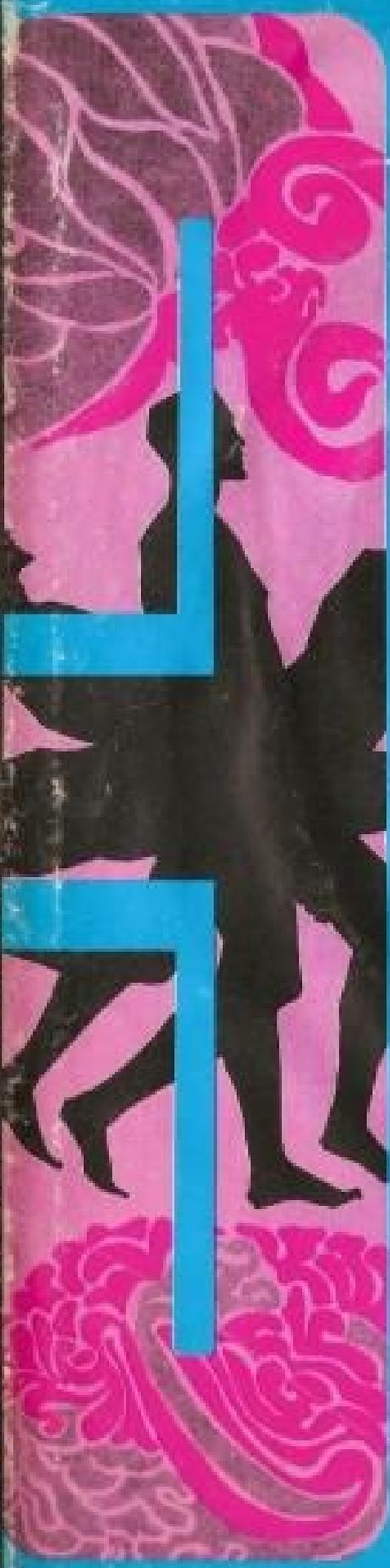


SILVERBERG
ZELAZNY
BLISH

THREE FOR TOMORROW

THREE ORIGINAL NOVELLAS
OF SCIENCE FICTION
Merrilith Press



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ROBERT SILVERBERG
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With a Foreword by
ARTHUR C. CLARKE

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"HOW IT WAS WHEN THE PAST WENT AWAY"

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Editor's Introduction

The three stories presented here were written specially for this book. They are the outcome of an unusual sort of literary challenge. Arthur C. Clarke, one of the world's best-known science-fiction authors, whose works include the novel *Childhood's End* and the screenplay for Stanley Kubrick's motion picture *2001: A Space Odyssey*, was asked to write a brief essay setting forth a general theme for a science-fiction story. Clarke's theme then was offered to Robert Silverberg, Roger Zelazny, and James Blish, three award-winning science-fiction writers; each was told to use it as the basis for a short novel, and each was given no hint of the approaches the others were taking. The result is a trio of stories that differ markedly in style, technique, and tone, while demonstrating in three individual ways the uncomfortable possibilities that the future may hold for us.

Foreword

With increasing technology goes increasing vulnerability; the more Man "conquers" (*sic*) Nature the more prone he becomes to artificial catastrophe. The last few years have brought a series of previews: the *Torrey Canyon* oil tanker and the Santa Barbara oil slick, the blackout of the northeastern United States, the thalidomide disaster, the tobacco and automobile industries...

Some even more fascinating prospects are now looming up ahead. Thousand-seater jets, sonobombs, *really* big geodesic domes, the Pill, nuclear-power stations (how many people know that, a year later, the AEC was still trying to get a good look at the inaccessible object that had wrecked the multimillion-dollar Fermi reactor?) provide material for some gloomy thoughts.

But the most terrifying prospects are those which involve psychological, not only technological factors. Remember the "Mad Bomber" of the New York subway. Think of all the airliners that have been destroyed by explosives in the baggage compartment. (There are many more attempts at aerial sabotage than the public ever hears about.) And don't forget that clean-cut, all-American sniper in the University of Texas clock tower.

