heard of it." He finished off the whisky and stood up. "I have to get back, sir. I have to watch those engines."

"We're counting on you, Mr. Cooper. You have to get us through."

He went back to the engine room and slumped into a chair, listening to the engine-song that beat throughout the ship.

He had to keep them going. There was no question of it now, if there'd even been a question. For now it was not the simple matter of getting home again, but of getting needed drugs to the old home planet.

"I promise you," he said, talking to himself. "I promise you we'll get there."

He drove the engine crew and he drove himself, day after dying day, while the howling of the tubes and the thunder of the haywire Morrisons racked a man almost beyond endurance.

There was no such thing as sleep — only catnaps caught as one could catch them. There were no such things as meals, only food gulped on the run. And there was work, and worse than work were the watching and the waiting, the shoulders tensed against the stutter or the sudden screech of metal that would spell disaster.

Why, he wondered dully, did a man ever go to space? Why should one deliberately choose a job like this? Here in the engine room, with its cranky motors, it might be worse than elsewhere in the ship. But that didn't mean it wasn't bad. For throughout the ship stretched tension and discomfort and, above all, the dead, black fear of space itself, of what space could do to a ship and the men within it.

IN some of the bigger, newer ships, conditions might be better, but not a great deal better. They still tranquilized the passengers and colonists who went out to the other planets — tranquilized them to quiet the worries, to make them more insensitive to discomfort, to prevent their breaking into panic.

But a crew you could not tranquilize. A crew must be wide-awake, with all its faculties intact. A crew had to sit and take it.

Perhaps the time would come when the ships were big enough, when the engines and the drives would be perfected, when Man had lost some of his fear of the emptiness of space — then it would be easier.

But the time might be far off. It was almost two hundred years now since his family had gone out, among the first colonists, to Mars.

If it were not that he was going home, he told himself, it would be beyond all tolerance and endurance. He could almost smell the cold, dry air of home — even in this

place that reeked with other smells. He could look beyond the metal skin of the ship in which he rode and across the long dark miles and see the gentle sunset on the redness of the hills.

And in this he had an advantage over all the others. For without going home, he could not have stood it.

The days wore on and the engines held and the hope built up within him. And finally hope gave way to triumph.

And then came the day when the ship went mushing down through the thin, cold atmosphere and came in to a landing.

He reached out and pulled a switch and the engines rumbled to a halt. Silence came into the tortured steel that still was numb with noise.

He stood beside the engines, deafened by the silence, frightened by this alien thing that never made a sound.

He walked along the engines, with his hand sliding on their metal, stroking them as he would pet an animal, astonished and slightly angry at himself for finding in himself a queer, distorted quality of affection for them.

But why not? They had brought him home. He had nursed and pampered them, he had cursed them and watched over them, he had slept with them, and they had brought him home.

And that was more, he admitted to himself, then he had ever thought they would do.

HE found that he was alone. The crew had gone swarming up the ladder as soon as he had pulled the switch. And now it was time that he himself was going.

But he stood there for a moment, in that silent room, as he gave the place one final visual check. Everything was all right. There was nothing to be done.

He turned and climbed the ladder slowly, heading for the port.

He found the captain standing in the port, and out beyond the port stretched the redness of the land.

"All the rest have gone except the purser," said the captain. "I thought you'd soon be up. You did a fine job with the engines, Mr. Cooper. I'm glad you shipped with us."

"It's my last run," Cooper said, staring out at the redness of the hills. "Now I settle down."

"That's strange," said the captain. "I take it you're a Mars man."

"I am. And I never should have left."

The captain stared at him and said again: "That's strange."

"Nothing strange," said Cooper. "I—"

"It's my last run, too," the captain broke in. "There'll be a new commander to take her back to Earth."

"In that case," Cooper offered, "I'll stand you a drink as soon as we get down."

"I'll take you up on that. First we'll get our shots."

They climbed down the ladder and walked across the field toward the spaceport buildings. Trucks went whining past them, heading for the ship, to pick up the unloaded cargo.

And now it was all coming back to Cooper, the way he had dreamed it in that shabby room on Earth — the exhilarating taste of the thinner, colder air, the step that was springier because of the lesser gravity, the swift and clean elation of the uncluttered, brave red land beneath a weaker sun.

Inside, the doctor waited for them in his tiny office.

"Sorry, gentlemen," he said, "but you know the regulations."

"I don't like it," said the captain, "but I suppose it does make sense."

They sat down in the chairs and rolled up their sleeves.

