. Her maximum effort was to raise the cup a foot from the table, but that she could do very well.

"Where does the energy come from?" Matt asked.

"I don't know," Abbie sighed, "but I'm powerful hungry."

"Very," Matt said.

"Very hungry," Abbie repeated. She got up and walked to the cupboard. "How many ham sandwiches do you want — two?"

Matt nodded absently. When the sandwiches came, he ate in thoughtful silence.

It was true, then. Abbie could do it, but she had to be unhappy to have full power and control.

"Try it on the mustard," he said.

"I'm so full," Abbie explained contentedly. She had eaten three sandwiches.

Matt stared at the yellow jar, unseeing. It was quite a problem. There was no sure way of determining just what Abbie's powers were, without getting some equipment. He had to find out just what it was she did, and what effect it had on her, before he could expect to fully evaluate any data.

But that wasn't the hardest part of it. He should be able to pick up the things he needed in Springfield. It was what he was going to have to do to Abbie that troubled him.

All he had been able to find out about Abbie's phenomena was that they seemed to occur with the greatest frequency and strength when the girl was unhappy.

Matt stared out through the cabin window.

Gradually, he was forming a

plan to make Abbie unhappier than she had ever been.

ALL afternoon Matt was very kind to Abbie. He helped her dry the dishes, although she protested vigorously. He talked to her about his life and about his studies at the University of Kansas. He told her about the thesis and how he had to write it to get his master's degree in psychology and what he wanted to do when he was graduated.

"Psychology," he said, "is only an infant science. It isn't really a science at all but a metaphysics. It's a lot of theorizing from insufficient data. The only way you can get data is by experimentation, and you can't experiment because psychology is people, living people. Science is a ruthless business of observation and setting up theories and then knocking them down in laboratories. Physicists can destroy everything from atoms to whole islands; biologists can destroy animals; anatomists can dissect cadavers. But psychologists have no true laboratories; they can't be ruthless because public opinion won't stand for it, and cadavers aren't much good. Psychology will never be a true science until it has its laboratories where it can be just as ruthless as the physical sciences. It has to come."

Matt stopped. Abbie was a

good listener; he had forgotten he was talking to a hill girl.

"Tell me more about K.U.," she sighed.

He tried to answer her questions about what the coeds wore when they went to classes and when they had dates and when they went to dances. Her eyes grew large and round.

"Guess it would be romantic," Abbie sighed. "How far do they let a fellow go if they ain't — aren't serious?"

Matt thought Abbie's attempt to improve her English was touching — almost pathetic. He puzzled about her question for a moment. "I guess it depends on the girl."

Abbie nodded understandingly. "Why do they go to college?"

"To get married," Matt said. "Most of them."

Abbie shook her head. "All those pretty clothes. All those men. They must be awful — very slow not to get married quick. Can't they get married at home without waiting so long?"

Matt frowned perplexedly! Abbie had a talent for asking questions which reached down to basic social relationships. "The men they meet at college will make more money for them."

"Oh," Abbie said. She shrugged. "That's all right, I guess, if that's what you want."

So it went. Matt paid Abbie

little compliments on her appearance, and she blushed and looked pleased. He told her he couldn't understand why she wasn't besieged by suitors and why she hadn't been married long ago. She blushed deeper. He bragged expansively on the supper she cooked and swore that he had never tasted better.

ABBIE couldn't have been happier. She hummed through her tasks. Everything worked well for her. The dishes were done almost as soon as they were started.

Matt walked out on the porch. He sat down on the edge. Abbie settled herself beside him, quietly, not touching him, her hands in her lap.

The cabin was built on the top of a ridge. It was night, but the moon had come up big and yellow, and they could look far out over the valley. Silvery, in a dark green setting of trees, the lake glimmered far below.

"Ain't — isn't it purty," Abbie sighed, folding her hands.

"Pretty," Matt said absently.

"Pretty," Abbie sighed.

They sat in silence. Matt sensed her nearness in a way that was almost physical. It stirred him. There was something intensely feminine about Abbie that was very appealing at times, in spite of her plain face and shapeless

clothes and bare feet and lack of education. Even her single-minded ambition was a striving to fulfill her true, her basic function. In a way it was more vital and understandable than all the confused sublimations of the girls he had known.

Abbie, at least, knew what she wanted and what she would pay to get it. She would make someone a good wife. Her one goal would be to make her husband happy. She would cook and clean for him and bear his strong, healthy children with a great and thrilling joy. She would be silent when he was silent, unobtrusive when he was working, merry when he was gay, infinitely responsive when he was passionate. And the transcendent wonder of it was that she would be fulfilling her finest function in doing it; she would be serenely happy, blissfully content.

Matt lit a cigarette in an attempt to break the mood. He glanced at her face by the light of the match. "What is courting like here in the hills?" he asked.

"Sometimes we walk," Abbie said dreamily, "and look at things together, and talk a little. Sometimes there's a dance at the school house. If a fellow has a boat, you can go out on the lake. There's huskin' bees an' church socials an' picnics. But mostly when the moon is a-shinin' an' the night is

warm, we just sit on a porch an' hold hands and do whatever the girl's willin' to allow."

Matt reached out and took one of her hands and held it in his. It was cool and dry and strong. It clung to his hand.

She turned her face to him, her eyes searching for his face in the darkness. "Do you like me a little bit, Mr. Wright?" she asked softly. "Not marryin'-like, but friendly-like?"

"I think that you're the most feminine girl I've ever met," he said, and realized it was true.

Almost without volition on either part, they seemed to lean together, blending in the night. Matt's lips sought her pale little girl lips and found them, and they weren't pale or little girlish at all, but warm and soft and passionate. Matt felt her lips part. He broke away, breathing quickly.

Abbie half turned to nestle against his shoulder, his arm held tightly around her. She sighed contentedly. "I reckon I wouldn't be unwillin'," she said tremulously, "whatever you wanted to do."

"I can't understand whv you didn't get married long ago," he said.

"I guess it was me," Abbie said reflectively. "I wasn't rightly satisfied with any of my fellows. I'd get mad at them for no

reason at all, and then something bad would happen to them and pretty soon no one would come courtin'. Maybe I expected them to be what they weren't. I guess I wasn't really in love with any of them. Anyways, I'm glad I didn't get married up." She sighed.

Matt felt the stirrings of something that felt oddly like compunction. *What a louse you are, Matthew Wright!*

"What happened to them — your fellows?" he asked. "Was it something you did?"

"Folks said it was," Abbie said. There was a trace of bitterness in her voice. "They said I had the evil eye. I don't see how. There isn't anything wrong with my eyes, is there?" She looked up at him; her eyes were large and dark blue, with little flecks of silvery moonlight in them.

"Not a thing," Matt said. "They're very beautiful."

"I don't see how it could have been any of my fault," Abbie said. "Of course, when Hank was late that evening, I told him he was so slow he might as well have a broken leg. Right after that he was nailing shingles on a roof, and he fell off and broke his leg. But I reckon he'd have broke it anyways. He was always right careless."

"And then Gene, he was so cold I told him he should fall in the lake and warm up. But a person

who does a lot of fishin', I guess he falls in a lot anyways."

"I guess so," Matt said. He began to shiver.

"You're shivering, Mr. Wright," Abbie said solicitously. "Let me go get your jacket."

"Never mind," Matt said. "It's about time for bed anyway. You go in and get ready. Tomorrow — tomorrow we're going to drive to Springfield for some shopping."

"Really, Mr. Wright? I haven't never been to Springfield," Abbie said incredulously. She got up, her eyes shining. "Really?"

"Really," Matt said. "Go on in, now."

She went in. She was almost dancing.

Matt sat on the porch for a few minutes longer, thinking. It was funny what happened to the fellows that disappointed Abbie. When he lit a cigarette, his hand was shaking.

Abbie had a way of being many different persons. Already Matt had known four of them: the moody little girl with braids down her back shuffling along a dusty road or bouncing gleefully on a car seat; the happy, placid housewife with cheeks rosy from the stove; the unhappy vessel of strange powers, tearful and reluctant; the girl with the passionate lips in the moon-streaked darkness. Which one was Abbie, the true Abbie?

THE next morning Matt had a fifth Abbie to consider. Her face was scrubbed and shining until it almost rivaled her eyes. Her braided hair was wound in a coronet around her head. She was wearing a different dress made of a shiny blue quilted material with a red lining. Matt scanned his small knowledge of dress materials. Taffeta? The color did terrible things to her hair. The dress had a V-shape neck and back and fitted better than anything she had worn yet. On one hip was a large artificial rose. Her stockingless feet were enclosed in a pair of black, patent-leather sandals.

My God! Matt thought. Her Sunday best! I'll have to walk with that down the streets of Springfield. He shuddered, and resisted the impulse to tear off that horrible rose.

"Well," he said, "all ready?" Abbie blushed excitedly. "Are we really going to Springfield, Mr. Wright?"

"We are if the car will start." "Oh, it'll start," Abbie said confidently.

Matt gave her a thoughtful sidelong glance. That was another thing.

After the usual hearty breakfast, with fried potatoes on the side, they got into the car. The brakes released without hesitation.

The drive was more than fifty miles, half of it over dirt roads that were roller-coaster washboards, and they drove it in silence. Every few miles Matt would glance at Abbie out of the corner of his eye and shudder. As excited as she was, like a child, Abbie was contented to sit quietly and enjoy the ride, particularly when they swung off the dirt road onto Highway 665.

When they came into Springfield, Abbie's face was glowing. She stared at the buildings as if they had sprung magically into being especially for her. Then she began to inspect the people walking along the streets. Matt noticed that it was the women who received her closest attention.

Suddenly Matt noticed that Abbie was very quiet. He glanced toward her. She was still, staring down at her hands resting in her lap.

"What's the matter?" Matt asked.

"I guess," she said, her voice a little unsteady, "I guess I look pretty funny. I guess you'll feel ashamed having me along. If it's all right with you, Mr. Wright, I'll just sit in the car."

"Nonsense," Matt said heartily. "You look fine." *The little devil*, he thought. *She has an uncanny talent for understanding things. She's either unusually perceptive*

or — What? "Besides, I'll need you to try on some clothes."

"Clothes, Mr. Wright!" she exclaimed. She seemed to find it hard to speak. "You're going to buy some clothes."

Matt nodded. He parked the car in front of Springfield's biggest department store. He came around to Abbie's door and helped her out. For a moment Abbie's face was level with his; her blue eyes locked with his dark ones in a look that Matt refused to analyze. They walked into the store, Abbie clinging to his arm. He could feel her heart beating swiftly. Matt stopped a moment to study the directory.

"Second floor," he said.

Abbie held back as Matt started off. "Kin we — can we look around here — for just a second?" Abbie asked hesitantly.

