

The Mighty Dead

William Campbell Gault

The background of the lower half of the page is a teal color. It features an abstract pattern of various purple geometric shapes, including vertical and horizontal bars, a diagonal bar, a curved bar, and a large triangle at the bottom center.

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the mighty dead

by William Campbell Gault

What would it be like to live in a world which has conquered the near planets but abolished all literature? Bill Gault gives us a look at a world like this—in a not too distant future which finds all our pressure groups united to rule the roost.

On its surface the choice was an easy one—Doak Parker's career in Washington against a highly suspect country girl he had just met.

Doak Parker was thinking of June, when the light flashed. He was thinking of the two months' campaign and the very probable probability of his knocking her off this week-end. It was going to be a conquest to rank among his best. It was going to be....

The buzzer buzzed, the light flashed and the image of Ryder appeared on his small desk-screen. Ryder said, "Come in, Doak. A little job for the week-end."

No, Doak thought, no, no, no! Not this week-end. Not this particular triumphant looming week-end. No! He said, "Be right there, Chief."

Ryder was sitting behind his desk when Doak entered. Ryder was a man of about sixty, with a lined, weary face and a straggling mustache. He nodded at the chair across the desk from him.

Ryder depressed a button on his desk and the screen beyond him began to glow. Ryder said, "An electronic transcript of a phone call I received this morning from former Senator Elmer Arnold. You know who he is, I guess, Doak."

"Author of the Arnold Law?" Doak smiled. "Who doesn't?"

Then the image of former Senator Arnold came on the screen. He didn't look any more than a hundred and ten years old, a withered and thin lipped man with a complexion like ashes. He began to talk.

"Ryder, I guess you know I'm no scatterbrain and I guess you know I'm not one to cry wolf—but there's something damned funny going on in the old Fisher place on the Range Road. You better send a man down here, and I mean quick. You have him contact me."

The image faded, the rasping voice ceased. Doak sighed and looked at his nails.

"Senile, you're thinking?" Ryder said quietly.

"I wasn't thinking at all, Chief," Doak said.

"Not even about that new one, that June?" the Chief asked, smiling.

Doak looked up, startled. "Is there no privacy? Are there no sanctuaries?"

"Not from Security," Ryder said. "But don't be disturbed. There's no law against *that* yet excepting some of the old ones—and who has time for the old ones?"

"As long as we're being frank," Doak said, "he mentioned the old Fisher place and a road as though you should know them. Friends of yours?"

"Friends? That's our home town. Senator Arnold was very instrumental in my Department climb." Ryder paused. "And no crackpot."

"I'll buy that," Doak agreed. "He was the man who first saw the power in combining pressure groups. He surely made some strange bedfellows."

"Any lobbyist would be a strange bedfellow, I've been told," the Chief answered. "The Arnold Law has saved us one hell of a lot of work, Doak, and saved the Department money."

"Yes, sir," Doak said. "I'm to understand this couldn't be put off until Monday?"

Ryder nodded.

"And no other Security Officer would do?"

"No other."

Doak rose. "Anything else—*sir*?"

Ryder smiled. "Just one. As a guess, what do you think it is, in the old Fisher place, on the Range Road?"

"Readers," Doak answered, "or why would the—uh, Mr. Arnold be so worried."

Ryder chuckled. "I can see them now, in the curtained room, huddling over an old railroad timetable. I think your guess is sound, Doak." He rose. "And there'll be other week-ends. That girl can wait. She isn't going to spoil."

"But *I* might explode," Doak said. "Well, it will be triple-time. That's some consolation. Enough for a new video set—I need one in the bathroom."

It was still a half hour to quitting time and Doak went back to his desk. He sat there, trying to remember the history of Senator Arnold. It was all on the tape in the Biography Center, he knew, but he didn't want that much information.

Subversive kicked around in his memory and the phrase "free press." And then he remembered the Censors. The religious, the political, the scientific, the capitalist, the communist, the ridiculous and the absurd.

Arnold had unified the Censors and they had made strange bedfellows. For where one bit of ink and paper might be anti-Christian, the next might be anti-anti-Christian and the next anti-anti-anti—ad absurdum. And sex? Where couldn't one find sex in print, even among the prissy writers? For wasn't a large part of it boy meets girl? And they didn't meet to exchange election buttons—that much was certain.

Well, there were the P.T.A. and the N.A.M. and the fine if disguised hand of the Lenin lovers and the S.P.C.A. who didn't like dogs to play a sub-human part in the world of letters. All these, fighting each other, until Senator Arnold came forth.

The Senator had never enjoyed a favorable press and had a habit of saying things that looked silly, three years later, in print. The Senator was the new spokesman for the Censors.

And those who loathed sex or Christians or Republicans or Democrats or the Big Ten or the small snifter were unified under this noble man who read with his lips.

They were for him. And they established the biggest lobby ever to crawl out of the woodwork in Washington. They had their day.

The printers fought a little but were offered jobs in Hollywood. The paper manufacturers were promised all the government map-work plus a new sheaf of picture magazines. The publishers were all rich and ready to retire anyway.

The writers? They were disorganized because some were rich and some weren't, the game being what it was, and the difference in viewpoint between a rich and a non-rich writer makes McCarthy and Malenkov look like brothers.

There shall be in that area of the galaxy under American control no material of a literary or non-literary, educational or non-educational, pertinent or impertinent nature, which is printed, written, enscribed, engraved, mimeographed, dupligrated, electro-graved, arti-scribed, teleprinted....

That wasn't the exact wording, but close.

Simple enough—how can there be subversive literature if there is no literature?

There were still sex, Democrats, Lenin lovers, some religion and two Republicans (on Venus). There was, of course, no Post Office Department, nor need for any.

On Connecticut Ave (S.E.) there was a girl named June waiting for a call from Doak. She had been in a negative frame of mind for two months, but the weekend ahead had shown promise of bringing matters to a head and maybe, considering everything, well, what the hell....

Doak looked at the newsscreen over the water cooler and saw, *Stormy and some rain. Temp. 93. 1730.*

A gong sounded.