"Hang on," the doctor told them. "It gives you quite a jolt."

It did.

And it had before, thought Cooper, every time before. He should be used to it by now.

He sat weakly in the chair, waiting for the weakness and the shock to pass, and he saw the doctor, there behind his desk, watching them and waiting for them to come around to normal.

"Was it a rough trip?" the doctor finally asked.

"They all are rough," the captain replied curtly.

Cooper shook his head. "This one was the worst I've ever known. Those engines..."

THE captain said: "I'm sorry, Cooper. This time it was the truth. We were *really* carrying medicine. There *is* an epidemic. Mine was the only ship. I'd planned an overhaul, but we couldn't wait."

Cooper nodded. "I remember now," he said.

He stood up weakly and stared out the window at the cold, the alien, the forbidding land of Mars.

"I never could have made it," he said flatly, "if I'd not been psychoed."

He turned back to the doctor. "Will there ever be a time?"

The doctor nodded. "Some day, certainly. When the ships are better. When the race is more conditioned to space travel."

"But this homesickness business — it gets downright brutal."

"It's the only way," the doctor declared. "We'd not have any spacemen if they weren't always going home."

"That's right," the captain said. "No man, myself included, could face that kind of beating unless it was for something more than money."

Cooper looked out the window at the Martian sandscape and shivered. Of all the God-forsaken places he had ever seen!

He was a fool to be in space, he told himself, with a wife like Doris and two kids back home. He could hardly wait to see them.

And he knew the symptoms. He was getting homesick once again — but this time it was for Earth.

The doctor was taking a bottle out of his desk and pouring generous drinks into glasses for all three of them.

"Have a shot of this," he said, "and let's forget about it."

"As if we could remember," said Cooper, laughing suddenly.

"After all," the captain said, far too cheerfully, "we have to see it in the right perspective. It's nothing more than a condition of employment."

— CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

FORECAST

The next issue solves a vital problem that we have spent all this while trying to work out: how to get a novel of such freshness, ingenuity, suspense — and stature — that it could bridge the gap between issues. To solve that problem, Frederik Pohl has out-Pohled himself, a big deal indeed for one who has given us *Gravy Planet* and other such great *Galaxy* book-length serials.

In DRUNKARD'S WALK — a tipsy title, but a sure-footed story — the main character is plagued by a terrifying, utterly baffling assassin. Night after night, the assassin stalks him and will not rest until he is dead. A commonplace predicament in fiction, of course. But in this case, it is not the man being stalked who must be dead. It is the assassin! Nor is this simply an O. Henry switcheroo — the hard, cold, completely logical reasons will sweep you through the two installments of this compelling story.

Along with this big half of a true, honest-Injun, fair-dinkum, so-help-us book-length nove' — *not* a "shortened version" — we've managed to cram in at least two novelets.

TRANSSTAR, by Raymond E. Banks, is the story of the war that no one dares fight — and the man whose duty lies in preventing that war — by forgetting where his duty stops!

A name new to our pages is William W. Stuart, but it won't be new for long. You'll agree when you read his brilliant novelet, INSIDE JOHN BARTH. Barth has always dreamed of seeing a Garden of Eden — and discovers that he would rather see than be one!

Short stories? Of course. Edgar Pangborn for sure, after too long an absence since his magnificent *Angel's Egg* and *The Music Master of Babylon*, plus others, as many as we can fit in — along with Willy Ley's always enjoyable column and our regular features.

A fine issue. Don't skip it.

The Airy Servitor

By MARGARET ST. CLAIR

Anyone should be free to take an impossible stand — except that is where the nuse man does business!

Illustrated by WOOD

THE clerk in the utility office looked at Denham silently. It was a look which, to Denham, seemed haughty, insolent and supercilious — qualities he was ready by now to discern in the whole utility company.

"If you dispute the amount of the bill, sir," the clerk said, "you should deposit the sum in question with the Utilities Commission while they examine your claim."

"Listen," Denham said, fumbling in his pockets, "all I'm asking is that you send the meter reader out again." He pulled out a handful of receipted bills. "Look at these. Electricity in June, $7.45. In July, $8.32. In August, $3.30 — that was because Franny and I were on vacation. In September, $7.91. And then in October you send in a bill for $875! It's not reasonable!"

The clerk opened the book on the desk in front of him and pointed at a page. "Section five, paragraph 10, sub-section 13," he said woodenly. "'In case of disputed bills, customers must deposit the amount in dispute with the—'"

"I tell you, it's some blasted mistake! Somebody's mislocated the decimal point! Where am I to get $875 to deposit? If you'd send me a bill for $8,750, or $87,500, would you still expect me to deposit it with the Utilities Commission?"