Matt glanced at her and shrugged. "I suppose so."

ABBIE started off determinedly toward some mysterious, unseen destination, leading Matt down innumerable aisles. All the way to the back of the store they went, and emerged miraculously into the kitchenware department. Abbie stopped on the threshold, gazing rapturously at the gleaming pots and pans, beaters, knives, and gadgets, as if they were jewels. She dismissed with a glance the stoves and electrical

appliances, but the cooking utensils brought forth long sighs. After a moment she moved among them, staring at them, touching them with one timid finger. She made little crooning sounds deep in her throat.

Matt had to drag her away.

They were almost to the stairs when Matt noticed that she was holding something to her breast. He stopped. He stared aghast. She was hugging a tiny frying pan of shiny aluminum and dully gleaming copper.

"Where did you get that?" he demanded.

"Back there," she said innocently. "They got so many. They'll never miss a little thing like this."

"But you can't do that!" Matt said. "That's stealing."

"'Tain't stealing when they got so much and I got so little," she explained.

"You've got to take it back!" Matt made a futile grab for the frying pan. Abbie hugged it to her breast with both arms.

"Don't take it away from me!" she wailed. "Please don't make me take it back!"

Matt glanced around nervously. So far no one seemed to be watching them. He turned back to Abbie. "Sh-h-h!" he said. "Be quiet now. Please be quiet." He looked at her pleadingly. She hugged the frying pan tighter.

"All right," he sighed. "Stay here! Don't move! Don't say anything!"

QUICKLY he walked back to kitchenwares. He caught the attention of the clerk. "How much are those," he said, pointing to the frying pans.

"Four-fifty, sir. Shall I wrap one up?"

"Four-fifty!"

"Yes, sir," the man said. "We have some cheaper ones in all aluminum —"

"Never mind," Matt said hurriedly. He pulled out his billfold. "Here. Give me a receipt and a sack."

The clerk picked up a frying pan.

"No, no," Matt said. "I don't want one. I just want a receipt and a sack."

"But, sir," the man said bewilderedly. "You said —"

"Don't argue with me," Matt said. "Just give me a receipt and a sack!"

The clerk rang up the sale, tore off the receipt, dropped it in a sack, and handed it to Matt with a very dazed expression on his face.

"Anything else, sir?" he asked automatically.

"I hope not," said Matt, and hurried away. When he looked back the clerk was still staring after him.

ABBIE was standing by the stairs where he had left her. "Put the frying pan in here," he whispered.

She gave him a look of admiration. "Oh, that was real clever of you."

Matt mopped his forehead. "Yes, wasn't it." He took her arm and hurried her up the stairs. At the top Matt came to a halt and looked around. Abbie stared with big eyes at the racks upon racks of dresses.

"I never knew," she whispered, "there was so many dresses in the world."

Matt nodded absently. He had to get away long enough to find a laboratory from which to rent some testing apparatus.

He saw a saleswoman, and drew her aside.

"The girl over there," he said. "I want you to take her to the beauty parlor and give her the works. Haircut, shampoo, setting, facial, eyebrows thinned and shaped and a makeup job. Then get her a new outfit from the skin out. Can you do all that?"

The saleswoman looked quite pleased. "We'll be very happy to help you."

Matt took out his billfold and peered into it. Slowly he extracted one traveler's check for one hundred dollars and then another. It left him only three hundred dollars, and he still had to get

the equipment and live for the rest of the summer. Matt sighed and countersigned the checks. "Try to keep it under this," he said heavily. "If you can."

"Yes, sir," said the saleswoman and hesitated, smiling. "Your fiancée?"

"Good God, no," Matt blurted out. "I mean — she's my — niece. It's her birthday."

He walked over to Abbie, breathing heavily. "Go with this woman, Abbie, and do what she tells you."

"Yes, Mr. Wright," Abbie said dazedly. And she walked away as if she were entering into fairyland.

Matt turned, biting his lip. He felt slightly sick.

HE had one more thing to do before he could leave the store. Making sure Abbie was gone, he went into the lingerie department. He regretted it almost immediately. Once he had seen a woman come into a pool hall; he must, he thought, wear the same sheepish, out-of-place expression.

He swallowed his qualms — they were a hard lump in his throat — and walked up to the counter.

"Yes, sir," said the young woman brightly, "what can I do for you?"

Matt avoided looking at her.

"I'd like to buy a negligee," he said in a low voice.

"What size?"

Matt began a motion with his hands and then dropped them hastily at his sides. "About five feet tall. Slim."

The woman led him along the counter. "Any particular color?"

"Uh — black," Matt said hoarsely.

The clerk brought out a garment that was very black, very lacy, very sheer. "This is thirty-nine ninety-eight."

Matt stared at it. "That's awfully black," he said.

"We have some others," the clerk began, folding the negligee.

"Never mind," Matt said quickly. "Wrap it up." Furtively, he slipped the money over the counter.

When he came out, the package under his arm, he was sweating freely.

He put the box in his car and looked at his watch. He had about two and a half hours, at least. He should be able to find everything he needed in that time.

He pulled a list of things out of his pocket, and found a telephone directory in a drugstore.

SPRINGFIELD had a laboratory supply house. He called the number, asked for the equipment he'd need, was told they had it for rent, and drove over to

pick it up. The rental didn't seem like much by the day, but it was, he discovered on figuring it out, a lot by the month — enough to break him fast if he didn't get something like a controlled series of tests, very fast.

Feeling like a child-slayer, he drove back to the department store and parked.

Only one hour had gone by. He went into the store and browsed about.

Two hours. He put another nickel in the parking meter. He sat down in a red leather chair and tried to look as if he were testing it for size and comfort.

Three hours. He fed the parking meter again, and began to feel hungry. He went back to the chair. From it, he could keep an eye on the stairs.

Women went up and came down. None of them were Abbie. He wondered, with a flash of fear, if she had been caught trying to make off with something else.

Matt tried not watching the stairs on the theory that a watched pot never boils. Never again, he vowed, would he go shopping with a woman. Where the devil was Abbie?

"Mr. Wright." The voice was tremulous and low.

Matt looked up and leaped out of his chair. The girl standing beside him was blond and breath-taking. The hair was short and

fluffed out at the ends; it framed a beautiful face. A soft, simple black dress with a low neckline clung to a small but womanly figure. Slim, long legs in sheer stockings and small black shoes with towering heels.

"Good God, Abbie! What have they done to you?"

"Don't you like it?" Abbie asked. The lovely face clouded up.

"It's — it's marvelous," Matt spluttered. "But they bleached your hair!"

Abbie beamed. "The woman who worked on it called it a rinse. She said it was natural, but I should wash it every few days. Not with laundry soap, either." She sighed. "I didn't know there was so much a girl could do to her face. I've got so much to learn. Why, she —"

Abbie prattled on happily while Matt stared at her, incredulous. Had he been sleeping in the same small cabin with this girl? Had she been cooking his meals and darning the holes in his pockets? Had he really kissed her and held her in his arms and heard her say, "I reckon I wouldn't be unwillin' —"

He wondered if he would act the same again.

MATT had expected a difference but not such a startling one. She wore her clothes with a

becoming sureness. She walked on the high heels as if she had worn them all her life. She carried herself as if she was born to beauty. But then, things always worked well for Abbie.

Abbie opened a small black purse and took out five dollars and twenty-one cents. "The woman said I should give this back to you."

Matt took it and looked at it in his hand and back at Abbie. He shrugged and smiled. "The power of money. Have you got everything?"

Under her arm she carried a large package that contained, no doubt, the clothes and shoes she had worn. Matt took it from her. She refused to give up the package that held the frying pan.

"I couldn't wear this," she said. She reached into her purse and pulled out something black and filmy. She held it up by one strap. "It was uncomfortable."

Matt shot nervous glances to the right and the left. "Put it away." He crammed it back into the purse and snapped the purse shut. "Are you hungry?"

"I could eat a hog," Abbie said.

Coming from this blonde creature, the incongruity set Matt to laughing. Abbie stared with wide eyes. "Did I say something wrong?" she asked plaintively.

"No." Matt got out and led her toward the door.

"You got to tell me," Abbie said appealingly. "There's so much I don't know."

Matt located the most expensive restaurant in town. It had a romantic atmosphere but he had chosen it because it specialized in sea food. He wanted to be sure that Abbie had things to eat she had never tasted before.

Matt ordered for both of them: shrimp cocktail, assorted relishes, chef's salad with roquefort dressing, broiled lobster tails with drawn butter, french fried potatoes, broccoli with a cheese sauce, frozen eclair, coffee. The food was good, and Abbie ate everything with great wonderment, as if it were about to disappear into the mysterious place from which it came.

She stared wide-eyed at the room and its decorations and the other diners and the waiter, and seemed oblivious of the fact that other men were staring admiringly at her. The waiter puzzled her. "Is this all he does?" she asked timidly. Matt nodded. "He's very good at it," Abbie conceded.

"Try to move the coffee cup," Matt said when they finished.

Abbie stared at it for a moment. "I can't," she said softly. "I tried awful — very hard, but I can't. I'd do anything you wanted, Mr. Wright, but I can't do that."

Matt smiled. "That's all right. I just wanted to see if you could."

MATT found a place they could dance. He ordered a couple of drinks. Abbie sipped hers once, made a face, and wouldn't touch it again.

She danced lightly and gracefully in her high-heeled shoes. They brought the top of her head level with his lips. She rested her head blissfully against his shoulder and pressed herself very close. For a moment Matt relaxed and let himself enjoy the pleasures of the aftermath of a good meal and a beautiful girl in his arms. But Abbie seemed to be in a private Eden of her own, as if she had entered a paradise and was afraid to speak for fear the spell would break.

During the long drive home, she spoke only once. "Do people live like that all the time?"

"No," Matt said. "Not always. Not unless they have a lot of money."

Abbie nodded. "That's the way it should be," she said softly. "It should only happen a long ways apart."

When they reached the cabin, Matt reached into the back seat for the package he had bought.

"What's that?" Abbie asked.

"Open it," Matt said.

She held it up a little, lacy and black in the moonlight. Then she turned to look at Matt, her face transparent, her eyes glowing. "Wait out here a minute, will

you?" she asked breathlessly.

"All right." Matt lit a cigarette and stood on the porch looking out over the valley, hating himself.

After a few minutes, he heard a little whisper. "Come in, Mr. Wright."

HE opened the door started in and stopped, stunned. One kerosene lamp lit the room dimly. The new clothes were draped carefully over the edge of a chair. Abbie was wearing the negligee. That was all. Through its lacy blackness she gleamed pink and white, a lovely vision of seductiveness. She stood by the table, staring at the floor. When she looked up, her cheeks were flushed.