The other wage-slaves rose with assorted sighs, looking forward to the weekend. Doak dialed June's number.

His outside screen lighted up and there she was, her hair in curlers but luscious as a peach. "Hi," she said. And then frowned at the seriousness of his smile.

"Look, June," he said, "I—I've got to go out of town."

"I'll bet," she said.

"So help me, kid, it's...." Well, he couldn't say what it was. "I'll phone you, though, as soon—"

His screen went blank. He dialed again, and again. The screen stayed blank.

Ryder came out from his office, his hat on, looking weary. He managed a smile for Doak. "You'd better get to the cashier before he closes, if you haven't already."

"Yes, sir," Doak said. "Dubbinville, wasn't it?"

"Dubbinville," Ryder said. "My old Wisconsin home. You'll find it beautiful this time of the year. You'll love it, Doak."

"Yes, sir," Doak said.

The cashier was just getting ready to close when Doak came to the window. "Week-end trip," Doak said. "Secret."

"How much?"

Doak faced him squarely. "Two thousand."

The cashier seemed to wince but Doak's gaze didn't relent. He was only three years behind in his taxes now and this extra moola on the swindle-sheet could bring him two months closer. Anyone who was only two years behind on his taxes was considered a very solid citizen.

The cashier reached down to pull up four packets of twenties. "Well," he said quietly, "it's not *my* money." He tossed the two thousand out to Doak and yawned. "Remind me about it Monday if I forget, will you? I'm not much good the end of the week."

Or any other part of the week, Doak thought. He said, "If I'm back, Monday. If I'm not I'll scream for more."

"You do that well," the cashier said and reached up to turn off the light overhead.

It was hot outside. The sun seemed to be imprisoned in the white corridor that stretched for miles between the government buildings and the asphalt of the parking lot glittered like broken glass.



From the mines of Mars the asphalt came, the best paving surface known to man. And what was Mars but mines? With all their grand talk, who wanted to

leave Mother Earth? What was Venus but a sanctuary, a vacation spot, and what was Mars but mines? When a big cog like the Chief could send a lonely man all the way to Dubbinville because of a neighbor's summons, how could they expect little cogs to grow up to galactic thinking?

Dubbinville and the heat of a Wisconsin summer—and June waiting in the apartment on Connecticut (S.E.). Doak swore quietly and thoroughly and stepped into the oven that was his Chev.

The cooling system started with the motor and the interior was comfortable by the time he pulled into the stream of home-bound traffic. It was a fourteen-lane highway and jammed to the curbs.



There were only two signals in eight miles but traffic moved in fits and starts at this time of day. He could see the first light when he was a hundred yards from it and was sure he could make it.

But it turned amber when he was still fifteen yards from the corner and the force-field actuated his traffic-servant and he heard the brake control click. Well, it avoided accidents but it sure as hell was rough on brake linings. He skidded to a stop.

Cars, cars, cars for miles. And the glittering ashment and all the boys and gals going home to plot the week-end. No magazines, no books, no papers with their social columns, so the girls would be out and looking around.

And the men would be out and looking around and what more did you need?

The light changed and his brake was released and he moved out at the head of his line, thinking about Dubbinville, trying to imagine it, some hamlet tucked away in a Wisconsin hill, dreaming of yesterday. Great, fine, dandy!

In his apartment all his video sets yammered at him and he stopped in the doorway, staring. They should have turned off when he'd thrown the master switch this morning.

In the hallway, he checked the switch, and it read *off*. Must be shorted....

He went from dinette to kitchen to bedroom to living room, turning off each set individually. All of them had the same program, Milton Berle IV. He liked that

better than wrestling though not much.

In his chrome and plastic kitchen he dialed June's number.

Her hair wasn't in the curlers. It was golden and braided and high on her classic head. She said, "Your picture isn't coming through. Who is this, please?"

Doak said in a falsetto, "Guess."

The screen went blank.

Doak snapped the video switch to *on* and dialed Lateral-American. A brunette with vivid blue eyes came into view.

"A priority to Dubbinville, Wisconsin, first trip possible," Doak said and gave her Security's code number.

"Dubbinville?" she said and frowned. She consulted a station box out of his view and looked up again. "You'll have to take surface transportation from Milwaukee. It's only about twenty miles from there in Waukesha County."

"Good enough. And when's the first to Milwaukee?"

"At nineteen hundred, ramp eighty-seven. Kindly pick up your ticket at Booth sixty-two." The screen went blank.

The ticket wasn't really though the name had persisted. The 'ticket' was a coin. Doak looked in his refrigerator and there was nothing worthwhile in there. He'd eat at the airport.

He looked at the phone and decided against it. He went into the bedroom and threw some shirts and socks and a pair of clean pajamas into his durapelt bag.

Dubbinville—and June out looking around. What a lousy deal!

II

The great ship lay sleekly quiet under the slanting sun, the passengers like ants measured against its giant hull. Clink, clink, clink went the coins into the counting box, the light over each seat going on with the clink of the coin.

Then they were seated, the lights all on, and the tractor was pulling the giant to the channelled runway, guarded by the blast walls.

Milwaukee, here I come.

The whirr of the rolling wheels, the reverberations from the blast walls, a crescendo of sound, and they were free of earth. An accelerating, effortless flight, a faint tremor as they passed the sonic barrier, then no sensory impressions at all.

Flight as free as the wind's passage but more silent. Through the visacrys windows a blur of blue-green. Speed without strain, power without tumult.

Doak relaxed and for the first time since the Chief's summons he wasn't thinking of June. He was thinking of Man, from the cave to Venus, from the wheel to free flight. And something out of his childhood memory came to mind.

*Studios let me sit
And hold high converse with the mighty dead*

Where had he heard that? Some Scotch poet, it must have been, for his mother recited only the Scotch poets. *Studios let me sit*—in front of a video set, to watch the wrestling?

And hold high converse with the mighty dead—not in this world where there was only tomorrow, not in this world of no books. There were no writers on television—they had no need to attract an audience. They *had* an audience. An audience that would watch wrestling would watch anything.