How is the society of the future going to protect itself from an increasing spectrum of ever more horrendous disasters, particularly those made possible by new devices (high-powered lasers? drugs? in the hands of madmen? To put the matter in one sentence: When will some Lee Harvey Oswald attempt to assassinate a city—or a world?

Of course, miscellaneous disasters have been the stock-in-trade of science fiction since its earliest days. (One of my favorites remains the *Saturday Evening Post* story about the giant new skyscraper that collapsed because the occupants of the—*watertight!*—penthouse left the bathroom tap running when they went on vacation.) Everyone is familiar with the *Dr. Strangelove/Fail-Safe* theme; few realize that such things could happen even in a peaceful, unified world society.

I would like to see more of those possibilities explored—if only in the hope that, by so doing, we can avoid them.

ARTHUR C. CLARK

How It Was When the Past Went Away

by

ROBERT SILVERBERG

Robert Silverberg's first science-fiction stories were published in 1953; since then he has written score of novels and hundreds of short stories, as well as editing anthologies and producing a number of books on scientific subjects. His recent novels include Thorns, The Masks of Time, The Time Hoppers, Hawksbill Station, and The Man in the Maze. He received the Hugo award in 1956, and was President of the Science Fiction Writers of America in 1967-68.

How It Was When the Past Went Away

The day that an antisocial fiend dumped an amnesifacient drug into the city water supply was one of the finest that San Francisco had had in a long while. The damp cloud that had been hovering over everything for three weeks finally drifted across the bay into Berkeley that Wednesday, and the sun emerged, bright and warm, to give the old town its warmest day so far in 2003. The temperature climbed into the high twenties, and even those oldsters who hadn't managed to learn to convert to the centigrade thermometer knew it was hot. Air-conditioners hummed from the Golden Gate to the Embarcadero. Pacific Gas & Electric recorded its highest one-hour load in history between two and three in the afternoon. The parks were crowded. People drank a lot of water, some a good deal more than others. Toward nightfall, the thirstiest ones were already beginning to forget things. By the next morning, everybody in the city was in trouble, with a few exceptions. It had really been an ideal day for committing a monstrous crime.

On the day before the past went away, Paul Mueller had been thinking seriously about leaving the state and claiming refuge in one of the debtor sanctuaries—Reno, maybe, or Caracas. It wasn't altogether his fault, but he was close to a million in the red, and his creditors were getting unruly. He had reached the point where they were sending their robot bill collectors around to harass him personally, just about every three hours.

"Mr. Mueller? I am requested to notify you that the sum of \$8,005.97 is overdue in your account with Modern Age Recre-ators, Inc. We have applied to your financial representative and have discovered your state of insolvency, and therefore, unless a payment of \$395.61 is made by the eleventh of this month, we may find it necessary to begin confiscation procedures against your person. Thus I advise you..."

"—the amount of \$11,554.97, payable on the ninth of August, 2002, has not yet been received by Luna Tours, Ltd. Under the Credit Laws of 1995 we have applied for injunctive relief against you and anticipate receiving a decree of personal service due, if no payment is received by..."

"—interest on the unpaid balance is accruing, as specified in your contract, at a rate of four percent per month..."

"—balloon payment now coming due, requiring the immediate payment of..."

Mueller was growing accustomed to the routine. The robots couldn't call him—Pacific Tel & T had cut him out of their data net months ago—and so they came around, polite blank-faced machines stenciled with corporate emblems, and in soft purring voices told him precisely how deep in the mire he was at the moment, how fast the penalty charges were piling up, and what they planned to do to him unless he settled his debts instantly. If he tried to duck them, they'd simply track him down in the streets like indefatigable process servers, and announce his shame to the whole city. So he didn't duck them. But fairly soon their threats would begin to materialize.