"'—must deposit the amount in dispute with an impartial authority, in this case the Utilities Commission,'" he continued imperturbably. "'Pending settlement of the disputed claim, such deposits are to draw interest at the rate of 2.2% per annum. In case—'"

"All right!" Denham yelled. Two people who had been talking to other clerks at the desk started and turned around to look at him. "All right!" He had completely lost the slender hold he had been keeping on his temper, and he no longer cared. "Send your blasted mechanic around and have the blasted meter taken out!"

AGAIN the clerk looked at him. It was, Denham was pleased to observe, a look quite different in quality from the ones he had previously bestowed. It held respect, admiration, awe. "You mean you want us to have the electricity shut *off?* Why, sir, nobody ever does that!"

"Well, I do!" Denham said.

"But — but — how will you get along without it?"

"That's my problem," Denham answered. "I'd rather do without power the rest of my life than deposit $875 with the Utilities Commission."

"Very well, sir." The clerk's lips curved in a faint smile. "Now, if you'll just sign this form . . ."

Outside in the street again, Denham felt the beginning of a qualm. Of course he and Franny would get along all right without power, the way people used to do. The pioneers hadn't had electric refrigerators. All the same, it might be rather a nuisance. There was the Halloween dinner they were giving for the in-laws on Saturday.

The thing to do was to buy a couple of oil lamps, and a little kerosene stove for Franny to cook on. (But what about the food in the refrigerator, and the hot water sup-

ply?) Oil lamps wouldn't be so bad for a Halloween party — appropriate, in a way, to the spirit of the occasion.

But if Mrs. Murgatroyd found out that he'd had the power shut off deliberately, she'd decide that it was just another proof of the way he mistreated her daughter. Denham was well aware that his mother-in-law considered him a heartless, inconsiderate brute. Franny might tell her mother as often as she pleased that she loved her husband and was happy with him: Mrs. Murgatroyd would sigh, close her eyes, shake her head, and murmur, "My poor little girl!" It was a remark that by now almost maddened Denham. He would go to nearly any length to avoid hearing it. For a moment he wondered whether it wouldn't be wiser to go back to the power company's office and ask to have the power turned on again.

A man stepped out from a doorway and stood in Denham's path. He was a tall, thin man with eyebrows which arched high on his forehead and then swooped down suddenly to the bridge of his nose, and his cheeks were sunken and pale. There was something indefinably odd about his clothing. It looked, Denham thought, as if it had been made from a picture by a tailor who had never seen a suit of clothes.

"Heigh, gesell," he said in a harsh, hoarse voice. "Would you be interested in some nuse?"

"What?" Denham said, confused.

"Nuse. The airy servitor. Omniscient, omnipotent, invisible. Like Prospero's Ariel. 'I come / To answer thy best pleasure; be't to fly, / To swim, to dive into the fire, to ride / On the curl'd clouds. To thy strong bidding task / Ariel and all his quality.' *The Tempest*, scene 2, act 1. By Francis Bacon. Don't think, use nuse."

"*The Tempest?*" Denham responded blankly.

THIS sudden excursion into culture from one whom he had expected to offer him smuggled Alaskan sealskins, just off the boat and dirt cheap, bewildered Denham. "What're you talking about?"

"Nuse. I said it was like Prospero's Ariel. Don't they teach you people Bacon in school these days? But never mind that, ges — I mean, sir. That little argument with the power company — you're going to find it pretty tough getting along without electricity, you know. Why don't you try nuse?"

"You mean you're selling bootlegged power from some fly-by-night company?" Denham asked suspiciously.

The stranger hesitated. Then he appeared to make up his mind. "I can see you're an intelligent man, ge — sir" he said. "As a matter of fact, I represent the Inter-Era Trading and Exchange Corporation. We specialize in selling products of the future to the present day. Nuse is the most popular of them. Why don't you give us a trial? I'm sure you'd be more than satisfied."

"Uh—"

"We get our nuse direct from the producer, in 3,000 A.D., and retail it to the present. Like all our items, it's top quality. We'd have to arrange a special installation, since today's abode is somewhat more complicated than when I come from, but I can promise you an adequate supply of nuse within thirty minutes after you sign the authorization. All fixed before your wife gets home." He got a little dark-green box out of his waist pocket and showed it to Denham. "This is the plant."

Denham touched it gingerly. It felt warm and the surface was resilient. "Yes, but what is it? Some kind of power?"