So the ad men took over the duties of the semi-writers who had prepared the radio programs. Ad men offended nobody, even those with denture breath. That could be cured and so could acne, B.O., straight hair and seam squirrels.

Hey! he thought suddenly. *Watch where you're thinking, Doak Parker.*

A government man, a Security Officer, he straightened in his seat as the stewardess came along the aisle.

She smiled at him, "Everything all right, Mr. Parker?"

"Dandy," Doak said. "Great, fine! Why?"

She paused, disconcerted "I beg your pardon?"

"Why shouldn't everything be all right? Lateral-American, the skyway to the stars, right?"

She smiled "Absolutely correct."

"*And Milwaukee,*" Doak added. "Do you only handle the earth runs?"

"Until next year," she said. "I'm new."

"I'm old," Doak said. "Is there anything to drink on board?"

"Water, Mr. Parker."

"I'm not *that* old," he said.

She glanced at her watch. "We'll be in Milwaukee in six minutes. And that's the beer town."

But he had no time for a glass of beer. The limousine took him to the elevated station and the last car for Dubbinville was leaving in three minutes.

It was a nine-minute trip. He'd picked up an hour, coming west, and used but thirty-three minutes. It was still only seven o'clock when the huge elevated car hissed to a stop in front of the Dubbinville station.

There was a smell to the place, a smell of sun-warmed grass and fruit blossoms, of lilacs and quiet rains. Doak stood on the platform, surveying the winding main street leading up into the gentle hills. People on porches and teenagers in front of the drugstore. A reddish-brown setter padded past on some secret business of his own.

There was no whiz, no whir, no clank, no squeal, no grind. This was Dubbinville, U.S.A.

The station agent was picking up a pair of film boxes, as Doak walked over. He smiled at Doak. "Beautiful evening, isn't it?"

"It certainly is. Is there—a place to stay in town, a hotel?"

The station agent shook his head. "No hotel. But you could stay at Mrs. Klein's. She takes in boarders." He pointed with a bony forefinger. "That grey house with the blue shutters, right on the curve there."

"Thank you," Doak said. "What's the population here?"

"Around eight hundred, last census, though we had a couple families move in since then. Hasn't changed much the last hundred years."

"Retired farmers, mostly?" Doak asked.

"Mmmm, I guess. Just—people."

People... Which meant nothing and everything. Doak had turned away before he remembered. Then he turned back. "Oh, yes, and Senator Arnold? Where does he live?"

"Big house, over the hill," the agent said. "Only big house around here—you can't miss it. Got a high stone fence all around it and two vicious dogs. God knows what he's scared of." This was a different man from the one who had remarked on the beauty of the evening.

"Thanks," Doak said. "Thanks again."

Political resentment—or some local feud? Doak went along the platform to the single step that led to the street.

There was a breeze from the east, cooling the warm air. He turned in at the drug store and could scarcely believe his eyes.

Bent wire chairs and marble-topped tables with bent wire legs. No toasters, video sets, geiger counters, ray guns or portable garbage detergents.

But dim and cool and with a high marble fountain. "A lime-ade," Doak said, "with a sprig of mint."

The man behind the fountain wore a blue jacket over his white shirt. He had a thin face and a high-domed head and intelligent blue eyes.

Doak sat on one of the high wire stools and lighted a cigarette. "Hot day, was it?"

"Hot enough. But we get the night breeze. Stranger in town?"

"From Milwaukee," Doak said. "Out to visit Senator Arnold."

"Oh." The man set the drink in front of Doak.

"Trying to talk him into leaving some money to the University," Doak added. "Guess he's a pretty hard man to get money from."

"I hear he is. I wouldn't know about it. He—doesn't shop in town."

The drink was freshly flavorful, cool as springwater. Doak rubbed the beaded moisture with a thumb. "Pretty town," he said. "Pretty country around here."

"Peaceful," the man agreed. "I've never been anywhere else, so I couldn't judge it right, I guess—but then I've never had the urge to go anywhere else, so it must be all right."

"These days," Doak said, "a man doesn't need to go anywhere else. They bring the world right to you."

"I guess. Hear they're having a hard time getting Venus populated. I guess people aren't as rootless as the planners figured."

By "the planners" the man undoubtedly meant THAT WASHINGTON CROWD. Doak finished his drink and went up the street to the grey house with the blue shutters on the curve.

There was a woman sitting on the front porch, a short and heavy woman with dark hair and brown eyes. She smiled at him and said, "Good evening," without rising.

"Mrs. Klein?" Doak asked and she nodded. He said, "The station agent told me you rented rooms and served meals. My name is Doak Parker."

"A pleasure, Mr. Parker. If you'll go through the living room and take that door at the east end of it, you'll come to a hall. The room at the back of the hall's the one, if you'd like to look at it." She didn't move from her chair.

He went into the dim living room and through the door and down the hall. A mahogany bed with a patchwork quilt for a spread, a mahogany dresser and a huge wicker chair, upholstered in a bright chintz. It was a chintzy house.



He looked out the back window and saw a neat lawn, bordered with flowering shrubs. He put his grip on the floor and came back to the living room.

There were windows along the front of this room and they were open. He could see Mrs. Klein in her chair and a girl standing next to her.

There was no reason for him to pause but he did. He'd heard Mrs. Klein say, "Another meeting tonight, Martha?"

"Yes." The girl's voice was defensive.

"Why—why, Martha? Don't you realize the danger of—oh, Martha!"

"Mother, please. There's no danger. We're careful."

Doak coughed and walked out again onto the porch. The girl standing there was as dark as her mother but slim and long-legged and vividly beautiful.

Mrs. Klein said, "My daughter Martha, Mr. Parker. You liked the room?"

"It's fine," he said and to Martha, "How do you do?"

"How do you do, Mr. Parker? You've had supper?"

He nodded and lied, "In Milwaukee. I'm up here to try and get some money out of Senator Arnold. I wonder if this might be a good time to see him."

Mrs. Klein said, "I doubt if anytime is a good time to see him. You're a salesman, Mr. Parker?"