Suddenly she ran lightly across the floor and threw her arms around Matt's neck and kissed him hard on the lips. Her lips moved. She drew back a little, looking up at him.

"There's only one way a girl like me can thank a man for a day as wonderful as this," she whispered. "For the clothes and the trip and the dinner and the dancing. And for being so nice. I never thought anything like this would ever happen to me. I don't mind. I guess it isn't bad when you really like someone. I like you awful — very well. I'm glad they made me pretty. If I can

make you happy — just for a moment —"

Gently, feeling sick, Matt took her hands from around his neck. "You don't understand," he said coldly. "I've done a terrible thing. I don't know how you can ever forgive me. Somehow you misunderstood me. Those clothes, the negligee — they're for another girl — the girl I'm going to marry — my fiancée. You're about her size and I thought — I don't know how I could have misled . . ."

He stopped. It was enough. His plan had worked. Abbie had crumpled. Slowly, as he spoke, the life had drained out of her, the glow had fled from her face, and she seemed to shrink in upon herself, cold and broken. She was a little girl, slapped across the face in her most spiritual moment by the one person she had trusted most.

"That's all right," she said faintly. "Thanks for letting me think they was mine — that it was for me — only for a little. I'll never forget."

She turned and went to the bunk and let the blanket fall back around her.

It was the sobbing that kept Matt from going to sleep that night. Or maybe it was the way the sobs were so soft and muffled that he had to strain to hear them.

BREAKFAST was a miserable meal. There was something wrong with the food, although Matt couldn't quite pin down what it was. Everything was cooked just the same, but the flavor was gone. Matt cut and chewed mechanically and tried to avoid looking at Abbie. It wasn't difficult; she seemed very small today, and she kept her eyes on the floor.

She was dressed in the shapeless blue gingham once more. She toyed listlessly with her food. Her face was scrubbed free of make-up, and everything about her was dull. Even her newly blonde hair had faded.

Several times Matt opened his mouth to apologize again, and shut it without saying anything. Finally he cleared his throat and said, "Where's your new frying pan?"

She looked up for the first time. Her blue eyes were cloudy. "I put it away," she said lifelessly, "do you want it back?"

"No, no," Matt said hurriedly. "I was just asking."

Silence fell again, like a sodden blanket. Matt sat and chain-smoked while Abbie cleaned up the table and washed the dishes.

When she finished she turned around with her back to the dishpan. "Do you want me to move things for you? I can do it real good today."

Matt saw the little pile of packages in the corner and noticed for the first time that the new clothes were gone. He steeled himself. "How do you know?"

"I got a feeling."

"Do you mind?"

"I don't mind. I don't mind anything." She came forward and sat down in the chair. "Look!"

The table between them lifted, twisted, tilted on one leg, and crashed on its side to the floor.

"How did you feel?" Matt said excitedly. "Can you control the power? Was the movement accidental?"

"It felt like it was kind of a part of me," Abbie said. "Like my hand. But I didn't know exactly what it was going to do."

"Wait a minute," Matt said. "I'm going to get some things out of the car. Maybe we can learn a little more about what makes you able to do things like this. You don't mind, do you?"

"What's the good of it?" she asked listlessly.

Matt dashed out to the car and pulled the two cartons of equipment out of the trunk. He carried them into the shack and laid the apparatus out on the table. He went back to the car and brought in the bathroom scales he'd bought in the drugstore in Springfield.

"All right, Abbie. First, let's find out a few things about you

before we try moving anything else."

Abbie complied automatically while he took her temperature and pulse, measured her blood pressure and weighed her. "I wish I could set up controls to measure your basal metabolism," he muttered as he worked, "but this will have to do. I wish this shack had a generator."

"I could get you electricity," Abbie said without much interest.

"Hmmm — you could at that, I guess. But that would make these tests meaningless, if you had to devote energy to keeping the equipment running."

HE cursed the limited knowledge that was undoubtedly making him miss things that a man who had studied longer would have known more about.

But there wasn't anything he could do about that. Once he'd reached some preliminary conclusions, more experienced researchers could take over the job.

Working carefully, he wrote down the results.

"Now, Abbie, would you please pick that chair up off the floor, and hold it up for a few minutes? No — I mean really go over and pick it up."

He let her hold it for exactly five minutes, then ran her through the same tests as before, noting the changes in temperature, blood

pressure, pulse rate, respiration, and then he weighed her again.

"All right. Take a rest now. We'll have to wait until these readings drop down to what they were before we do anything else," Matt said.

Still not displaying anything more than acquiescence, Abbie sat down in another chair and stared at the floor.

"Abbie, do you mind helping me?" Matt asked. "It's for your benefit, too. If you can control these powers all the time, maybe the fellows around here will stop breaking legs and falling into lakes."

Abbie's dull expression did not change. "I don't care," she said.

Matt sighed. For a moment, he considered dropping his experiments and just getting out of Abbie's life — packing his thesis notes and typewriter in the car and driving back to the University. But he couldn't stop now. He was too close to the beginnings of an answer.

He checked Abbie again, and found that his readings coincided with the first set. The short rest had dropped her heartbeat and respiration back to normal.

"Let's try all over again," Matt said. "Lift that chair to the same height you were holding it, please."

The chair jerked upward, hesitantly. "Easy. Just a little more."

It straightened, then moved more steadily. "Hold it there." The chair hovered motionless in the air, maintaining its position. Matt waited five minutes. "All right. Let it down now, easy. Slow." The chair settled gently to the floor, like a drifting feather.

Once more, he checked Abbie.

Her heartbeat was below what it had been. Her blood pressure was lower. Her respiration was shallow — her breast was barely rising to each breath. Her temperature was low — dangerously so, for an ordinary human being.

"How do you feel?" he asked apprehensively. If this was what always happened, then Abbie was in real danger every time she used her powers.

"All right," she said with no more than her previous disinterest. Matt frowned, but she was showing no signs of discomfort.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"Yes," she said. "You want me to try some more?"

"If you're sure you're not in danger. But I want you to stop if you feel any pain or if you're uncomfortable. Now, lift the table just this far . . ."

THEY practiced with the table for an hour. At the end of that time, Abbie had it under perfect control. She could raise it a fraction of an inch or rocket it to the ceiling where it would remain,

legs pointing stiffly toward the floor, until she lowered it. She balanced it on one leg and set it spinning like a top.

Distance did not seem to diminish Abbie's control or power. She could make the table perform equally well from any point in the room, from outside the cabin, or from a point to which she shuffled dispiritedly several hundred yards down the road.

"How do you know where it is and what it's doing?" Matt asked frowning.

Abbie shrugged listlessly. "I just feel it."

"With what?" Matt asked. "Do you see it? Feel it? Sense it? If we could isolate the sense —"

"It's all of those," Abbie said.

Matt shook his head in frustration. "You look a little tired. You'd better lie down."

She lay in her bunk, not moving, her face turned to the wall, but Matt knew that she wasn't asleep. When she didn't get up to fix lunch, Matt opened a can of soup and tried to get her to eat some of it.

"No, thanks, Mr. Wright," Abbie said. "I ain't hungry."

"I'm not hungry," Matt corrected.

Abbie didn't respond. In the evening she got out of her bunk to fix supper, but she didn't eat more than a few mouthfuls. After she washed the dishes, she went

back into her bunk and pulled the blanket around it.

Matt sat up, trying to make sense out of his charts. Despite their readings, Abbie hadn't reacted dangerously to what should have been frightening physiological changes. He could be fairly safe in assuming that they always accompanied the appearance of her parapsychological powers — and she had certainly lived through those well enough.

But why was there such a difference in the way she reacted when she was happy and when she wasn't? The first morning, when she had barely been able to assume conscious control, she'd been ravenously hungry. Today, when she had performed feats that made the others insignificant she was neither hungry nor abnormally exhausted. She was tired, yes, but there *had* been a measurable, though slight, expenditure of energy with each action, which, accumulated through their numerous experiments, could be expected to equal that required for an afternoon's normal work.

What was different? Why, when she tried with what amounted to will-power alone, was it harder for her to move an object telekinetically than it would have been to do so physically? Why was the reverse true when she was unhappy?

Unless she was tapping a source of energy somewhere.

The thought sounded as though there might be something behind it. He reached for a blank sheet of paper and began jotting down ideas.

Disregarding the first morning's experiments, when she was obviously succeeding despite this hypothetical force, what source of energy could she be contacting?

Well, what physical laws was she violating? Gravity? Inertia?

WHEN Abbie was unhappy, she could nullify gravity — no, not exactly gravity — mass. Once she had done that, a process that might not require much energy at all, the object rose by itself, and, having no mass, could be pushed around easily. Somehow, by some unconscious mechanism, she could restore measured amounts of mass and — there was an idea trying to come to the surface of his thinking — of course! The energy created by the moving or falling body when mass was restored and gravity re-asserted itself was channeled into her body. She stopped being a chemical engine sustained by food burned in the presence of oxygen, and became a receiver for the power generated by the moving bodies.

Writing quickly, he systemat-

ized what he had learned. Obviously, the energy restored when the manipulated objects fell or swooped back into place couldn't quite balance the energy required to move them. She did get tired — but nowhere near as tired as she should have been. If she empathized with her feelings at such times, she retained a bare margin of control even when happy, but she lost the delicate ability to tap the energy thus liberated, and had to draw on her own body for the power.

Matt grimaced. If that was true — and his charts and graph confirmed it, then she could never use her powers unless she was miserable.

And the key to that lay buried in the childhood of a little hill girl, who probably had been scolded and beaten, as hill children were when they were bad. In this case 'bad' meaning a little girl who could move things without touching them, who had been confronted with the example of 'Libby,' the perfect little girl who would always have minded her mother, until she had come to associate the use of her powers only with unhappiness, with not being wanted, with rejection on the part of the people whom she loved.

Matt winced. *You louse, Wright!*

But it was too late to do any-

thing about it now. He had to go on with what he was doing.

ABBIE'S appetite wasn't any better in the morning. She looked tired, too, as if she hadn't slept. Matt stared at her for a moment thoughtfully, then shrugged and put her to work.

In a few minutes, Abbie could duplicate her feats with the table of the day before with a control that was, if anything, even finer. Matt extended his experiment to her subjective reactions.

"Let's isolate the source," he said. "Relax. Try to do it with the mind alone. Will the table to move."

Matt jotted down notes. At the end of half an hour he had the following results:

Mind alone—negative.

Body alone—negative.

Emotions alone—negative.

It was crude and uncertain. It would take days or months of practice to be able to use the mind without a sympathetic tension of the body, or to stop thinking or to wall off an emotion. But Matt was fairly sure that the telekinetic ability was a complex of all three and perhaps some others that he had no way of knowing about, which Abbie couldn't describe. But if any of the primary three were inhibited, consciously or unconsciously, Abbie could not move a crumb of bread.