They could do awful things to him. The decree of personal service, for example, would turn him into a slave; he'd become an employee of his creditor, at a court-stipulated salary, but every cent he earned would be applied against his debt, while the creditor provided him with minimal food, shelter, and clothing. He might find himself compelled to do menial jobs that a robot would spit at, for two or three years, just to clear that one debt. Personal confiscation procedures were even worse; under the deal he might well end up as the actual servant of one of the executives of a creditor company, shining

shoes and folding shirts. They might also get an open-ended garnishment on him, under which he and his descendants, if any, would pay a stated percentage of their annual income down through the ages until the debt, and the compounding interest thereon, was finally satisfied. There were other techniques for dealing with delinquents, too.

He had no recourse to bankruptcy. The states and the federal government had tossed out the bankruptcy laws in 1995, after the so-called Credit Epidemic of the 1980's, when for a while it was actually fashionable to go irretrievably into debt and throw yourself on the mercy of the courts. That haven of easy bankruptcy was no more; if you became insolvent, your creditors had you in their grip. The only way out was to jump to a debtor sanctuary, a place where local laws barred any extradition for a credit offense. There were about a dozen such sanctuaries, and you could live well there provided you had some special skill that you could sell at a high price. You needed to make a good living, because in a debtor sanctuary everything was on a strictly cash basis—cash in advance, at the very least, even for a haircut. Mueller had a skill that he thought would see him through: he was an artist, a maker of sonic sculptures, and his work was always in good demand. All he needed was a few thousand dollars to purchase the basic tools of his trade—his last set of sculpting equipment had been repossessed a few weeks ago—and he could set up a studio in one of the sanctuaries, beyond the reach of the robot hounds. He imagined he could still find a friend who would lend him a few thousand dollars. In the name of art, so to speak. In a good cause.

If he stayed within the sanctuary area for ten consecutive years, he would be absolved of his debt and could come forth a free man. There was only one catch, not a small one. Once a man had taken the sanctuary route, he was forever barred from all credit channels when he returned to the outside world. He couldn't even get a post office credit card, let alone a bank loan. Mueller wasn't sure he could live that way, paying cash for everything all the rest of his life. It would be terribly cumbersome and dreary. Worse: it would be barbaric.

He made a note on his memo pad: *Call Freddy Munson in morning and borrow three bigs. Buy ticket to Caracas. Buy sculpting stuff.*

The die was cast—unless he changed his mind in the morning.

He peered moodily out at the row of glistening whitewashed just-post-Earthquake houses descending the steeply inclined street that ran down Telegraph Hill toward Fisherman's Wharf. The sun sparkled in the unfamiliar sunlight. A beautiful day, Mueller thought. A beautiful day to drown yourself in the bay, Damn. Damn. Damn. He was going to be forty years old soon. He had come into the world on the same black day that President John Kennedy had left it. Born in an evil hour, doomed to a dark fate. Mueller scowled. He went to the tap and got a glass of water. It was the only thing he could afford to drink, just now. He asked himself how he had ever managed to get into such a mess. Nearly a million in debt!

He lay down dismally to take a nap.

When he woke, toward midnight, he felt better than he had felt for a long time. Some great cloud seemed to have lifted from him, even as it had lifted from the city that day. Mueller was actually in a cheerful mood. He couldn't imagine why.

In an elegant townhouse on Marina Boulevard, The Amazing Montini was rehearsing his act. The Amazing Montini was a professional mnemonist: a small, dapper man of sixty, who never forgot anything. Deeply tanned, his dark hair slicked back at a sharp angle, his small black eyes glistening with confidence, his thin lips fastidiously pursed. He drew a book from a shelf and let it drop open

random. It was an old one-volume edition of Shakespeare, a familiar prop in his nightclub act. He skimmed the page, nodded, looked briefly at another, then another, and smiled his inward smile. Li was kind to The Amazing Montini. He earned a comfortable \$30,000 a week on tour, having converted a freakish gift into a profitable enterprise. Tomorrow night he'd open for a week at Vegas; then on to Manila, Tokyo, Bangkok, Cairo, on around the globe. In twelve weeks he'd earn his year's take; then he'd relax once more.