"No, no. It's philanthropy I'm concerned with. Mr. Arnold's old enough to start thinking about his benefactors."

"He'll probably leave it all to the dogs," Mrs. Klein said. "And you be careful of them, Mr. Parker."

"That I will," Doak said. "I think I'll walk up there now. Not much of a walk, I understand. Just over the hill, isn't it?"

It was the girl who answered. "That's right. I'm going that way myself. I'll be glad to show you the house."

Mrs. Klein said, "You're leaving so soon, Martha?"

"Right now. I'll be home early. Don't fret about me, Mother."

They went down the walk together, Doak and Martha, and he had forgotten June and the Department and all the girls who would be out, looking, tonight in Washington.

She walked easily at his side, poised and quiet.

He said, "Do you work in town?"

She nodded. "For an attorney. I was going to law school myself until Dad died."

"Oh," he said.

He wondered at his lack of words, and the strange sense of—almost of inferiority glimmering in him. She hadn't said anything or done anything to place him at a disadvantage but he knew this was no less for the casual pitch.

They came to the crest of the hill and saw the dying sun low in the west. The quiet was almost absolute. About a hundred yards on the other side of the ridge was a road leading off to the south. On the right side of this road was the big house with the high stone fence.

Doak said quietly, "There's a few sentences that have been bothering me all day. I wonder if you'd recognize them. They're, 'Studious, let me sit and hold high converse with the mighty dead.' One of the Scotch poets probably."

"Thomson," she said, "from his *Seasons*." She looked straight ahead.

"I'm not sure I understand exactly what he meant," Doak said.

"He meant—reading." She turned to look at him. "This is Senator Arnold's house, Mr. Parker. You might ask him what Thomson meant."

Her smile was brief and cool. She walked on.

Behind the fence, the dogs started to bark. In the huge gatepost was a pair of paneled doors about three feet high, the lower edges about four feet from the ground. A sign read, *Visitors, kindly use this phone*.

Doak opened the double doors and lifted the phone. As he did so a scanning light went on in the weatherproof niche. Someone said, "Yes?"

"Officer Parker of Security. I believe I'm expected."

"One moment, sir."

Silence, except for the sniffing dogs. And then the sniffing stopped and he heard the pad of their feet, as they raced for the house and the voice in the phone said, "The gates will be open soon, Mr. Parker."

They opened in less than a minute. At the far end of the gravel drive a turreted monstrosity loomed, a weathered wooden structure that had undoubtedly once been white.

It was now as ashen as the face of Senator Arnold, bleak against the skyline, set back on a dandelion-covered lawn. Behind the wrought-iron fence, to the right of the house, the dogs watched him approach.

They were German Boxers, formidable creatures and great slobberers. They drooled as he walked up to the low porch but uttered not a sound.

The man who opened the door was fat and needed a shave. He wore a shiny, duraserge suit. "Follow me, please, Mr. Parker."

III

Doak followed him through a high musty living room into a small room off this. There was a small hynrane heater in here, and the room was stifling.

Senator Arnold sat in a wheel chair, his feet elevated. He wore a greasy muffler around his thin neck and a heavy reefer buttoned all the way up.

The fat man left, closing the door behind him. Arnold looked Doak over from head to feet and came back up. "It's about time. Your credentials?"

Doak handed over his wallet. There was, he saw, no chair in the room. Evidently, he was supposed to stand through the interview.

The old man handed the wallet back. "The place is right up that road to the south. First house, only house in sight."

Doak put his wallet in his pocket. "Just what kind of business do you think is going on up there, Senator?"

The old man seemed to spit the word. "Readers."

Doak exhaled, saying nothing.

"And maybe more," the old man said and his eyes were unholy. "Maybe—I wouldn't be surprised if they're—they're *printing* something up there." He coughed.

Sweat poured off Doak as the glowing hynrane heater made an oven of the windowless room.

The old man closed his eyes. "In my home town, the vermin, in my own town!"

They always laughed at me here but, by God, that was before the state saw fit to send me to the Senate. The last laugh's been mine. But now—right under my nose, you might say!" He opened his eyes and glared at Doak.

"Subversive reading, you think?" Doak asked.

The old man stared at him. "Is there another kind? I shouldn't have to ask that of a Security Officer. What kind of men is the Department hiring these days?"

Doak thought of something to say and decided not to. He said, "I wondered about how dangerous they were. If I'd need additional men."

"For readers? Young man, there must be some red blood in your veins. By God, if I was two years younger, I'd go along just for the joy of smashing them." He was trembling, leaning forward in his chair. "Go now, go and trap the filthy scum."

Doak went. He left the hot and odorous room and went out through the cool and odorous room to the front hall and out the front door. There his nausea quieted a little under the sun-warmed air from the east.

Behind the wrought-iron fence the dogs slobbered and watched, only their heads moving. As he went down the gravel drive to the heavy gate he was conscious of their stares and a coldness moved through him. The gates opened when he was twenty feet away.

It was growing dark and the breeze seemed stronger. On the road to the south, the Range Road, the house identified as the old Fisher place revealed one light in a first-floor room. There were two cars in the yard.

Doak turned back toward town but paused over the crest of the hill and sought cover. There was a small grove of hickory and oak to his left. He walked into their shelter until he was out of any passerby's range of vision.

Readers wouldn't be any trouble. But printers? If the old mummy was right in his guess Doak could have more trouble than one man could handle.

He put his back up against the rough bark of an oak tree and sat hugging his knees, waiting for the darkness. *Studios let me sit....* Oh, yes.

Printers—and what would they print? Had any poets been born since the Arnold Law, any writers? Was there some urge to write in a readerless world? In the

Russian homes, he'd heard, under the machine gods, the old religion persisted, from parent to child, by word of mouth.

But writers without an audience? An art that persisted without followers?

That girl, that lovely poised girl-creature had been quick to identify Thomson and he wasn't one of the giants. If there were others with equally fertile memories, and they got together, it would be like a small—what was the word?—a small library.

They could write or print or type the remembered offerings of all the readers and have a book. Or at least a pamphlet.