Two of them could be controlled. The third was a product of environment and circumstances. Abbie had to be unhappy.

A muscle twitched in Matt's jaw, and he told Abbie to try moving more than one object. He saw a cup of coffee rise in the air, turn a double somersault without spilling a drop, and sit down gently in the saucer that climbed to meet it. Matt stood up, picked the cup out of the air, drank the coffee, and put the cup back. The saucer did not wobble.

There were limits to Abbie's ability. The number of dissimilar objects she could manipulate seemed to be three, regardless of size; she could handle five similar objects with ease, and she had made six slices of bread do an intricate dance in the air. It was possible, of course, that she might improve with practice.

"My God!" Matt exclaimed. "You could make a fortune as a magician."

"Could I?" Abbie said without interest. She pleaded a headache and went to bed. Matt said nothing. They had worked for an hour and a half.

Matt lit a cigarette. The latent telekinetic power could explain a lot of things, poltergeist phenomena, for instance, and in a more conscious form, levitation and the Indian rope trick and the whole gamut of oriental mysticism.

He spent the rest of the day making careful notes of everything Abbie did, the date and time, the object and its approximate weight and its movements. When he finished, he would have a complete case history. Complete except for the vital parts which he did not dare put down on paper.

Several times he turned to stare at Abbie's still, small form. He was only beginning to realize the tremendous potentialities locked up within her. His awareness had an edge of fear. What role was it he'd chosen for himself. He had been fairy godmother, but that no longer. Pygmalion? He felt a little like Pandora must have felt before she opened the box. Or, perhaps, he thought ruefully, he was more like Doctor Frankenstein.

ABBIE did not get up at all that day, and she refused to eat anything Matt fixed. Next morning, when she climbed slowly from her bunk, his apprehension sharpened.

She was gaunt, and her face had a middle-aged, haggard look. Her blond hair was dull and lifeless. Matt had already cooked breakfast, but she only went through the motions of eating. He urged her, but she put her fork down tiredly.

"It don't matter," she said.

"Maybe you're sick," Matt fretted. "We'll take you to a doctor."

Abbie looked at Matt levelly and shook her head. "What's wrong with me, a doctor won't fix."

That was the morning Matt saw a can of baking powder pass through his chest. Abbie had been tossing it to Matt at various speeds, gauging the strength of the push necessary. Matt would either catch it or Abbie would stop it short and bring it back to her. But this time it came too fast, bullet-like. Involuntarily, Matt looked down, tensing his body for the impact.

He saw the can go in . . .

Abbie's eyes were wide and frightened. Matt turned around dazedly, prodding his chest with trembling fingers. The can had shattered against the cabin wall behind him. It lay on the floor, battered, in a drift of powder.

"It went in," Matt said. "I saw it, but I didn't feel a thing. It passed right through me. What happened, Abbie?"

"I couldn't stop it," she whispered, "so I just sort of wished it wasn't there. For just a moment. And it wasn't."

That was how they found out that Abbie could teleport. It was as simple as telekinesis. She could project or pull objects through walls without hurting either one.

Little things, big things. It made no difference. Distance made no difference either, apparently.

"What about living things?" Matt asked.

Abbie concentrated. Suddenly there was a mouse on the table, a brown field mouse with twitching whiskers and large, startled black eyes. For a moment it crouched there, frozen, and then it scampered for the edge of the table, straight toward Abbie.

Abbie screamed and reacted. Twisting in the air, the mouse vanished. Matt looked up, his mouth hanging open. Abbie was three feet in the air, hovering like a hummingbird. Slowly she sank down to her chair.

"It works on people, too," Matt whispered. "Try it again. Try it on me."

MATT felt nauseated, as if he had suddenly stepped off the Earth. The room shifted around him. He looked down. He was floating in the air about two feet above the chair he had been sitting on. He was turning slowly, so that the room seemed to revolve around him.

He looked for Abbie, but she was behind him now. Slowly she drifted into view. "That's fine," he said. Abbie looked happier than she had looked for days. She almost smiled.

Matt began to turn more rapid-

ly. In a moment he was spinning like a top; the room flashed into a kaleidoscope. He swallowed hard. "All right," he shouted, "that's enough."

Abruptly he stopped spinning and dropped. His stomach soared up into his throat. He thumped solidly into the chair and immediately hopped up with a howl of anguish. He rubbed himself with both hands.

"Ouch!" he shouted. And then accusingly, "You did that on purpose."

Abbie looked innocent. "I done what you said."

"All right, you did," Matt said bitterly. "From now on, I resign as a guinea pig."

Abbie folded her hands in her lap. "What shall I do?"

"Practice on yourself," Matt said.

"Yes, Mr. Wright." She rose sedately in the air. "This is wonderful." She stretched out as if she were laying in bed. She floated around the room. Matt was reminded of shows in which he had seen magicians producing the same illusion, passing hoops cleverly around their assistant's body to show that there were no wires. Only this wasn't magic; this wasn't illusion; this was real.

Abbie settled back into the chair. Her face was glowing. "I feel like I could do anything," she said. "Now what shall I try."



Matt thought a moment. "Can you project yourself?"

"Where to?"

"Oh, anywhere," Matt said impatiently. "It doesn't matter."

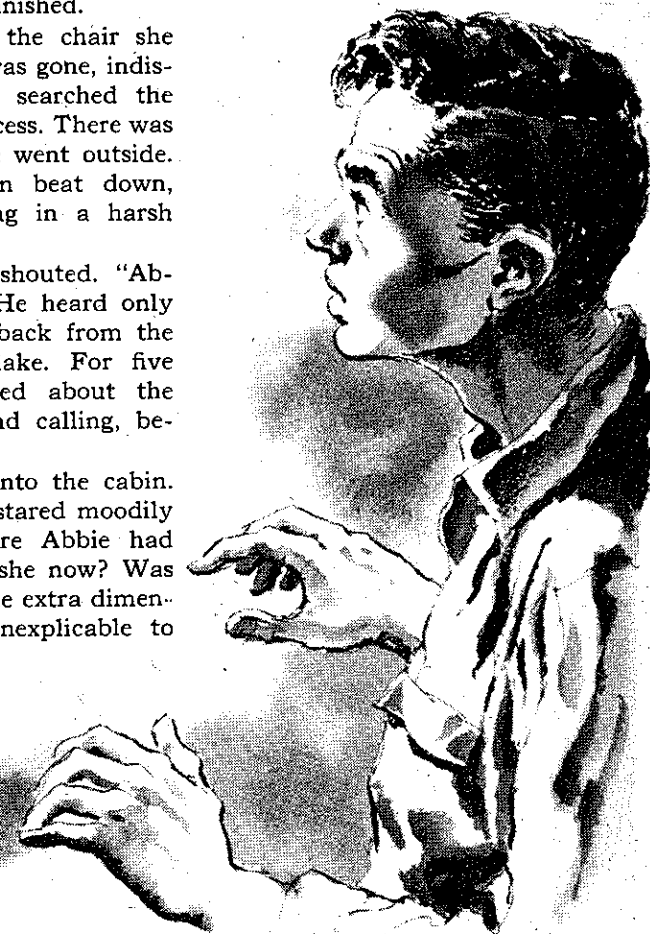
"Anywhere?" she repeated. There was a distant and unreadable expression in her eyes.

And then she vanished.

Matt stared at the chair she had been in. She was gone, indisputably gone. He searched the room, a simple process. There was no sign of her. He went outside. The afternoon sun beat down, exposing everything in a harsh light.

"Abbie!" Matt shouted. "Abbie!" He waited. He heard only the echo drifting back from the hills across the lake. For five minutes he roamed about the cabin, shouting and calling, before he gave up.

He went back into the cabin. He sat down and stared moodily at the bunk where Abbie had slept. Where was she now? Was she trapped in some extra dimension, weird and inexplicable to



the senses, within which her power could not work.

There had to be some such explanation for teleportation — a fourth dimensional shortcut across our three. Why not—if she could nullify mass, she could adjust atoms so that they entered one of the other dimensions.

AS he brooded, remorse came to him slowly, creeping in so stealthily that awareness of it was like a blow. The whole scheme had been madness. He could not understand now the insane ambition that had led to this tinkering with human lives and the structure of the Universe. He had justified it to himself with the name of science. But the word had no mystic power of absolutism.

His motive had been something entirely different. It was only a sublimated lust for power, and thinly disguised at that. The power, of knowledge. And for that lust, which she could never understand, an innocent, unsophisticated girl had suffered.

Was Abbie dead? Perhaps that was the most merciful thing.

Ends can never justify means, Matt realized now. They are too inextricably intertwined ever to be separated. The means inevitably shape the ends. In the long view, there are neither means nor

ends, for the means are only an infinite series of ends, and the ends are an infinite series of means...

And Abbie appeared. Like an Arabian genie, with gifts upon a tray, streaming a mouth-watering incense through the air. Full-formed, she sprang into being, her cheeks glowing, her eyes shining.

"Abbie!" Matt shouted joyfully. His heart gave a sharp bound, as if it had suddenly been released from an unbearable weight. "Where have you been?"

"Springfield."

"Springfield!" Matt gasped. "But that's over fifty miles."

Abbie lowered the tray to the table. She snapped her fingers. "Like that, I was there."

Matt's eyes fell to the tray. It was loaded with cooked food: shrimp cocktail, broiled lobster tails, french fried...

Abbie smiled. "I got hungry."

"But where—?" Matt began. "You went back to the restaurant," he said accusingly, "you took the food from there."

Abbie nodded happily. "I was hungry."

"But that's stealing," Matt moaned. And he realized for the first time the enormity of the thing he had done, what he had let loose upon the world. Nothing was safe. Neither money nor jewels nor deadly secrets. Nothing at all.

"They won't ever miss it," Abbie said, "and nobody saw me." She said it simply, as the ultimate justification.

Matt was swept by the staggering realization that where her basic drives were concerned Abbie was completely unmoral. There was only one small hope. If he could keep her from realizing her civilization-shattering potentialities! They might never occur to her.

"Sure," Matt said. "Sure."

Abbie ate heartily, but Matt had no appetite. He sat thoughtfully, watching her eat, and he experienced a brief thankfulness that at least she wasn't going to starve to death.

"Didn't you have any trouble?" he asked. "Getting the food without anyone seeing you?"

Abbie nodded. "I couldn't decide how to get into the kitchen. I could see that the cook was all alone..."

"You could see?"

"I was outside, but I could see into the kitchen, somehow. So finally, I called 'Albert!' And the cook went out and I went in and took the food that was sitting on the tray and came back here. It was really simple, because the cook was expecting someone to call him."