It was all so easy. He knew so many good tricks. Let them scream out a twenty-digit number; he'd scream it right back. Let them bombard him with long strings of nonsense syllables; he'd repeat them gibberish flawlessly. Let them draw intricate mathematical formulas on the computer screen; he'd reproduce them down to the last exponent. His memory was perfect, both for visuals and auditories, and for the other registers as well.

The Shakespeare thing, which was one of the simplest routines he had, always awed the impressionable. It seemed so fantastic to most people that a man could memorize the complete works page by page. He liked to use it as an opener.

He handed the book to Nadia, his assistant. Also his mistress; Montini liked to keep his circle of intimates close. She was twenty years old, taller than he was, with wide frost-gleamed eyes and a torrent of glowing, artificially radiant azure hair: up to the minute in every fashion. She wore a glass bodice, a nice container for the things contained. She was not very bright, but she did the things Montini expected her to do, and did them quite well. She would be replaced, he estimated, in about eighteen more months. He grew bored quickly with his women. His memory was too good.

"Let's start," he said.

She opened the book. "Page 537, left-hand column."

Instantly the page floated before Montini's eyes. "Henry VI, Part Two," he said. "King Henry: Sa man, were these thy words? Homer: An't shall please your majesty, I never said nor thought any such matter: God is my witness, I am falsely accused by the villain. Peter: By these ten bones, my lords, I did speak them to me in the garret one night, as we were scouring my Lord of York's armour. York Base dunghill villain, and ..."

"Page 778, right-hand column," Nadia said.

"Romeo and Juliet. Mercutio is speaking: ... an eye would spy out such a quarrel? Thy head is full of quarrels as an egg is full of meat, and yet thy head hath been beaten as addle as an egg for quarreling. Thou hast quarreled with a man for coughing in the street, because he hath wakened the dog that hath lain asleep in the sun. Didst thou not?"

"Page 307, starting fourteen lines down on the right side."

Montini smiled. He liked the passage. A screen would show it to his audience at the performance.

"Twelfth Night," he said. "The Duke speaks: Too old, by heaven. Let still the woman take an elder than herself, so wears she to him, so sways she level in her husband's heart: For, boy, however we do praise ourselves, our fancies are more giddy and unfirm"

"Page 495, left-hand column."

"Wait a minute," Montini said. He poured himself a tall glass of water and drank it in three quick gulps. "This work always makes me thirsty."

...

Taylor Braskett, Lt. Comdr., Ret., U.S. Space Service, strode with springy stride into his Oak Street

home, just outside Golden Gate Park. At 71, Commander Braskett still managed to move in a jaunty way, and he was ready to step back into uniform at once if his country needed him. He believed his country did need him, more than ever, now that socialism was running like wildfire through half the nations of Europe. Guard the home front, at least. Protect what's left of traditional American liberty. What we ought to have, Commander Braskett believed, is a network of C-bombs in orbit, ready to rain a hellish death on the enemies of democracy. No matter what that treaty says, we must be prepared to defend ourselves.

Commander Braskett's theories were not widely accepted. People respected him for having been one of the first Americans to land on Mars, of course, but he knew that they quietly regarded him as a crank, a crackpot, an antiquated Minute Man still fretting about the Redcoats. He had enough of a sense of humor to realize that he did cut an absurd figure to these young people. But he was sincere in his determination to help keep America free—to protect the youngsters from the lash of totalitarianism, whether they laughed at him or not. All this glorious sunny day he had been walking through the park, trying to talk to the young ones, attempting to explain his position. He was courteous, attentive, eager to find someone who would ask him questions. The trouble was that no one listened. And the young ones—stripped to the waist in the sunshine, girls as well as boys, taking drugs out in the open, using the foulest obscenities in casual speech—at times, Commander Braskett almost came to think that the battle for America had already been lost. Yet he never gave up all hope.