It grew darker and he thought of June and wondered, if her memory were searched, just what would be dredged up. He'd bet it would be one word—*no*.

And now it was dark enough and he rose and made his way back over the hill, toward the Fisher place, following the field instead of the road, keeping to the tall grass, conscious of the crickets and the night breeze and the light in the first floor room of the Fisher place.

There was another car in the drive now and he could see a few people in the room. He could see Martha and next to her an aged man with a beard like snow. He went past the window and around in back of the house.

There was an unlatched rear door and he entered a dark rear hall and put on his infra-scope. Now he could see the three steps leading to an open door and he went up the steps to the kitchen. There he could hear their voices.

Martha was talking. "As Dan has told you there's nothing to fear from an injection of lucidate. It's a perfectly harmless drug with no serious aftereffects that promotes total recall. Total recall is what we need unless we get a much larger group of donors than we have presently.

"Readers are no problem. We've had more requests for our magazine than we can fill. Our biggest problem, more important than getting memory donors, is to find someone who can contribute significant original work. For that kind of man we're still searching. Or woman."

Doak moved quietly, very slowly, past the kitchen sink and along the short hall that led to the dining room. There was a swinging door here, closed, but the upper half was glass and he could see through the dining room into the lighted

living room. He took off the infra-scope glasses.

Nine people were in the room, seven men and two women. The men ranged in age from about twenty-three to the old gent with the beard, who seemed ageless. The other woman was a gray-haired lady of about fifty with fine features and a rich contralto voice.

She was saying, "I'd like to be the first to go under the lucidate."

Next to a maple fireman's chair a man who looked about forty nodded and the woman came forward to sit in the chair. He had a hypodermic in his hand and she extended her arm.

On the far side of the room Martha was wheeling up a small recording machine.

Now the woman's eyes were closed and the others sat back, watching her. The contralto voice was clear and resonant.

"... 'tis but thy name that is my enemy
Thou art thyself though, not a Montague.
What's Montague? It is nor hand nor foot,
Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part
Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!
What's in a name? that which we call a rose,
By any other name would smell as sweet..."

The rich voice, the flowing rhythm, the silence—was it Burns she quoted? No—he knew all of Burns—but this was some giant of the past; this was almost up to vintage Burns.

He left his vantage point and went quietly back to the kitchen, donning his infra-scope once more. In some of these old houses there was a back steps, leading to the second floor.

Another door leading off the kitchen, another hall—and the steps.

They would undoubtedly creak. But they might not creak loudly enough to disturb that circle of mesmerized individuals listening to the contralto magic.

There was only one small creak, halfway up.

Three rooms led off a narrow hall. One held a cot and a dresser and a straight-backed chair. The second room he entered had a strange smell. A smell he didn't

recognize. Ink? Was that a mimeograph machine? Something stirred in his memory, some picture he had seen of a duplicating machine somewhere. This other dingus was undoubtedly a typewriter—and this small gadget on the desk a stapler.

And here, on a small pine table, was a sheaf of four mimeographed pages, stapled together.

The heading read, *The Heritage Herald*.

That was the name of their magazine. Printers, under the technical interpretation of the law. A typewriter and a duplicating machine and stencils and ink—and words.

Shakespeare, whoever he was, and Robert W. Service and Milton and an original by S. Crittington Jones.

The original was a short-short tale about a wrestler and a cowboy and a video comedian, a space-farce. There was a piece headed *Editorial* by Martha Klein. It had a sub-heading—*For Those Who Are Willing To Fight*.

It was a stirring and vigorous call to arms against the Arnold Law. It was as subversive as anything Doak had seen in his Department career.

He folded the magazine, and put it into an upper jacket pocket. He went to the third room and saw the paper stacked there and the bottles of ink and new stencils.

He went back to the stairs, and quietly down them. From the living room, he heard—

"... From scenes like these old Scotia's grandeur springs,
That makes her loved at home, revered abroad;
Princes and lords are but the breath of kings,
An honest man's the noblest work of God!"

This was more like it, except for that last line the bard had borrowed. This was the true giant, and who was quoting him? It was not the contralto voice. Who?

He moved out to the kitchen and back to his vantage point. He took off the infra-scope and looked into the living room. It was the old gent, with the beard. And who else could it be? For wasn't he the cream of the lot, the most obvious

scholar, the most evident gentleman? Scholarship and breeding seemed to flow from every hair in his beard.

"O Scotia! my dear, my native soil!
From whom my warmest wish to heaven is sent,
Long may thy hardy sons of rustic toil
Be blessed with health and peace and sweet content!
And, O, may heaven their—"

Doak felt a stirring in him and tears moved down his cheeks and he turned, quickly and silently, and went out the back door. He was no child at his mother's knee, he was no mewling kitten—he was a Security Officer and this was subversion.

Outside the stars were bright in a black sky. He stood in the back yard, breathing heavily, ashamed at the sudden surge of feeling that had moved through him. Some streak of adolescence, he thought, stirred by the words he had remembered from his mother's lips.

He walked slowly back toward town. He could call in local help and round up the gang back there in the house. He could wash this up tonight and be back in Washington tomorrow morning. With June.

The prospect of being with June had lost its flavor somehow. And if this was a widely published magazine, he had a larger duty than merely apprehending the gang. All of the magazine's readers were breaking the law and a real operative comes in with a complete, clean case.

Mrs. Klein still sat on her front porch. "Any luck?" she asked, as he came up to sit on the glider near her chair.

"Some. I'll see him again tomorrow."

Her voice was dry. "One of our most prominent citizens, the Senator. The other's Glen Ryder. I guess you know who he is."

He stiffened, trying to see her face in the dark. "Ryder? Oh, yes, in the Security Department."

"That's right. Glen isn't anything to be ashamed of really. But that Senator Arnold—my, the stories my mother told me about him!"

"I've heard," Doak said, "he was pretty wild as a young man."

"Wild?" Mrs. Klein sniffed. "Degraded would be a better word. If his father didn't have all the money in the county he'd have gone to jail more than once, that man. And then the people of this state sending him to the Senate."