"More than power. Much, much more. As to what it is—well, wasn't there a period when your scientists were uncertain as to the nature of electricity? We're in much the same position with regard to nuse. All we know is that it is a trans-dimensional neural force. We get it, as I say, from the far side of 3,000 A.D., but our scientists can only speculate on how it actually originates."

"You mean that if I let you put that gadget in my apartment, the appliances would still work?" Denham asked, grasping at straws. "Even though the electricity is off?"

"Certainly. Much better than ever before. And more than appliances. Having nuse in an abode is like having a dozen super-efficient servants working for you. Omnipotent, omniscient, invisible. Don't think, use nuse."

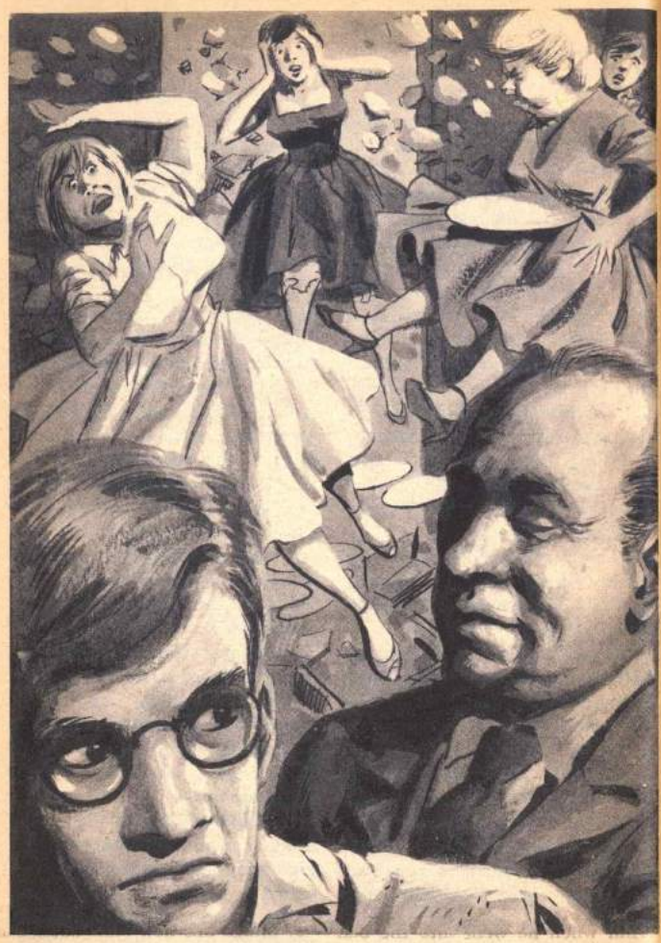
"Well . . ." Denham said.

AS Denham stopped by at the novelty store on his way home, to pick up the favors and Halloween cut-outs Franny had asked him to get, he decided against telling her about the contract he had signed for nuse. It was perfectly straightforward and businesslike, of course, but he had a feeling she might not care for the idea of having her electric toaster worked by a trans-dimensional neural force that originated on the far side of 3,000 A.D.

He was relieved to find the apartment brightly lighted when he opened the door. That meant, or ought to mean, that the nuse man had been around and the nuse was already on the job. Invisible, omnipotent, omniscient. Don't think, use nuse.

"Hi, baby," he greeted his wife. "Have a good day? Anything new?" He noticed she was wearing a faint frown.

"Not much," she answered, "only something sort of funny happened,



Gus. That strawberry mousse you like — I decided to make some for supper, and I got all the things for it out of the refrigerator. Then I decided I'd better comb my hair in case you got home ahead of time. And when I went back to the kitchen, there the mousse was in the refrigerator, already mixed and everything. The dishes were washed and put away, too. And I don't remember a single thing about doing it. Oh, Gus, do you suppose there's anything wrong with my mind?"

Denham gulped. Apparently the nuse wasn't going to confine itself to small-time stuff like operating electric toasters and washing machines.

He comforted his wife by telling her that highly intelligent people not infrequently had these lapses, and then, while she was putting supper on the table, wandered out into the hall. After some searching he located the small green box the nuse man had showed him. It was low down by the kitchen door. No wires went into or came out of it. For the second time that day Denham touched it with his fingertips. This time it was definitely cold.

The strawberry mousse, for the record, reached a new height of deliciousness.

Denham's shower next morning was perfect, not, as usual, scalding one minute and freezing the next. And when he went into the bedroom to dress, he found his brown suit laid out neatly on the bed waiting for him. Memoranda and papers had been transferred into the appropriate pockets. His shoes, too, were neatly shined.