He had been in the park for hours. Now, at home, he walked past the trophy room, into the kitchen, opened the refrigerator, drew out a bottle of water. Commander Braskett had three bottles of mountain spring water delivered to his home every two days; it was a habit he had begun fifty years ago, when they had first started talking about putting fluorides in the water. He was not unaware of the little smiles they gave him when he admitted that he drank only bottled spring water, but he didn't mind; he had outlived many of the smilers already, and attributed his perfect health to his refusal to touch the polluted, contaminated water that most other people drank. First chlorine, then fluorides—probably they were putting in some other things by now, Commander Braskett thought.

He drank deeply.

You have no way of telling what sort of dangerous chemicals they might be putting in the municipal water system these days, he told himself. Am I a crank? Then I'm a crank. But a sane man drinks only water he can trust.

Fetally curled, knees pressed almost to chin, trembling, sweating, Nate Haldersen closed his eyes and tried to ease himself of the pain of existence. Another day. A sweet, sunny day. Happy people playing in the park. Fathers and children. Husbands and wives. He bit his lip, hard, just short of laceration intensity. He was an expert at punishing himself.

Sensors mounted in his bed in the Psychotrauma Ward of Fletcher Memorial Hospital scanned him continuously, sending a constant flow of reports to Dr. Bryce and his team of shrinks. Nate Haldersen knew he was a man without secrets. His hormone count, enzyme ratios, respiration, circulation, even the taste of bile in his mouth—it all became instantaneously known to hospital personnel. When the sensors discovered him slipping below the depression line, ultrasonic snouts came nosing up from the recesses of the mattress, proximity nozzles that sought him out in the bed, found the proper vein, and squirted him full of dynajuce to cheer him up. Modern science was wonderful. It could do everything for Haldersen except give him back his family.

The door slid open. Dr. Bryce came in. The head shrink looked his part: tall, solemn yet charming, gray at the temples, clearly a wielder of power and an initiate of mysteries. He sat down beside Halder'sen's bed. As usual, he made a big point of not looking at the row of computer outputs next to the bed that gave the latest details on Halder'sen's condition.

"Nate?" he said. "How goes?"

"It goes," Halder'sen muttered.

"Feel like talking a while?"

"Not specially. Get me a drink of water?"

"Sure," the shrink said. He fetched it and said, "It's a gorgeous day. How about a walk in the park?"

"I haven't left this room in two and a half years, Doctor. You know that."

"Always a time to break loose. There's nothing physically wrong with you, you know."

"I just don't feel like seeing people," Halder'sen said. He handed back the empty glass. "More?"

"Want something stronger to drink?"

"Water's fine." Halder'sen closed his eyes. Unwanted images danced behind the lids: the rocket liner blowing open over the pole, the passengers spilling out like autumn seeds erupting from a pod, Emily tumbling down, down, falling eighty thousand feet, her golden hair swept up by the thin cold wind, her short skirt flapping at her hips, her long lovely legs clawing at the sky for a place to stand. And the children falling beside her, angels dropping from heaven, down, down, down, toward the white soothing fleece of the polar ice. They sleep in peace, Halder'sen thought, and I missed the plane and I alone remain. And Job spake, and said, Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived.

"It was eleven years ago," Dr. Bryce told him. "Won't you let go of it?"

"Stupid talk coming from a shrink. Why won't it let go of *me*?"

"You don't want it to. You're too fond of playing your role."

"Today is talking-tough day, eh? Get me some more water."

"Get up and get it yourself," said the shrink.

Halder'sen smiled bitterly. He left the bed, crossing the room a little unsteadily, and filled his glass. He had had all sorts of therapy—sympathy therapy, antagonism therapy, drugs, shock, orthodox Freudian, the works. They did nothing for him. He was left with the image of an opening pod, and falling figures against the iron-blue sky. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. My soul is weary of my life. He put the glass to his lips. Eleven years. I missed the plane. I sinned with Marie, and Emily died, and John, and Beth. What did it feel like to fall so far? Was it like flying? Was there ecstasy in it? Halder'sen filled the glass again.

"Thirsty today, eh?"

"Yes," Halder'sen said.

"Sure you don't want to take a little walk?"

"You know I don't." Halder'sen shivered. He turned and caught the psychiatrist by the forearm. "When does it end, Tim? How long do I have to carry this thing around?"