Doak said nothing, staring out at the quiet night.

"Would you like a little snack?" Mrs. Klein asked. "I've some baked ham and rolls out in the kitchen."

"No thanks," Doak said. "I'm not very hungry. Was Glen Ryder a friend of Senator Arnold's?"

"Not until Glen went to work for the government. I don't think the Senator had any friends except those who could profit by it."

"This Ryder was something of an—opportunist?"

"If that means what it sounds like, I guess that would describe Glen. He wasn't one to overlook any opportunity to better himself and he cut it pretty thin at times."

Doak looked over but could not see her face in the darkness. He said slowly, "I guess we all have to look out for ourselves and the devil take the hindmost."

"I suppose," she said placidly. "Though it would depend on what you wanted out of life. Here in Dubbinville I think we're a little more neighborly than that."

"It's a nice town," Doak said. "A real nice town."

In front a car was stopping on the other side of the road. Someone got out from the door on the far side and the car moved on.

"That would be Martha, I guess," Mrs. Klein said. "She'll want some of that ham, I know. You may as well have a cup of coffee with us anyway."

IV

Doak had some coffee and some rolls and ham. And some talk with both of them in the bright comfortable kitchen. They talked about the ridiculous price of food in the city and how cool the house was after the heat of the day and what was it

like on Venus?

Neither of the women had ever been to Venus. Doak told them about the lakes, the virgin timber, the glareless warmth that came from the generative earth.

And about the lack of communication facilities.

"There isn't enough commerce to make any video installations worthwhile," he explained, "and the only information transmission is by amateur radio operators. But nobody seems to miss it. It's got enough vacation facilities without video."

Martha looked at him evenly. "The—Arnold Law applies there, too, doesn't it?"

Doak met her gaze. "Of course." And then, "Why do you ask?"

She smiled. "I was thinking it would be a good place to curl up with a book." Her chin lifted. "Or establish a newspaper."

He didn't answer. He took another roll and buttered it.

Mrs. Klein said, "Martha's too young to know what a newspaper is—or a book. And so are you, Mr. Parker. I say we're not missing much."

He grinned at her. "Bad, were they?"

"There was a paper in Chicago so bad you'd think I was lying if I tried to describe it to you. And all the books seemed to be concerned with four-letter words."

He carefully put a piece of ham between the broken halves of the roll. "Even Bobbie Burns? From what my mother told me he was quite a lad."

"He was dead before your mother was born," Mrs. Klein said. "All the good ones were, all the ones who tried to entertain instead of shock or corrupt."

Martha said lightly, "Mama's an admirer of Senator Arnold, the way it sounds."

"I'll thank you not to mention his name while I'm eating," Mrs. Klein said acidly. "And I'm not forgetting why *he* hated the printed word. But that's looking a gift horse in the mouth."

Doak sipped his coffee. His voice was casual. "Why did he hate the printed word?"

"He couldn't read anything but the simplest words. The tutors his father hired and fired to get some learning into that man! He was just hopeless, that's all."

Doak smiled. "Well, he seems to have done all right without it. I'd like to have his money."

"And his brain?" Martha asked.

"Just his money," Doak said. "And maybe I'll get some of it before I give up on him."

He happened to glance at Martha after he finished saying that. Her face was coldly skeptical and he had an uncomfortable feeling that his lie hadn't registered with her at all.

In his room, as he undressed, as he hung his clothes in the small closet, he felt the folded thickness of the dupligraphed magazine in his jacket pocket.

What more did he need? Tomorrow he'd take the first train back to Milwaukee and the first plane from Milwaukee. Here was evidence and he realized now it wasn't something he would be wise to tackle alone. A few weeks' work by a half dozen operatives and the entire publisher-reader organization would be spotted and ready for one unified move.

Local authorities were subject to local loyalties and one leak could scare off the whole organization. He could be back in Washington before noon, which would give him a full day and a half of free time, of June time. To say nothing of the nights.

Why should he hang around this whistle stop for a wasted week-end, holding kitchen conversations with the unmighty living?

But that Martha, that lovely, that proud and knowing gal.... The crickets helped him to Dreamland.

The morning sun was bright on the quilted bedspread when he opened his eyes. There was no sound of meal preparation in the house, no dialogue. Was it early?

It was ten o'clock. Not since he was a child had he enjoyed as long and satisfying a sleep as this.

When he came out of the bathroom Mrs. Klein was in the hall. "About five minutes?" she asked.

"Make it two," he told her and winked. "I'm starving."

Martha had already gone to work. Doak sat down alone to popovers and oatmeal, eggs and Canadian bacon. And real coffee. He had an almost animal sense of well being. His decision to go back to Washington, which had seemed so final last night, was fading under the Dubbinville spell.

After breakfast he walked down to the station and inquired about Milwaukee-bound trains.

"There's one due at noon," the agent told him. "Stops on signal. You want me to stop it?"

"That's kind of early," Doak said. "When's the next?"

"At six tonight. A local. Doesn't need a signal."

That would be soon enough. Doak left and walked slowly up the main street of Dubbinville. He was walking past the bank when the beard caught his gaze.



It was the Burns quoter of last night. He was sitting behind the biggest desk in the open portion of the bank, and there was a sign on his desk.

The sign read, *Malcolm S. Sutherland—President.*

Lordy, Lordy, Lordy—the president of the bank! That showed the strata this subversion was reaching. Didn't the man realize what a risk he was taking?

In the drugstore he saw another of the faces he had seen last night. It was the man who had administered the hypodermic. He was talking to the druggist. Doak turned and went in.

"All right, Doctor," the druggist said. "I'll have it about one o'clock. Will that be all right?"

"Fine," the doctor said. He went out.

Doak bought a package of cigarettes. "Was that Doctor Ryan by any chance?"

"No. Doctor Helgeson. I don't recall a Doctor Ryan. Doctor Helgeson's the only medical doctor in town."

"This Ryan's a Ph.D." Doak said. "Senator Arnold told me about him. Beautiful day, isn't it?"

"Beautiful," the druggist agreed.