There was no use asking Franny whether she had done it — she was busy getting dressed herself, and he knew she had not. It must be the nuse.

WHEN Denham got home that night, he found Franny sitting on the living room floor in tears. Her suitcase was in front of her, and various items of her trousseau lay on the rug around her.

"I'm losing my mind," she quavered when she saw him. "Ever since I came home I've been doing things and forgetting about having done them. It's terrible. I'm g-going to pack up and g-go home to Mother. It's not f-f-fair to you."

"No, you're not," Denham answered grimly. He sat down on the floor beside her and told her what had happened.

Franny took his disclosure with remarkable calm. "Oh, is that it? Why didn't you tell me? Say, listen, though — it isn't costing us an awful lot, is it?"

"Only four fifty a month," Denham answered.

Franny's expression grew pleased. "We paid more than that for electricity and it didn't do lots of things this new stuff does. Gus,

you know what I am planning to do?"

"What?" Denham asked.

"I'm going to have it clean up the whole place tomorrow, new shelf paper in the kitchen, windows, floors waxed, everything, and when Mother says, my, but I must get tired working so hard, I'm going to tell her you've insisted that I have a maid. Then I'm going to have it try a lot of those dishes in the Wine Cook Book you got me — the ones I never made because they s .nded too complicated — and when she mentions those, I'll tell her the maid did that too. And then I'll have the nuse give me a facial and a manicure and set my hair a new way. I get so tired of the way Mother talks about you all the time. Oh, Gus! Isn't this lots of fun?"

"Um," Denham said, starting to worry because his wife was accepting nuse with so much enthusiasm.

His mood of depression persisted all next day. Part of it, no doubt, could be accounted for by the unattractive prospect of an evening with his in-laws, but there remained a residue of depression which Denham later was to ascribe to sheer prescience. If the nuse man had been around, he would have expressed it, probably, by quoting Francis Bacon's immortal *Romeo and Juliet*: "Oh, God, I have an ill-divining soul!"

DENHAM (he had to work on Saturdays) got home and the apartment was shining like a new penny, romantic aromas of herbs and wine filled the air, and Franny herself was resplendent in an odd but attractive hair-do.

"How'd it go?" he asked her.

"Oh, wonderful! At first I thought it would make me nervous to be waited on by something I couldn't see, but it does it so quick, just like thinking, that I don't have time to get scared. And it's awfully impersonal.

"A funny thing happened, though, Gus. After I got the stuff out of the refrigerator for the gateau with sherry and cream filling, I got to thinking I'd have to watch my weight with all this rich food. Then I decided to taste the dessert to see if it was all right. Would you believe it? The nuse wouldn't let me taste it! It was just as though there was a wall between me and the gateau. It made me cross for a minute, but of course the nuse was right — it's those little tastes that put the fat on."

"H'm," Denham said uneasily.

"Mother called up to say she's bringing Aunt Agatha," she said, watching him warily.

"Aunt Agatha!" Denham's jaw dropped in alarm. Mrs. Murgatroyd's sister was deceptively mild-looking, but every bit as tough and mean as Mrs. Murgatroyd, and her footwork was a lot faster.

"Oh, Gus, don't look at me like that. She won't hurt you. I've been thinking, and I'm sure the reason she and Mother don't like you better is that they don't know you well. If they were in closer contact with you, they'd realize how nice you really are. That's why I'm putting you between them tonight."

There was a lengthy pause. "O.K.," Denham said at last.

The guests arrived at seven thirty-five. Mrs. Murgatroyd, Aunt Agatha, Mr. Murgatroyd (Denham liked his father-in-law whenever he remembered him), and Bert, Denham's thirteen-year-old brother-in-law — Denham catalogued them miserably while he forced his reluctant face into a genial smile. He felt even more pessimistic and apprehensive than before.

"'Lo, Gussie," Bert said. He was wearing a cotton T shirt with "Bat Man" written in large black letters across the chest. Under the words was the silhouette of a nasty-looking bat. To the lapel of his jacket was pinned an improbably red rose. "What do you think of my flower?"

"Fine," Denham answered. The only good quality he had ever been able to discern in Bert was that the boy was a little too old to chew bubble gum. "Very pretty."

"Go on, smell it."

URGED, Denham bent. He was rewarded by a douche of cold water in the face. "Did you bite!" Bert said with deep satisfaction, "Jeepers, did you bite!"