"Until you're willing to put it down."

"How can I make a conscious effort to forget something? Tim, Tim, isn't there some drug I can

take, something to wash away a memory that's killing me?"

"Nothing effective."

"You're lying," Haldersen murmured. "I've read about the amnesifacients. The enzymes that eat memory-RNA. The experiments with di-isopropyl fluorophosphate. Puromycin. The—"

Dr. Bryce said, "We have no control over their operations. We can't simply go after a single block of traumatic memories while leaving the rest of your mind unharmed. We'd have to bash about randomly, hoping we got the trouble spot, but never knowing what else we were blotting out. You wake up without your trauma, but maybe without remembering anything else that happened to you in between, say, the ages of 14 and 40. Maybe in fifty years we'll know enough to be able to direct the dosage at a specific—"

"I can't wait fifty years."

"I'm sorry, Nate."

"Give me the drug anyway. I'll take my chances on what I lose."

"We'll talk about that some other time, all right? The drugs are experimental. There'd be months of red tape before I could get authorization to try them on a human subject. You have to realize—"

Haldersen turned him off. He saw only with his inner eye, saw the tumbling bodies, reliving his bereavement for the billionth time, slipping easily back into his self-assumed role of Job. I am a brother to dragons, and a companion to owls. My skin is black upon me, and my bones are burned with heat. He hath destroyed me on every side, and I am gone: and mine hope hath he removed like a tree.

The shrink continued to speak. Haldersen continued not to listen. He poured himself one more glass of water with a shaky hand.

It was close to midnight on Wednesday before Pierre Gerard, his wife, their two sons, and the daughter had a chance to have dinner. They were the proprietors, chefs, and total staff of the Petit Po Restaurant on Sansome Street, and business had been extraordinarily, exhaustingly good all evening. Usually they were able to eat about half past five, before the dinner rush began, but today people had begun coming in early—made more expansive by the good weather, no doubt—and there hadn't been a free moment for anybody since the cocktail hour. The Gerards were accustomed to brisk trade, for theirs was perhaps the most popular family-run bistro in the city, with a passionately devoted clientele. Still, a night like this was too much!

They dined modestly on the evening's miscalculations: an overdone rack of lamb, some faintly corky Chateau Beychevelle '97, a fallen souffle, and such. They were thrifty people. Their only extravagance was the Evian water that they imported from France. Pierre Gerard had not set foot in his native Lyons for thirty years, but he preserved many of the customs of the motherland, including the traditional attitude toward water. A Frenchman does not drink much water; but what he does drink comes always from the bottle, never from the tap. To do otherwise is to risk a diseased liver. One must guard one's liver.

That night Freddy Munson picked up Helene at her flat on Geary and drove across the bridge to Sausalito for dinner, as usual, at Ondine's. Ondine's was one of only four restaurants, all of the famous old ones, at which Munson ate in fixed rotation. He was a man of firm habits. He awakened religiously at six each morning, and was at his desk in the brokerage house by seven, plugging himself into the data channels to learn what had happened in the European finance markets while he slept. A

half past seven local time the New York exchanges opened and the real day's work began. By half past eleven, New York was through for the day, and Munson went around the corner for lunch, always at the Petit Pois, whose proprietor he had helped to make a millionaire by putting him into Consolidated Nucleonics' several components two and a half years before the big merger. At half past one, Munson was back in the office to transact business for his own account on the Pacific Coast exchange; three days a week he left at three, but on Tuesdays and Thursdays he stayed as late as five in order to catch some deals on the Honolulu and Tokyo exchanges. Afterwards, dinner, a play or concert, always with a handsome female companion. He tried to get to sleep, or at least to bed, by midnight.

A man in Freddy Munson's position *had* to be orderly. At any given time, his thefts from his clients ranged from six to nine million dollars, and he kept all the details of his jugglings in his head. He couldn't trust putting them on paper, because there were scanner eyes everywhere; and he certainly didn't dare employ the data net, since it was well known that anything you confided to one computer was bound to be accessible to some other computer somewhere, no matter how tight a privacy seal you slapped on it. So Munson had to remember the intricacies of fifty or more illicit transactions, constantly changing chain of embezzlements, and a man who practices such necessary disciplines in his memory soon gets into the habit of extending discipline to every phase of his life.