Walking back to the house Doak wondered if this couldn't be handled without punitive measures being taken. The only doctor in town and the president of the bank—and they were probably only a small part of the picture. It could disrupt this town if Senator Arnold had his way.

And what was their crime? Reading. A law as stupid as the ancient prohibition law had been, pushed through a bewildered Congress under much the same conditions. Supported by a strange blend of the divine and ridiculous, the naïve and the clever, the gullible and the knowing.

Well, was it his business? *He* didn't make the laws—he only helped to enforce them. It was a logical answer and why didn't it satisfy him?

He had a job, a good job at the public trough in a woman-heavy city, a security that was as solid as his country. Why should he fret over a gang of law-breakers? Unless it was that cow-town cutie, that Martha. Unless he was so dame-happy he'd sell out the Department. That corrupt he certainly wasn't—at least, not yet.

And they weren't readers anyway—they were publishers. He had almost forgotten that. Inciters to violence, instigators of strife, polluters of the mind ... Good Lord, he was beginning to sound like crack-brained ex-Senator Arnold!

V

Mrs. Klein was shaking out a rug on the front porch. She smiled at him. "Not much to do here, for a city man, is there?"

"I'm not bored," he said, "for some reason. You have a beautiful daughter, Mrs. Klein."

"I'd feel happier about her looks if she'd marry somebody," Mrs. Klein said dryly. "Seems to me they're wasted this way."

Doak sat on the glider. What was it someone had said about marriage? Oh, yes—that it combined the ultimate in temptation with the ultimate in opportunity.

He said, "I'm surprised she isn't married. The men around here must be blind or

mute."

"Oh, she's had enough offers," Mrs. Klein answered. She laid the rug over the porch railing. "But she's a fussy stubborn girl." She sat in her chair. "You a married man, Mr. Parker?"

He shook his head. "Never had the time nor the money—and besides they all said no to me."

"I'll bet. With that hair of yours and that fine head, with those eyes, I'll *bet* they said no."

"Why, thank you!" Doak said. "You have a number of good points, yourself, Mrs. Klein."

"My popovers and my coffee, maybe," she agreed. "And my figure wasn't bad, a decade or two back. But I never had Martha's looks. That's from her dad's side of the family."

"Handsome, were they?"

"Oh, yes. High falutin' people, scholars and beauties who owned half the land in the county, at one time. Old Wisconsin Germans. I'm Irish myself."

Bright scintillating dialogue, stirring the quick response. But he felt as relaxed as though he had hay in his hair. He looked out at the deserted road, at the fields beyond, at the clouds on the clear horizon. Rural summer—a quiet Saturday morning in the agricultural Midwest only nineteen minutes from Chicago.

People spoke of other worlds and here was one, nineteen minutes from Chicago. And last night, under the lucidate, the town banker had gone to another world, three hundred years away, had gone back to the magic of Burns.

A great lad for the ladies, Bobbie Burns, and a great love for the people. A poet with revolutionary leanings, all heart, a bleeder and a believer. Studious, Doak sat, on the front porch in another world.

Were the people so stupid they couldn't be trusted with words? They could be misled with words and confused and stirred to unrighteous anger. And informed with words and guided and ennobled and solaced and stirred to high destiny.

How had wrestling ever taken the place of words?

Someone said, "Dreaming, city-man?"

He looked up quickly to see Martha standing there. Mrs. Klein had evidently gone into the house without his being aware of it.

"Dreaming," Doak admitted. "Holding high converse with the mighty dead." He smiled at her. "Through for the week?"

"Through." She took the chair her mother usually occupied. "Five and a half days of whereas and wherefore earns me a day and a half for myself. At the risk of seeming forward would you like to go swimming with me this afternoon?"

"I can't think of a better way to spend it," Doak answered. "How about transportation?"

"It's only a little over a mile. We can walk." She paused. "Or did you plan to see Senator Arnold?"

"I'd rather go swimming," Doak said.

Which they did. In the waters of Lake Memahbin, in the small cove that harbored the entire recreational facilities of Dubbinville. Doak rented some trunks there and they swam out to the raft.

There weren't too many adults in the water this afternoon but the kids were everywhere. Noisy splashing running kids—but very few of them ventured out to the big raft.

There was a park running the length of the beach and a variety of games—table tennis, horse-shoes, shuffleboard. There was a small group around the table in the grove who seemed to be just sitting.

Doak saw the beard and the lady who had quoted the unknown poet, last night. He and Martha lay on their stomachs on the raft, looking back toward the shore.

Doak said easily, "That gang in the glade doesn't seem to be having much fun."

"Solid citizens," Martha said. "That lady is the principal of the high school and the man with the beard is president of the bank. You couldn't expect them to run and shout, could you?"

Doak said nothing.

She turned over on her side to look at him. "Any luck with the Senator?"

"Not much so far. I'll get him, before Monday, though."

She stood up and he felt a stirring in him at the sight of her taut fully-feminine figure. She poised on the edge of the raft and then her tanned body went slanting toward the water.

She came up directly beneath him and splashed a handful of water into his face. "Sun worshipper," she mocked. "The trip out do you in?"

He made a face at her and she went under.

He looked over at the group in the glade. High school principal, custodian of young minds—and a reader. Worse than that, a partner in a publishing venture.

Corruption? What kind of mind would it take to believe there was corruption in that group? A Senator Arnold kind of mind. Rebellion, yes. Oh, very definitely rebellion—under the Arnold Law.

But how could—

Somebody had his feet and he was being pulled head over toes into the waiting water. He came up spluttering to see Martha laughing at him from the edge of the raft.

He started to climb up and she dove off the further side. He went after her. Much laughter and great sport. An excuse to grab her, here and there, to feel the firm, warm smoothness of her, to quicken to the challenge of her body.

In the glade the watchers sat, missing nothing.

Doak said, "I'm not sure the solid citizens approve of your maidenly frolicking. They seem to be frowning our way."

"Studious types," Martha said, "but not necessarily disapproving."

Doak was silent, staring at the water.

"Bored?" Her voice was light.

He looked up. "I've never been less bored. Martha, I..." He shook his head in vexation.