"Now, Bert," Mrs. Murgatroyd said, and then to Denham, in what might have been apology, "Bert's sense of humor is so keen."

Denham went into the bathroom and dried his collar and his hair. Then he came back and handed around glasses of tomato juice. His own contained something different. He tasted it cautiously and then with enthusiasm. Why had he been so apprehensive? They certainly understood how to mix drinks in 3,000 A.D. Good old — yes, decidedly — good old nuse! He had been longing for a drink, and here it was.

The dinner, with the nuse unobtrusively helping Franny serve, went off well. Even Mrs. Murgatroyd, who had plainly been skeptical about Franny's maid, grew mellow by the time the diners reached the gateau, and Denham, whose glass had been replenished several times, felt himself upborne on a monumental euphoria. For a small sum, say two or three hundred dollars, he would have risked kissing his mother-in-law.

His self-confidence sagged abruptly at Franny's next remark. "Gus, honey," she said, "you go get the things out of the refrigerator, and we'll play that game — you know, the one I read about in the party book. I'm sure Dad and Bert will enjoy playing it."

Though Denham rose obediently, he was feeling sick. He disliked Mrs. Murgatroyd and the nuse knew it; in the darkness, passing her bits of saturated sponge, chunks of suet, oysters limp and wet, who knew what dreadful thing might happen to her? He'd have to watch his thoughts, watch his thoughts.

When he came back from the kitchen, the room was dark. He gave the parcel to Franny, sitting at the end of the table, and she began the narration.

"There was an old witch who lived in a cellar," she said impressively, "and she did terrible things. On Halloween I went to visit her, though they told me she was dead. I tripped over something on the floor and picked it up." Franny fumbled in the parcel. She lowered her voice. "I knew at once that it was a piece of her arm."

Fanny passed the piece of lamb shank to Bert, who yipped. From Bert it went to Aunt Agatha, to Denham, to Mrs. Murgatroyd. There followed the witch's teeth, tongue, stomach, and brain. The eyeballs, Denham thought apprehensively, would be the worst. Raw oysters in the dark — ugh. What had possessed Franny to try this stunt, anyhow? She was a doll, but she could exhibit an unbelievable lack of tact.

The eyeballs were not the worst. Before Denham even handed the oysters to Mrs. Murgatroyd, she screamed piercingly. "Worms! Worms! You've filled my lap with worms!"

IT was a shriek as demoralizing as a siren's. Denham jumped. The lights came on. Mrs. Murgatroyd glared at him. There was nothing in her lap.

"You did it!" she said fiercely to Denham. "You put worms in my lap. They wriggled horribly. And then you took them away again. You — you — oh, poor Franny, married to a man like you!"

Denham had bitten his tongue so deeply at Mrs. Murgatroyd's first shriek that he could hardly talk, and besides he was conscious of a deep bewilderment. *Worms?*

Franny cut across the hubbub. "For goodness' sake, mother, be quiet! Gus didn't do anything. It was just your imagination. Gus, go get the apples and the tub. We'll try another game."

Mrs. Murgatroyd and her sister — wisely, Denham thought — refused to bob for the apples floating in the tub. He would have liked to refuse himself, but Franny nodded at him commandingly. Dumbly, still nursing his bitten tongue, he took his place behind Bert.

Mr. Murgatroyd was first. He hesitated, calculated, and then plunged. To his son-in-law's surprise, he came up with a pippin firmly between his false teeth. "Nothin' to it," he said.

Franny was next. She got wet, she screeched. But on the third try she secured an apple. She smiled at Denham and bit into it.

Then Bert. Denham was conscious of keeping a rigid mental grip on himself. It occurred to him suddenly that he had misinterpreted the meaning of the slogan, "Don't think, use nuse." It didn't mean, as one might suppose, that using nuse would relieve one of wear and tear on the brain; it meant something much less agreeable — don't *think*, if you use nuse.

Bert's narrow back bent over the basin. There was a horrid feeling of tension and oppression in the atmosphere. Abruptly he dipped after an apple which floated near the edge.

The water in the basin seemed to recoil from him. Then with a mighty splash it descended on Bert. Two of the apples hit him on the head.

This time it took much longer to get Mrs. Murgatroyd calmed down. "You did it," she repeated bitterly to Denham. "I saw you with my own eyes." Denham couldn't think of a thing to say that would make any sense.

MRS. MURGATROYD gestured toward Bert, who stood between them dripping vehemently. He was wet in the same thoroughgoing fashion that a long-haired dog gets wet; Denham had never seen a human being drip so hard.