"How did you know that?"

"I thought it," Abbie said, frowning. "Like this."

SHE concentrated for a moment. He watched her, puzzled, and then knew what she meant. Panic caught him by the throat. There were things she shouldn't know. Because he was trying so hard to bury them deep, they scuttled across his consciousness.

Telepathy!

And as he watched her face, he knew that he was right.

Her eyes grew wide and incredulous. Slowly, something hard and cruelly cold slipped over her face like a mask.

Oh, Abbie! My sweet, gentle Abbie!

"You—" she gasped. "You devil! There ain't nothin' too bad for anyone who'd do that!"

I'm a dead man, Matt thought.

"You with your kindness and your handsome face and your city manners," Abbie said pitifully. "How could you do it? You made me fall in love with you. It wasn't hard, was it? All you had to do was hold a little hill girl's hand in the moonlight an' kiss her once, an' she was ready to jump into bed with you. But you didn't want anything as natural as that. All the time you was laughing and scheming. Poor little hill girl!"

"You make me think you like me so well you want me to look real purty in new clothes and new hair and a new face. But it's just a trick. All the time it's a trick."

When I'm feeling happiest and most grateful, you take it all away. I'd sooner you hit me across the face. Poor little hill girl! Thinking you wanted her. Thinking maybe you were aiming to marry her. I wanted to die. Even Paw was never that mean. He never done anything a-purpose, like you."

White-faced, Matt watched her, his mind racing.

"You're thinking you can get around me somehow," Abbie said, "and I'll forget. You can make me think it was all a mistake. 'Tain't no use. You can't, not ever, because I know what you're thinking."

What *had* he been thinking? Had he actually thought of marrying her? Just for a second? He shuddered. It would be hell. Imagine, if you can, a wife who is all-knowing, all-powerful, who can never be evaded, avoided, sighed to, lied to, shut out, shut up. Imagine a wife who can make a room a shambles in a second, who can throw dishes and chairs and tables with equal facility and deadly accuracy. Imagine a wife who can be any place, any time, in the flicker of a suspicion. Imagine a wife who can see through walls and read minds and maybe wish you a raging headache or a broken leg or aching joints.

It would be worse than hell.

The torments of the damned would be pleasant compared to that.

Abbie's chin came up. "You don't need to worry. I'd as soon marry up with a rattlesnake. At least he gives you warning before he strikes."

"Kill me!" Matt said desperately. "Go ahead and kill me!"

Abbie smiled sweetly. "Killing's too good for you. I don't know anything that ain't too good for you. But don't worry, I'll think of something. Now, go away and leave me alone."

THANKFULLY, Matt started to turn. Before he could complete it, he found himself outside the cabin. He blinked in the light of the sinking sun. He began to shiver. After a little he sat down on the porch and lit a cigarette. There had to be some way out of this. There was always a way.

From inside the cabin came the sound of running water. *Running water!* Matt resisted an impulse to get up and investigate the mystery. "Leave me alone," Abbie had said, in a tone that Matt didn't care to challenge.

A few minutes later he heard the sound of splashing and Abbie's voice lifted in a sweet soprano. Although he couldn't understand the words, the tune sent chills down his back. And then a phrase came clear:

*Root-a-toot-toot
Three times she did shoot
Right through that hardwood
door.
He was her man,
But he done her wrong...*

Matt began to shake. He passed a trembling hand across his sweaty forehead and wondered if he had a fever. He tried to pull himself together for he had to think clearly. The situation was obvious. He had done a fiendishly cruel thing—no matter what the excuse—and he had been caught and the power of revenge was in the hands of the one he had wronged, never more completely.

The only question was: what form would the revenge take? When he knew that, he might be able to figure out a way to evade it. There was no question in his mind about waiting meekly for justice to strike.

The insurmountable difficulty was that the moment he thought of a plan, it would be unworkable because Abbie would be forewarned. And she was already armed. He had to stop thinking.

How do you stop thinking? he thought miserably. *Stop thinking!* he told himself. *Stop thinking, damn you!*

He might be on the brink of the perfect solution. But if he thought of it, it would be worthless. And if he couldn't think of

it, then—

The circle was complete. He was back where he started, staring at its perfect viciousness. There was only one possi—

*Mary had a little lamb with
fleece as white as snow and every-
where that Mary went (Relax!)
the lamb (Don't think!) was sure
(Act on the spur of the moment)
to go. Mary had a...*

"Well, Mr. Wright, are you ready to go?"

Matt started. Beside him were a pair of black suede shoes filled with small feet. His gaze traveled up the lovely, nylon-sheathed legs, up the clinging black dress that swelled so provocatively, to the face with its blue eyes and red lips and blond hair.

Even in his pressing predicament, Matt had to recognize the impact of her beauty. It was a pity that her other gifts were too terrible.

"I reckon your fiancée won't mind," Abbie said sweetly. "Being as you ain't got a fiancée. Are you ready?"

"Ready?" Matt looked down at his soiled work clothes. "For what?"

"You're ready," Abbie said.

A WAVE of dizziness swept him, followed by a wave of nausea. Matt shut his eyes. They receded. When he opened his eyes again, he had a frightening sensa-

tion of disorientation. Then he recognized his surroundings. He was on the dance floor in Springfield.

Abbie came into his arms. "All right," she said, "dance!"

Shocked, Matt began to dance, mechanically. He realized that people were staring at them as if they had dropped through a hole in the ceiling. Matt wasn't sure they hadn't. Only two other couples were on the small floor, but they had stopped dancing and were looking puzzled.

As Matt swung Abbie slowly around he saw that the sprinkling of customers at the bar had turned to stare, too. A waiter in a white jacket was coming toward them, frowning determinedly.

Abbie seemed as unconcerned about the commotion she had caused as the rainbow-hued juke box in the corner. It thumped away just below Matt's conscious level of recognition. Abbie danced lightly in his arms.

The waiter tapped Matt on the shoulder. Matt sighed with relief and stopped dancing. Immediately he found himself moving jerkily around the floor like a puppet. Abbie, he gathered, did not care to stop.

The waiter followed doggedly. "Stop that!" he said bewilderedly. "I don't know where you came from or what you think you're doing, but you can't do it in here

and you can't do it dressed like that."

"I—I c-can-n't s-st-stop-p!" Matt said jerkily.

"Sure you can," the waiter said soothingly. He plodded along after them. "There's lots of things a man can't do, but he can always stop whatever you're doing. I should think you'd be glad to stop."

"W-w-would," Matt got out. "S-st-stop-p!" he whispered to Abbie.

"Tell the man to go 'way," Abbie whispered back.

Matt decided to start dancing again. It was easier than being shaken to pieces. "I think you'd better go away," he said to the waiter.

"We don't like to use force," the waiter said, frowning, "but we have to keep up a standard for our patrons. Come along quietly," he jerked on Matt's arm "or—"

The grip on Matt's arm was suddenly gone. The waiter vanished. Matt looked around wildly.

The juke box had a new decoration. Dazed, opaque-eyed, the waiter squatted on top of the box, his white jacket and whiter face a dark fool's motley in the swirling lights.

Abbie pressed herself close. Matt shuddered and swung her slowly around the floor. On the next turn, he saw that the waiter had climbed down from his perch.

He had recruited reinforcements. Grim-faced and silent, the waiter approached, followed by another waiter, a lantern-jawed bartender, and an ugly bulldog of a man in street clothes. The manager, Matt decided.

They formed a menacing ring around Matt and Abbie.

"Whatever your game is," growled the bulldog, "we don't want to play. If you don't leave damn quick, you're going to wish you had."

Matt, looking at him, believed it. He tried to stop. Again his limbs began to jerk uncontrollably.

"I-I c-can-n't," he said. "D-d-don't y-you th-think I-I w-would if I-I c-could."

The manager stared at him with large, awed, bloodshot eyes. "Yeah," he said. "I guess you would." He shook himself. His jowls wobbled. "Okay, boys. Let's get rid of them."

"Watch yourself," said the first waiter uneasily. "One of them has a trick throw."

They closed in. Matt felt Abbie stiffen against him.

THEY vanished, one after the other, like candles being snuffed. Matt glanced unhappily at the juke box. There they were on top of the box, stacked in each other's laps like a totem pole. The pile teetered and col-

lapsed in all directions. Dull thuds made themselves heard even above the juke box.

Matt saw them get up, puzzled and wary. The bartender was rubbing his nose. He doubled his fists and started to rush out on the floor. The manager, a wilier sort, grabbed his arm. The four of them went into consultation. Every few seconds one of them would raise his head and stare at Matt and Abbie. Finally the first waiter detached himself from the group and with an air of finality reached behind the juke box. Abruptly the music stopped; the colored lights went out. Silence fell. The four of them turned triumphantly toward the floor.

Just as abruptly, the lights went back on; the music boomed out again. They jumped.

Defiantly, the manager stepped to the wall and pulled the plug from the socket. He turned, still holding the cord. It stirred in his hand. The manager looked down at it incredulously. It wriggled. He dropped it hurriedly, with revulsion. The plug rose cobralike from its coils and began a slow, deadly, weaving dance. The manager stared, hypnotized with disbelief.

The cord struck. The manager leaped back. The bared, metal fangs bit into the floor. They retreated, all four of them, watching with wide eyes. Contemptu-

ously, the cord turned its back on them, wriggled its way to the socket, and plugged itself in.

The music returned. Matt danced on with leaden legs. He could not stop. He would never stop. He thought of the fairy tale of the red shoes. Abbie seemed as fresh and determined as ever.

As the juke box came into sight again, Matt noticed some commotion around it. The bartender was approaching the manager with an axe, a glittering fire axe. For one whirling moment, Matt thought the whole world had gone mad. Then he saw the manager take the axe and approach the juke box cautiously, the axe poised in one hand ready to strike.

He brought it down smartly. The cord squirmed its coils out of the way. The manager wrenched the axe from the floor. Bravely he advanced closer. He looked down and screamed. The cord had a loop around one leg; the loop was tightening. Frantically the manager swung again and again. One stroke hit the cord squarely. It parted. The music stopped. The box went dark. The headless cord squirmed in dying agonies.

Abbie stopped dancing. Matt stood still, his legs trembling, sighing with relief.

"Let's go, Abbie," he pleaded. "Let's go quick."

She shook her head. "Let's sit." She led him to a table which, like the rest of the room, had been suddenly vacated of patrons. "I reckon you'd like a drink."

"I'd rather leave," Matt muttered.

THEY sat down. Imperiously, Abbie beckoned at the waiter. He came toward the table cautiously. Abbie looked inquiringly at Matt.

"Bourbon," Matt said helplessly. "Straight."