"It's a little early for a pitch," she said, "though you do give it a warming amateur

earnestness. Or wasn't it going to be a pitch?"

He looked at her steadily. "What else?"

"A warning maybe?" a break in the light tone.

"What kind of warning?"

It was her turn to look at the water—and to color? It seemed so, faintly, under the tan. She said, "To warn me that you're married or poor or uninterested." She looked up, smiling. "I'm such a simple country girl."

"Yes," he said. "Sure." He looked over at the watchers. "Are they friends of yours?"

"Yes." Her eyes wide and searching, her face and body taut. "Why?"

"Wondered. Am I being played for a patsy?"

Silence while she studied him. Silence while the raft gently rocked, and the world. "Patsy?" she asked.

"Forget it. You have a great charm and an unholy animal attraction for me, Martha Klein, and maybe we'd better get back to shore and have a quiet cigarette."

They had a cigarette and a hot dog with a skin on it, the first Doak had ever seen. They had grape pop and a few laughs. Fun in the sun at Dubbinville, U.S.A. Wouldn't the gang at home get a belt out of this? And where was June's bright metallic laughter being heard this golden afternoon?

They walked back to town quietly, exertion-spent, sun-calmed. They came up onto the porch, and Mrs. Klein looked from Martha's face to Doak's and frowned—and sighed.

"Fun?" she asked.

"Wonderful," Doak said. "And Martha surprised me by being able to swim. None of my other girls can swim a lick."

"Martha's no girl," Mrs. Klein said. "She's twenty-seven."

Martha laughed. "Why, mother, you'll never get rid of me that way."

Mrs. Klein said, "I almost forgot. Mr. Arnold called. Wants to see you, Mr. Parker, tonight."

"Well, maybe he is sold. Wonder how he knew I was here."

"There isn't much he doesn't know about what's going on in town," Mrs. Klein said. "I'd wager there isn't *anything*." She looked at Martha as she said that last.

Martha's face was blank.

"Maybe I can put it off until tomorrow," Doak said. "It's been a pretty good day up to now."

He called the Senator from the drug store in town. He told him, "Nothing definite, yet, Senator."

"Don't give me that," Arnold said raspily. "Get up here right away, Parker."

Doak stopped at the house on the way back. He told Mrs. Klein, "I might be a little late for supper. I think I'll run up and see the Senator now and get it over with."

"We'll hold it," she said. She looked around to see if Martha was within hearing. Then, "You're not trifling with my girl, Mr. Parker?"

"Not for a second," Doak assured her. "Though I have an uncomfortable feeling she's trifling with me, but good."

Mrs. Klein shook her dark head. "Not with that sick-calf look on her face. The girl's smitten. You watch your step, Mr. Parker."

"I promise," he said. "I'll be back as soon as possible."

The hot room, the face like ashes, the cracked voice. No chair again for Doak. Arnold said, "You went up there last night, I know. Well?"

"I'll make a full report to my superior," Doak said. "I'm not permitted to discuss Department business with *anybody*, Senator."

Arnold's thin lips were open, his bony jaw slack. "Well, I'll be damned. Do you know who you're talking to, young man?"

"An ex-Senator," Doak answered.

"That's right—and the man who put your superior where he is. He'd still be peddling papers if I hadn't got him into the Department."

Doak said nothing.

"I could get your job in a minute," Arnold went on. "I'm a hell of a long ways from dead, Parker. You'd better wake up."

Doak had no words.

"Well, damn it, man, are you dumb? What have you got to say?"

"I've said it, sir," Doak said quietly.

For long and silent seconds, Arnold glared at him. And then he said, "All right. I'll get my report from Ryder—and your job. Now get out."

Fine, *great!* Hero Doak Parker, of Security. Lion bearder, hair-splitter, cutter-of-his-own-throat, lover of a country lass. And man without a future, it looked like now.



The dogs slobbered and watched, the gravel grated under his feet. The great gates swung open and Doak took a deep breath of the warm clean air. Why did he feel so free?

Martha was sitting on the front porch. She looked up and smiled as he came near and he stooped to kiss her.

"Hey!" she said. "Watch it, city man." But she hadn't taken her lips away for a few seconds.

From his jacket pocket he took the *Heritage Herald* and tossed it in her lap. She looked down at it for seconds, then up to read his face. He said nothing.

"Last night," she said, "you got it. I missed it when I went upstairs, last night, but I thought someone else might have taken it."

"I took it—last night."

Her eyes searched his wonderingly but there was no evident tension in her. Doak sat on the glider.

She said, "I was too forward to be believed this afternoon, perhaps? Did you listen last night?"

"I listened. I'm from Security, Martha—or was. I'm resigning."

"Oh? To fight the good fight?"

He nodded. "But legally—or what is known as legally. Through the pressure-group pattern. I know my way around Washington, Martha. I think, in time and with the right people behind me, I think I could—oh, hell!"

"Yes," she said. "Oh, hell! When you were swimming this afternoon we could have got this, Doak. I told them to wait. I told them I thought you had the makings of an honest man."

"Why?" He stared at her.

"I don't know why. Maybe your curly hair. I'm admitting nothing along that line, not yet, Doak. I want to see what kind of fighter you are, how much man you are."

"I wish I knew," he said quietly. "One thing I'm sure of, I'm going to enjoy the battle."

"You're going to enjoy both battles," Martha said. "And probably win both. But oh, the bastards we're going to have to fight."

He smiled and looked out at the shadowed lawn. This would be a place for the historians, the *writing* historians, Dubbinville, U.S.A. And why should a man be happy, looking forward to so damned much trouble?

Mr. Gault has just presented us with a wholly plausible if highly terrifying view of a reasonably near future. Such things could, conceivably, come to pass. And prophecy, from the time of Jules Verne to the present, has long been one of the several spinal columns of science fiction. Yet is it possible for anyone to predict an unvisited future? We are inclined to think not. Gadgetry to come, as repeatedly demonstrated by Verne, is easy. But no one yet has been able to tell what human beings are going to do from day to day, much less years and years ahead of time.

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