"Do you mean to tell me he did *that* by himself?" she demanded. "And look at those big bumps on his poor head! To think that a grown man could be so petty, so childish! Just because he played a harmless, boyish prank on you with his flower! This has opened my eyes, as if they needed opening, to the sort of man you are. Franny's infatuated with you, of course; I only hope that this will help her to realize your true character."

Denham writhed helplessly. He honestly didn't think it was his fault. He hadn't been thinking about anything. Over Mrs. Murgatroyd's head he looked at the others. Mr. Murgatroyd, his fingers laced together over his stomach, was looking up at the ceiling. Aunt Agatha, on the other hand, watched the scene detachedly, while a faint smile played over her lips. Franny's expression was shocked and incredulous.

After a moment Denham caught his wife's eyes. She raised her brows in a gesture of mute questioning. Passionately he shook his head, and was relieved to get a sickly grin from her in return. At least she realized he hadn't meant to do whatever the nuse had done.

Bert was led off to the bedroom and returned, somewhat drier, wearing Denham's new silk dressing gown. As he passed his host,

Bert stuck out his tongue and thumbed his nose at him. Mrs. Murgatroyd, seeing her son still damp, began to talk all over again.

"For heaven's sakes, Mother," Franny said, "a little water won't hurt Bert. Gus! Will you get the donkey out of the closet? We'll play another game."

Denham drew his wife aside. "Listen, honey," he said earnestly, "do you think it's safe? We've had quite a lot of trouble already, and if we get blindfolded and try to pin tails on that thing . . . Wouldn't it be better just to sit quietly and talk or watch TV?"

Franny looked miserable. "I know, Gus. I feel just as worried about it as you do. Something must have gone wrong with the nuse power source in the future. But if we don't play a game or something, Mother won't go home or anything — she'll just stay here and complain. I think you'd better go get the donkey game."

Denham for some reason was selected to try the tail-pinning first. He made a fool of himself by missing the donkey completely and attaching the tails to the plaster of the wall. He was unblindfolded to the accompaniment of Bert's malignantly triumphant howls.

AFTER Denham, Franny. She did fairly well. Mr. Murgatroyd, to everyone's surprise but his own, got two out of three tails in the proper place. He retired to his chair with an air of modest competence.

Mrs. Murgatroyd must have been stung by her spouse's unexpected success. At any rate she insisted on being blindfolded next, despite Franny's obvious disinclination. Denham watched the process like a man who, tied helpless on top of a powder keg, sees the approach of matches and gasoline.

His mother-in-law groped her way over to the wall. The first tail she pinned to the donkey's chest, the second to the nape of its neck. The third she attached to the right hind leg. Nothing else happened. Denham sagged back, almost sick with relief. Whatever had gone wrong with the nuse source in 3,000 A.D. must have been corrected again.

"The plaster feels a little soft, Frances," Mrs. Murgatroyd said as she surrendered the blindfold to Aunt Agatha. "Perhaps your husband—" she gave Denham a glance of pure cyanide—"could repair it some time."

"Oh, I will," Denham babbled. "Yes, certainly. Of course. Oh, yes, you bet." He got out his handkerchief and wiped the sweat from his brow. When it was perfectly safe to do so, he decided, he'd have the nuse bring him another drink.

Aunt Agatha passed her hand gropingly over the printed figure of the donkey. "The plaster does

feel a little soft, Kate," she said to Mrs. Murgatroyd. She turned back to her task. "Yes, a little spongy and soft. Why, what on Earth—oh!"

The wall had begun to fall down on her.

First the wall, then the ceiling. Plaster fell in hunks, in chunks, in slabs. Some of it fell on Aunt Agatha, the rest on Mrs. Murgatroyd. Denham, though standing near them, was not touched. The falling plaster would have been noisy in itself, but it was accompanied by a grinding, rending, crashing roar like a cyclone breaking into a lion cage.

The floor began to tremble. From the fireplace beside Denham, an andiron rose into the air and hurled itself at Mrs. Murgatroyd's midriff. An ornamental plate rose dizzily from the dinner table. Twice it smacked itself forcefully against Mrs. Murgatroyd's broad rear; then it flew over to Aunt Agatha and hit her in the face. One of the pair of silver candlesticks from the mantel brandished itself before the nose of Denham's mother-in-law as if held in an angry hand. The other plummeted down deliberately on Aunt Agatha's toes. Franny was screaming at the top of her lungs. It was as if a covey of demented poltergeists was holding a convention in the room.