In a moment the waiter was back with a bottle and two glasses on a tray. "The boss said to get the money first," he said timidly.

Matt searched his pockets futilely. He looked at the manager, standing against one wall, glowering, his arms folded across his chest. "I haven't got any money on me," Matt said.

"That's all right," Abbie said. "Just set the things down."

"No, ma'am," the waiter began, and his eyes rolled as the tray floated out of his hand and settled to the table. He stopped talking, shut his mouth, and backed away.

Abbie was brooding, her chin in one small hand. "I ain't been a good daughter," she said. "Paw would like it here."

"No, no," Matt said hurriedly. "Don't do that. We've got enough trouble—"

Jenkins was sitting in the third chair, blinking slowly, reeking of alcohol. Matt reached for the bottle and sloshed some into a glass. He raised it to his lips and tossed it off. The liquor burned his throat for a moment and then was gone. Matt waited expectantly as he lowered the glass to the table. He felt nothing, nothing at all. He looked suspiciously at the glass. It was still full.

Jenkins focused his eyes. "Ab!" he said. He seemed to cringe in his chair. "What you doin' here? You look different. All fixed up. Find a feller with money?"

Abbie ignored his questions. "If I asked you to do somethin', Paw, would you do it?"

"Sure, Ab," Jenkins said hurriedly. His eyes lit on the bottle of bourbon. "Anything." He raised the bottle to his lips. It gurgled pleasantly and went on gurgling.

Matt watched the level of amber liquid drop in the bottle, but when Jenkins put it down and wiped his bearded lips with one large hairy hand, the bottle was half empty and stayed that way. Jenkins sighed heavily.

Matt raised his glass again and tilted it to his lips. When he lowered it, the glass was still full and Matt was still empty. He stared moodily at the glass.

"If I asked you to hit Mr. Wright in the nose," Abbie went

on, "I reckon you'd do it?"

Matt tensed himself.

"Sure, Ab, sure," Jenkins said. He turned his massive head slowly. He doubled his fist. The expression behind the beard was unreadable, but Matt decided that it was better that way. "Ain't you been treatin' mah little gal right?" Jenkins demanded. "Say, son," he said with concern, "you don't look so good." He looked back at Abbie. "Want I should hit him?"

"Not now," Abbie said. "But keep it in mind."

Matt relaxed and seized the opportunity to dash the glass to his mouth. Futilely. Not a drop of liquor reached his stomach. Hopelessly, Matt thought of Tantalus.

"Police!" Jenkins bellowed suddenly, rising up with the neck of the bottle in one huge hand.

Matt looked. The bartender was leading three policemen into the front of the room. The officers advanced stolidly, confident of their ultimate strength and authority. Matt turned quickly to Abbie.

"No tricks," he pleaded. "Not with the law."

Abbie yawned. "I'm tired. I reckon it's almost midnight."

Jenkins charged, bull-like, bellowing with rage. And the room vanished.

Matt blinked, sickened. They were back in the cabin. Abbie and

he. "What about your father?" Matt asked.

"Next to liquor," Abbie said, "Paw likes a fight best. I'm going to bed now. I'm real tired."

She left her shoes on the floor, climbed into her bunk, and pulled the blanket around herself.

MATT walked slowly to his bunk. *Mary had a little lamb . . . He sat down on it and pulled off his shoes, letting them thump to the floor . . . with fleece as white as snow . . . He pulled the blanket around his bunk and made rustling sounds, but he lay down without removing his clothes . . . and everywhere that Mary went . . . He lay stiffly, listening to the immediate sounds of deep breathing coming from the other bunk . . . the lamb was sure to go . . .*

Two tortured hours crawled by. Matt sat up cautiously. He picked up his shoes from the floor. He straightened up. Slowly he tiptoed toward the door. Inch by inch, listening to Abbie's steady breathing, until he was at the door. He slipped it open, only a foot. He squeezed through and drew it shut behind him.

A porch board creaked. Matt froze. He waited. There was no sound from inside. He crept over the pebbles of the driveway, suppressing exclamations of pain. But he did not dare stop to put

on his shoes.

He was beside the car. He eased the door open and slipped into the seat. Blessing the steep driveway, he released the brake and pushed in the clutch. The car began to roll. Slowly at first, then picking up speed, the car turned out of the driveway into the road.

Ghostlike in the brilliant moon, it sped silent down the long hill. After one harrowing tree-darkened turn, Matt switched on the lights and gently clicked the door to its first catch.

When he was a mile away, he started the motor.

Escape!

MATT pulled up to the gas pump in the gray dawn that was already sticky with heat. Through the dusty, bug-splattered windshield the bloodshot sun peered at him and saw a dark young man in stained work clothes, his face stubbled blackly, his eyes burning wearily. But Matt breathed deep; he drew in the wine of freedom.

Was this Fair Play or Humansville? Matt was too tired and hungry to remember. Whichever it was, all was well.

It seemed a reasonable assumption that Abbie could not find him if she did not know where he was, that she could not teleport herself anywhere she had not already been. When she had dis-

appeared the first time, she had gone to the places in Springfield she knew. She had brought her father from his two-room shanty. She had taken him back to the cabin.

The sleepy attendant approached, and with him came a wash of apprehension to knot his stomach. Money! He had no money. Hopelessly he began to search his pockets. Without money he was stuck here, and all his money was back in his cabin with his clothes and his typewriter and his manila folder of notes.

And then his hand touched something in his hip pocket. Wonderingly, he pulled it out. It was his billfold. He peered at its contents. Four dollars in bills and three hundred in travelers' checks. "Fill it up," he said.

When had he picked up the billfold? Or had he had it all the time? He could have sworn that he had not had it when he was in the cocktail lounge in Springfield. He was almost sure that he had left it in his suit pants. The uncertainty made him vaguely uneasy. Or was it only hunger? He hadn't eaten since toying with Abbie's stolen delicacies yesterday afternoon.

"Where's a good place to eat?" he asked, as the attendant handed him change.

It was an old fellow in coveralls. He pointed a few hundred

feet up the road. "See those trucks parked outside that diner?" Matt nodded. "Usual thing, when you see them outside, you can depend on good food inside. Here it don't mean a thing. Food's lousy. We got a landmark though. Truckers stop to see it." The old fellow cackled. "Name's Lola."

As Matt pulled away, the old man called after him. "Don't make no difference, anyway. No place else open."

Matt parked beside one of the large trailer trucks. Lola? He made a wry face as he got out of the car. He was through with women.

The diner, built in the shape of a railroad car, had a long counter running along one side, but it was filled with truckers in shirt sleeves, big men drinking coffee and smoking and teasing the waitress. Tiredly, Matt slipped into one of the empty booths.

The waitress detached herself from her admirers immediately and came to the booth with a glass of water in one hand, swinging her hips confidently. She had a smoldering, dark beauty, and she was well aware of it. Her black hair was cut short, and her brown eyes and tanned face were smiling. Her skirt and low-cut peasant blouse bulged generously in the right places. Some time—and not too many years in the

future—she would be fat, but right now she was lush, ready to be picked by the right hand. Matt guessed that she would not be a waitress in a small town long. As she put the water on the table, she bent low to demonstrate just how lush she was.

The neckline drooped. Against his will, Matt's eyes drifted toward her.

"What'll you have?" the waitress said softly.

Matt swallowed. "A couple of—hotcakes," he said, "with sausages."

She straightened up slowly, smiling brightly at him. "Stack a pair," she yelled, "with links." She turned around and looked enticingly over her shoulder. "Coffee?"

Matt nodded. He smiled a little to show that he appreciated her attentions. There was no doubt about the fact that she was an attractive girl. In anyone's mind. Any other time . . .

"OUCH!" she said suddenly and straightened. She began to rub her rounded bottom vigorously and cast Matt a hurt, reproachful glance. Slowly her pained expression changed to a roguish smile. She wagged a coy finger at Matt. "Naughty, naughty!" the finger said. Matt stared at her as if she had lost her senses. He shook his head in

bewilderment as she vanished behind the counter. And then he noticed that a couple of the truckers had turned around to glower at him, and Matt became absorbed in contemplating the glass of water.

It made him realize how thirsty he was. He drank the whole glassful, but it didn't seem to help much. He was just as thirsty, just as empty.

Lola wasted no time in bringing Matt's cup of coffee. She carried it casually and efficiently in one hand, not spilling a drop into the saucer. But as she neared Matt the inexplicable happened. She tripped over something invisible on the smooth floor. She stumbled. The coffee flew in a steaming arc and splashed on Matt's shirt with incredible accuracy, soaking in hotly.

Lola gasped, her hand to her mouth. Matt leaped up, pulling his shirt away from his chest, swearing. Lola grabbed a handful of paper napkins and began to dab at his shirt.

"Golly, honey, I'm sorry," she said warmly. "I can't understand how I came to trip."

She pressed herself close to him. Matt could smell the odor of gardenias.

"That's all right," he said, drawing back. "It was an accident."

She followed him up, working

at his shirt. Matt noticed that the truckers were all watching, some darkly, the rest enviously. He slipped back into the booth.

One of the truckers guffawed. "You don't have to spill coffee on me, Lola, to make me steam," he said. The rest of the truckers laughed with him.

"Oh, shut up!" Lola told them. She turned back to Matt. "You all right, honey?"

"Sure, sure," Matt said wearily. "Just bring me the hotcakes." The coffee had cooled now. His shirt felt clammy. Matt thought about accident prones. It had to be an accident. He glanced uneasily around the diner. The only girl here was Lola.

The hotcakes were ready. She was bringing them toward the booth, but it was not a simple process. Matt had never seen slippery hotcakes before this. Lola was so busy that she forgot to swing her hips.

The hotcakes slithered from side to side on the plate. Lola juggled them, tilting the plate back and forth to keep them from sliding off. Her eyes were wide with astonishment; her mouth was a round, red "O"; her forehead was furrowed with concentration. She did an intricate, unconscious dance step to keep from losing the top hotcake.

As Matt watched, fascinated, the sausages, four of them linked

together, started to slip from the plate. With something approaching sentience, they skilled off and disappeared down the low neck of Lola's blouse.

Lola shrieked. She started to wriggle, her shoulders hunched. While she tried to balance the hotcakes with one hand, the other dived into the blouse and hunted around frantically. Matt watched; the truckers watched. Lola hunted and wiggled. The hand that held the plate flew up. The hotcakes scattered.

One hit the nearest trucker in the face. He peeled it off, red and bellowing. "A joker!" He dived off the stool toward Matt.

MATT tried to get up, but the table caught him in his stomach. He climbed up on the seat. The hotcake the trucker had discarded had landed on the head of the man next to him. He stood up angrily.

Lola had finally located the elusive sausages. She drew them out of their intimate hiding place with a shout of triumph. They whipped into the open mouth of the lunging trucker. He stopped, transfixed, strangling.

"Argh-gh-uggle!" he said.

A cup crashed against the wall, close to Matt's head. Matt ducked. If he could get over the back of this booth, he could reach the door. The place was

filled with angry shouts and angrier faces and bulky shoulders approaching. Lola took one frightened look and grabbed Matt around the knees.

"Protect me!" she said wildly.

The air was filled with missiles. Matt reached down to disengage Lola's fear-strengthened arms. He glanced up to see the trucker spitting out the last of the sausages. With a maddened yell, the trucker threw a heavy fist at Matt. Hampered as he was, Matt threw himself back hopelessly. Something ripped. The fist breezed past and crashed through a window.

Matt hung over the back of the booth, head downward, unable to get back up, unable to shake Lola loose. Everywhere he looked he could see rage-enflamed faces. He closed his eyes and surrendered himself to his fate.

From somewhere, above the tumult, came the sound of laughter, like the tinkling of little silver bells.

Then Matt was outside with no idea of how he had got there. In his hand was a strip of thin fabric. Lola's blouse. *Poor Lola*, he thought, as he threw it away. What was his fatal fascination for girls?

Behind him the diner was alive with lights and the crash of dishes and the smacking of fists on flesh. Before long they would

discover that he was gone.

Matt ran to his car. It started to life when he punched the button. He backed it up, screeched it to a stop, jerked into first, and barreled onto the highway. Within twenty seconds, he was doing sixty.

He turned to look back at the diner and almost lost control of the car as he tried to absorb the implications of the contents on the back seat.

Resting neatly there were his typewriter, notes, and all his clothes.

WHEN Matt pulled to a stop on the streets of Clinton, he was feeling easier mentally and much worse physically. The dip in a secluded stream near the road, the change of clothes, and the shave—torturing as it had been in cold water—had refreshed him for a while. But that had worn off, and the lack of a night's sleep and twenty-four hours without food were catching up with him.

Better that, he thought grimly, than Abbie. He could endure anything for a time.

As for the typewriter and the notes and the clothes, there was probably some simple explanation. The one Matt liked best was that Abbie had had a change of heart; she had expected him to leave and she had made his way

easy. She was, Matt thought, a kind-hearted child underneath it all.

The trouble with that explanation was that Matt didn't believe it.

He shrugged. There were more pressing things—money, for instance. Gas was getting low, and he needed to get something in his stomach if he was to keep up his strength for the long drive ahead. He had to cash one of his checks. That seemed simple enough. The bank was at the corner of this block. It was eleven o'clock. The bank would be open. Naturally they would cash a check.

But for some reason Matt felt uneasy.

Matt walked into the bank and went directly to a window. He countersigned one of the checks and presented it to the teller, a thin little man with a wispy mustache and a bald spot on top of his head. The teller compared the signatures and turned to the shelf at his side where bills stood in piles, some still wrapped. He counted out four twenties, a ten, a five, and five ones.

"Here you are, sir," he said politely.

Matt accepted it only because his hand was outstretched and the teller put the money in it. His eyes were fixed in horror upon a wrapped bundle of twenty dol-

lar bills which was slowly rising from the shelf. It climbed leisurely over the top of the cage.

"What's the matter, sir?" the teller asked in alarm. "Do you feel sick?"

Matt nodded once and then tore his eyes away and shook his head vigorously. "No," he gasped. "I'm all right." He took a step back from the window.

"Are you sure? You don't look well at all."

WITH a shrinking feeling, Matt felt something fumble its way into his right hand coat pocket. He plunged his hand in after it. His empty stomach revolved in his abdomen. He could not mistake the touch of crisp paper. He stooped quickly beneath the teller's window. The teller leaned out. Matt straightened up, the package of bills in his hand.

"I guess you must have dropped this," he muttered.

The teller glanced at the shelf and back at the sheaf of twenties. "I don't see how—But thank you! That's the funniest—"

Matt pushed the bills under the grillwork. "Yes, isn't it," he agreed hurriedly. "Well, thank you."

"Thank you!"

Matt lifted his hand. The money lifted with it. The package stuck to his hand as if it

had been attached with glue.

"Excuse me," he said feebly. "I can't seem to get rid of this money." He shook his hand. The money clung stubbornly. He shook his hand again, violently. The package of bills did not budge.

"Very funny," the teller said, but he was not smiling. From his tone of voice, Matt suspected that he thought money was a very serious business indeed. The teller reached under the bars and caught hold of one end of the package. "You can let go now," he said. "Let go!"

Matt tried to pull his hand away. "I can't!" he said, breathing heavily.

The teller tugged, Matt tugged. "I haven't time to play games," the teller panted. "Let go!"

"I don't want it," Matt said frantically. "But it seems to be stuck. Look!" He showed his hand, fingers spread wide.

The teller grabbed the bundle of bills with both hands and braced his feet against the front of his cubicle. "Let go!" he shouted.

Matt pulled hard. Suddenly the tension on his arm vanished. His arm whipped back. The teller disappeared into the bottom of the cubicle. Something clanged hollowly. Matt looked at his hand. The bills were gone.

Slowly the teller's head ap-

peared from the concealed part of the cubicle. It came up, accompanied by groans, with a red swelling in the middle of the bald spot. After it came the teller's hand, waving the package of twenties triumphantly. The other hand was rubbing his head.

"Are you still here?" he demanded, slamming the bills down at his side. "Get out of this bank. And if you ever come back I'll have you arrested for—for disturbing the peace."

"Don't worry," Matt said. "I won't be back." His face suddenly grew pale. "Stop" he said frantically, waving his arms. "Go back!"

The teller stared at him, fearfully, indecisively.

THE bundle of twenties was rising over the top of the cage again. Instinctively, Matt grabbed them out of the air. His mind clicked rapidly. If he was to keep out of jail, there was only one thing to do. He advanced on the teller angrily, waving the bills in the air.

"What do you mean by throwing these at me!"

"Throwing money?" the teller said weakly. "Me?"

Matt shook the bills in front of the teller's nose. "What do you call this?"

The clerk glanced at the money and down at his side. "Oh, no!"



he moaned.

"I have a good mind," Matt said violently, "to complain to the president of this bank." He slammed the bills down. He closed his eyes in a silent prayer "Tellers throwing money around!"

He took his hand away. Blissfully, the money stayed where it was on the counter. The teller reached for it feebly. The package shifted. He reached again. The bills slid away. He stuck both hands through the slot and groped wildly. The money slipped between his arms into the cage.

Matt stood shifting his weight from foot to foot, paralyzed between flight and fascination. The bundle winged its way around in the cage like a drunken butterfly. Wide-eyed and frantic, the teller chased it from side to side. He made great diving swoops for it, his hands cupped into a net. He crept up on it and pounced, cat-like, only to have to slip between his fingers at the last moment. Suddenly he stopped, frozen. His hands flew to his head.

"My God!" he screamed. "What am I doing? I'm mad!"

Matt backed toward the door. The other clerks and tellers were running toward the center of the disturbance. Matt saw a dignified gentleman with a paunch stand up inside a railed-in office and hurdle the obstacle with fine

show of athletic form.

Matt turned and ran, dodging the guard at the gate. "Get the doctor," he yelled.

From somewhere came the sound of a tinkling of little silver bells.

There was no doubt in Matt's mind as he gunned his car out of Clinton. Abbie was after him. He had not been free a moment. All the time she had known where to find him. He was the fleeing mouse, happy in his illusion of freedom—until the cat's paw comes down on his back. Matt thought of the Furies—awful Alecto, Tisiphone, Megaera—in their blood-stained robes and serpent hair pursuing him across the world with their terrible whips. But they all had Abbie's face.

Matt drove north toward Kansas City, thirsty, starving, half dead from fatigue, wondering hopelessly where it would end.

DARKENING shades of violet were creeping up the eastern sky as Matt reached Lawrence, Kansas. He had not tried to stop in Kansas City. Something had drawn him on, some buried hope that still survived feebly, and when, five miles from Lawrence, he had seen Mount Oread rise against the sunset, the white spires and red tile roofs of the university gleaming like beacons,

he had known what it was.

Here was a citadel of knowledge, a fortress of the world's truth against black waves of ignorance and superstition. Here, in this saner atmosphere of study and reflection, logic and cool consideration, here, if anywhere, he could shake off this dark conviction of doom that sapped his will. Here, surely, he could think more clearly, act more decisively, rid himself of this demon of vengeance that rode his shoulders. Here he could get help.

He drove down Massachusetts Street, his body leaden with fatigue, his eyes red-rimmed and shadowed searching restlessly from side to side. His hunger was only a dull ache; he could almost forget it. But his thirst was a live thing. Somewhere—he could not remember where—he had eaten and drunk, but they had vanished from his throat as he swallowed.

Is there no end? he thought wildly. *Is there no way out?* There was, of course. There always is. *Always—Mary had a little lamb . . .*

Impulse swung his car into the diagonal parking space. First he was going to drink and eat, come what may. He walked into the restaurant. Summer students filled the room, young men in sport shirts and slacks, girls in gay cotton prints and saddle shoes, laughing, talking, eating . . .

Swaying in the doorway, Matt watched them, bleary-eyed. *Once I was like them*, he thought dully. *Young and alive and conscious that these were the best years I would ever know. Now I am old and used up, doomed . . .*

He slumped down at a table near the front, filled with a great surge of sorrow that all happiness was behind him. He was conscious that the waitress was beside him. "Soup," he mumbled. "Soup and milk." He did not look up.

"Yes, sir," she said. Her voice sounded vaguely familiar, but they are all the same, all the voices of youth. He had eaten here before. He did not look up.

Slowly he raised the glass of water to his lips. It went down his throat in dusty gulps. It spread out in his stomach in cool, blessed waves. Matt closed his eyes thankfully. The hunger pains began to return. For a moment Matt regretted the soup and wished he had ordered steak.

After the soup, he thought.

The soup came. Matt lifted a spoonful. He let it trickle down his throat.

"Feelin' better, Mr. Wright," said the waitress.

MATT looked up. He strangled. It was Abbie! Abbie's face bending over him. Matt choked and spluttered. Students turned

to stare. Matt gazed around the room wildly. The girls—they all looked like Abbie. He stood up, almost knocking over the table as he ran to the front door.

With his hand on the door knob, he stopped, paralyzed. Staring in at him, through the glass, was a pair of bloodshot eyes set above an unruly black nest. Stooped, powerful shoulders loomed behind the face. As Matt stared back, the eyes lighted up as if they recognized him.

"Argh-gh!" Matt screamed.

He staggered back and turned on trembling legs. He tottered toward the back of the restaurant. The aisle seemed full of feet put out to trip him. He stumbled to the swinging kitchen door and broke through into odors of frying and baking that no longer moved him.