Articles of futuristic construction, apparently materialized by the nuse on its own hook, rained past Denham's head. Mrs. Murgatroyd was on her knees in the corner; Aunt Agatha was doubled up, with her arms raised to protect her head. Neither of them, since Aunt Agatha's first astonished exclamation, had uttered a sound, and this silence, in sharp contrast with Franny's uninhibited shrieks, impressed Denham as profoundly unnatural.

SUDDENLY the maniacal activity suspended itself. Objects returned to their usual places or fell to the floor. There was an instant of static, frozen calm. Then the carpet tore itself loose from its moorings. With irresistible momentum it advanced on the two cowering women. For a moment it reared above them like a tidal wave; then it broke over their heads.

With this final burst of energy, the nuse seemed to have exhausted itself. The carpet collapsed. After a moment Aunt Agatha pushed its stiff bulk aside and looked out. Her expression was still invincibly mild, but there were bits of plaster in her hair.

Mrs. Murgatroyd wobbled to her feet. Her eyes were fixed on Denham. Her mouth opened and closed several times, but no sound came out. This uncharacteristic aphasia affected him almost more than words would have done. He looked hastily around the room in search of moral support.

Bert and Franny wore expressions suitable to persons who have just seen a dining room explode. But Mr. Murgatroyd — Denham looked at him with amazement which changed sharply into outraged comprehension — Mr. Murgatroyd was a happy man. Beaming and complacent, his hands clasped over his stomach, he regarded the devastated scene. His eyes lingered on his wife's bruised person with especial pleasure.

So *he* was the cause of everything! No doubt he'd materialized the worms in his wife's lap accidentally, realized that some strange power had obeyed him, and gone on to enjoy it!

"Come, Kate," Aunt Agatha, said, "let us leave this house."

And late as it was when they left, and tired as he was, Denham took a hammer and smashed the nuse.

DENHAM was on his way home from the office one evening in April when the nuse man stepped into his path. He looked leaner and less prosperous than when Denham had seen him half a year before. He had the air, somehow, of a cat which has been chased away from a lot of garbage cans and will undoubtedly be chased away from many more.

"Heigh, gesell," he said hoarsely, "how about buying an ipsissifex? Better even than nuse, the airy servitor. I hear you're working pretty hard these days. Duplicate yourself and cut your work load. We guarantee up to ten perfect replic — heigh, wait! What are you looking at me like that for? Are you going to hit me *too?*"

"I'm afraid I am," Denham said, and he did.

— MARGARET ST. CLAIR

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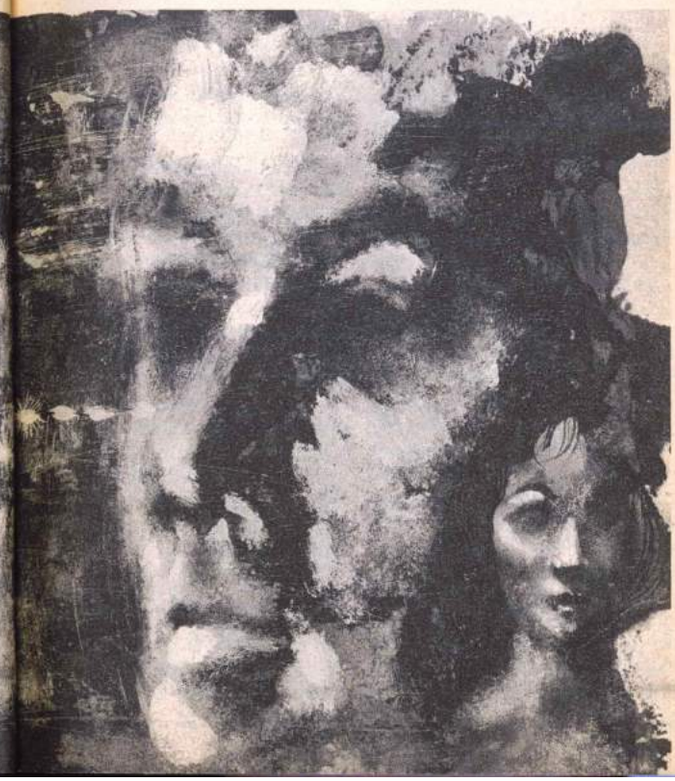

I

THE story ran—how did the story run? Everyone knew the reference to Helen America and Mr. Gray-no-more, but no one knew exactly how it happened. Their names were welded to the glittering timeless jewelry of romance. Sometimes they were compared to Heloise and Abelard, whose story had been