The cook looked up, startled. Matt ran on through the kitchen and plunged through the back door. The alley was dark. Matt barked his shins on a box. He limped on, cursing. At one end of the alley a street light spread a pool of welcome. Matt ran toward it. He was panting. His heart beat fast. Then it almost stopped. A shadow lay along the mouth of the alley. A long shadow with huge shoulders and something that waved from the chin.

Matt spun. He ran frantically toward the other end of the alley.

His mind raced like an engine that has broken its governor. Nightmarish terror streaked through his arms and legs; they seemed distant and leaden. But slowly he approached the other end. He came nearer. Nearer.

A shadow detached itself from the dark back walls. But it was no shadow. Matt slowed, stopped. The shadow came closer, towering tall above him. Matt cowered, unable to move. Closer. Two long arms reached out toward him. Matt quivered. He waited for the end. The arms wrapped around him. They drew him close.

"Son, son," Jenkins said weakly. "Yore the first familiar face I seen all day."

Matt's heart started beating again. He drew back, extracting his face from Jenkin's redolent beard.

"Cain't understand what's goin' on these days," Jenkins said shaking his head sadly, "but I got a feelin' Ab's behind it. Just as that fight got goin' good, the whole shebang disappeared and here I was. Where am I, son?"

"Kansas," Matt said. "Lawrence, Kansas."

"Kansas?" Jenkins wobbled his beard. "Last I heard, Kansas was dry, but it can't be half as dry as I am. I recollect hearin' Quantrell burned this town. Too bad it didn't stay burned. Here I was without a penny in my pocket

and only what was left in the bottle I had in my hand to keep me from dyin' of thirst. Son," he said sorrowfully, "somethin's got to be done. It's Ab, ain't it?"

Matt nodded.

"Son," Jenkins went on, "I'm gettin' too old for this kind of life. I should be sittin' on my porch with a jug in my lap, just a-rockin' slow. Somethin's got to be done about that gal."

"I'm afraid it's too late for that," Matt said.

"That's the trouble," Jenkins said mournfully. "Been too late for these six years. Son, yore an edyicated man. What we gonna do?"

"I can't tell you, Jenkins," Matt said. "I can't even think about it." *Mary had a little lamb* . . . "If I did, it wouldn't work. But if you want to hit me, go ahead. I'm the man who's responsible."

Jenkins put a large hand on his shoulder. "Don't worry about it, son. If it weren't you, it would've been some other man. When Ab gets a notion, you cain't beat it out of her. I learned that years ago."

Matt pulled out his billfold and handed Jenkins a five dollar bill. "Here. Kansas isn't dry any more. Go get something and try to forget. Maybe when you're finished with that, things will have changed."

"Yore a good boy, son. Don't do nothin' rash."

Mary had a little lamb . . .

JENKINS turned, raising his hand in a parting salute. Matt watched the mountainous shadow dwindle, as if it was his last contact with the living. Then Jenkins rounded the corner and was out of sight.

Matt walked slowly back to Massachusetts Street. There was one more thing he had to do.

As he reached the car, Matt sensed Abbie's nearness. The awareness was so sharp that it was almost physical. He felt her all around, like dancing motes of dust that are only visible under certain conditions, half angel, half devil, half love, half hate. It was an unendurable mixture, an impossible combination to live with. The extremes were too great.

Matt sighed. It was not Abbie's fault. If it was anyone's fault, it was his. Inevitably, he would pay for it. The Universe has an immutable law of action and reaction.

It was dark as Matt drove along Seventh Street. The night was warm, and the infrequent street lights were only beacons for nightflying insects. Matt turned a corner and pulled up in front of a big old house surrounded by an ornamental iron fence. The house was a two-

story stucco, painted yellow—or perhaps it had once been white—and the fence sagged in places.

Most of the houses in Lawrence are old. The finest and the newest are in the west, on the ridge overlooking the Wakarusa Valley, but university professors cannot afford such sites or such houses.

Matt rang the bell. In a moment the door opened. Blinking out of the light was Professor Franklin, his faculty adviser.

"Matt!" Franklin said. "I didn't recognize you for a second. What are you doing back so soon? I thought you were secluded in the Ozarks. Don't tell me you have your thesis finished already?"

"No, Dr. Franklin," Matt said wearily, "but I'd like to talk to you for a moment if you can spare the time."

"Come in, come in. I'm just grading some papers." Franklin grimaced. "Freshman papers."

Franklin led the way into his book-cluttered study off the living room. His glasses were resting on top of a pile of papers. He picked them up, slipped them on, and turned to Matt. He was a tall man, a little stooped now in his sixties, with gray, unruly hair.

"Matt!" he exclaimed. "You aren't looking well. Have you been sick?"

"In a way," Matt said, "you might call it that. How would you treat someone who believes

in the reality of psychic phenomena?"

Franklin shrugged. "Lots of people believe in it and are still worthwhile, reliable members of society. Conan Doyle, for instance—"

"And could prove it," Matt added.

"Hallucinations? Then it becomes more serious. I suppose psychiatric treatment would be necessary. Remember, Matt, I'm a teacher, not a practitioner. But look here, you aren't suggesting that—?"

Matt nodded. "I can prove it, and I don't want to. Would it make the world any better, any happier?"

"The truth is always important—for itself if for nothing else. But you can't be serious—"

"Dead serious." Matt shivered. "Suppose I could prove that there were actually such things as levitation, teleportation, telepathy. There isn't any treatment, is there, Professor, when a man goes sane?"

"Matt! You are sick, aren't you?"

"Suppose," Matt went on relentlessly, "that your glasses should float over and come to rest on my nose. What would you say then?"

"I'd say you need to see a psychiatrist," Franklin said worriedly. "You do, Matt."

HIS glasses gently detached themselves and floated leisurely through the air and adjusted themselves on Matt's face. Franklin stared blindly.

"Matt!" he exclaimed, groping. "That isn't very funny."

Matt sighed and handed the glasses back. Franklin put them back on, frowning.

"Suppose," Matt said, "I should float in the air?" As he spoke, he felt himself lifting.

Franklin looked up. "Come down here!"

Matt came back into his chair.

"These tricks," Franklin said sternly, "aren't very seemly. Go to a doctor, Matt. Don't waste any time. And," he added, taking off his glasses and polishing them vigorously, "I think I'll see my oculist in the morning."

Matt sighed again. "I was afraid that was the way it would be. Abbie?"

Franklin stared.

"Yes, Mr. Wright." The words, soft and gentle, came out of mid-air.

Franklin's eyes searched the room frantically.

"Thanks," Matt said.

"Leave this house!" Franklin said, his voice trembling. "I've had enough of these pranks!"

Matt got up and went to the front door. "I'm afraid Dr. Franklin doesn't believe in you. But I do. Good-by, Dr. Franklin."

I don't think a doctor would cure what I've got."

When he left, Franklin was searching the living room.

THERE was something strangely final about the drive through the campus. Along Oread street on top of Mount Oread, overlooking the Kaw Valley on the north and the Warkarusa on the south, the university buildings stood dark and deserted. Only the Student Union was lighted and the library and an occasional bulletin board. The long arms of the administration building were gloomy, and the night surrounded the white arches of Hoch Auditorium . . .

He pulled into the parking area behind the apartment building and got out and walked slowly to the entrance. He hoped that Guy wouldn't be in.

Matt opened the door. The apartment was empty. He turned on a living room lamp. The room was in typical disarray. A sweater on the davenport, books in the chair.

In the dark, Matt went to the kitchen. He bumped into the stove and swore, and rubbed his hip. *Mary had a little lamb . . .* Somewhere around here . . .

Some hidden strength kept Matt from dropping in his tracks. He should have collapsed from exhaustion and hunger long ago.

But soon there would be time to rest . . . *and everywhere that Mary went . . .* He stooped. There it was. The sugar. The sugar. He had always liked blue sugar.

He found a package of cereal and got the milk from the refrigerator. He found a sharp knife in the drawer and sliced the box in two. He dumped the contents into a bowl and poured the milk over it and sprinkled the sugar on top. The blue sugar . . . *with fleece as white as snow . . .* He was very sleepy.

He lifted a spoonful of the cereal to his mouth. He chewed it for a moment. He swallowed . . .

And it was gone.

He grabbed the knife and plunged it toward his chest.

And his hand was empty.

He was very sleepy. His head drooped. Suddenly it straightened up. The hissing had stopped. A long time ago. He turned on the light and saw that the burner was turned off, the one that never lighted from the pilot, the one he had stumbled against.

The blue insect poison had failed and the knife and the gas.

He felt a great wave of despair. It was no use. There was no way out.

HE walked back to the living room, brushed the sweater off the davenport, and sat down. The last hope—beyond which there is

no hope—was gone. And yet, in a way, he was glad that his tricks had not worked. Not that he was still alive but because it had been the coward's way. All along he had been trying to dodge the only solution that faced him at every turn. He had refused to recognize it, but now there was no other choice.

It was the hard way, the bitter way. The way that was not a quick death but a slow one. But he owed it to the world to sacrifice himself on the altar he had raised, under the knife he had honed, wielded by the arm that he had given strength and skill and consciousness.

He looked up. "All right, Abbie," he sighed. "I'll marry you."

The words hung in the air. Matt waited, filled with a fear that was half hope.

Was it too late for anything but vengeance?

But Abbie filled his arms, cuddled against him in homely blue gingham, scarcely bigger than a child but with the warmth and softness of a woman. She was more beautiful than Matt had remembered. Her arms crept around his neck.

"Will you, Mr. Wright?" she whispered. "Will you?"

A vision built itself up in his mind. The omniscient, omnipotent wife, fearsome when her powers were sheathed, terrible in

anger or disappointment. No man, he thought, was ever called upon for greater sacrifice. But he was the appointed lamb.

He sighed. "God help me," he said, "I will."

He kissed her. Her lips were sweet and passionate.

MATTHEW Wright was lucky, of course, far luckier than he deserved to be, than any man deserves to be.

The bride was beautiful. But more important and much more significant—

The bride was happy.

—JAMES E. GUNN

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SPECIALIST

By ROBERT SHECKLEY



THE photon storm struck without warning, pouncing upon the Ship from behind a bank of giant red stars. Eye barely had time to flash a last second warning through Talker before it was upon them.

It was Talker's third journey into deep space, and his first light-pressure storm. He felt a sudden pang of fear as the Ship yawed violently, caught the force of the wave-front and careened end for end. Then the fear was gone, replaced by a strong pulse of excitement.

Why should he be afraid, he asked himself—hadn't he been

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Recruiting all the parts of a ship works great...unless you suddenly run out of recruits!