Helene snuggled close. Her faintly psychedelic perfume drifted toward his nostrils. He locked the car into the Sausalito circuit and leaned back comfortably as the traffic-control computer took over the steering. Helene said, "At the Bryce place last night I saw two sculptures by your bankrupt friend

"Paul Mueller?"

"That's the one. They were very good sculptures. One of them buzzed at me."

"What were you doing at the Bryces?"

"I went to college with Lisa Bryce. She invited me over with Marty."

"I didn't realize you were that old," Munson said.

Helene giggled. "Lisa's a lot younger than her husband, dear. How much does a Paul Mueller sculpture cost?"

"Fifteen, twenty thousand, generally. More for specials."

"And he's broke, even so?"

"Paul has a rare talent for self-destruction," Munson said. "He simply doesn't comprehend money. But it's his artistic salvation, in a way. The more desperately in debt he is, the finer his work becomes. He creates out of his despair, so to speak. Though he seems to have overdone the latest crisis. He's stopped working altogether. It's a sin against humanity when an artist doesn't work."

"You can be so eloquent, Freddy," Helene said softly.

When The Amazing Montini woke Thursday morning, he did not at once realize that anything had changed. His memory, like a good servant, was always there when he needed to call on it, but the array of perfectly fixed facts he carried in his mind remained submerged until required. A librarian might scan shelves and see books missing; Montini could not detect similar vacancies of his synapses. He had been up for half an hour, had stepped under the molecular bath and had punched for his breakfast and had awakened Nadia to tell her to confirm the pod reservations to Vegas, and finally, like a concert pianist running off a few arpeggios to limber his fingers for the day's chores, Montini reached into his memory bank for a little Shakespeare and no Shakespeare came.

He stood quite still, gripping the astrolabe that ornamented his picture window, and peered out the bridge in sudden bewilderment. It had never been necessary for him to make a conscious effort to recover data. He merely looked and it was there; but where was Shakespeare? Where was the left-hand column of page 136, and the right-hand column of page 654, and the right-hand column of page 80 sixteen lines down? Gone? He drew blanks. The screen of his mind showed him only empty pages.

Easy. This is unusual, but it isn't catastrophic. You must be tense, for some reason, and you're forcing it, that's all. Relax, pull something else out of storage—

The *New York Times*, Wednesday, October 3, 1973. Yes, there it was, the front page, beautifully clear, the story on the baseball game down in the lower right-hand corner, the headline about the j accident big and black, even the photo credit visible. Fine. Now let's try—

The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Sunday, April 19, 1987. Montini shivered. He saw the top four inches of the page, nothing else. Wiped clean.

He ran through the files of other newspapers he had memorized for his act. Some were there. Some were not. Some, like the *Post-Dispatch*, were obliterated in part. Color rose to his cheeks. Who had tampered with his memory?

He tried Shakespeare again. Nothing.

He tried the 1997 Chicago data-net directory. It was there.

He tried his third-grade geography textbook. It was there, the big red book with smeary print.

He tried last Friday's five-o'clock xerofax bulletin. Gone.

He stumbled and sank down on a divan he had purchased in Istanbul, he recalled, on the nineteenth of May, 1985, for 4,200 Turkish pounds. "Nadia!" he cried. "Nadia!" His voice was little more than a croak. She came running, her eyes only half frosted, her morning face askew.

"How do I look?" he demanded. "My mouth—is my mouth right? My eyes?"

"Your face is all flushed."

"Aside from that!"

"I don't know," she gasped. "You seem all upset, but—"

"Half my mind is gone," Montini said. "I must have had a stroke. Is there any facial paralysis? That's a symptom. Call my doctor, Nadia! A stroke, a stroke! It's the end for Montini!"

Paul Mueller, awakening at midnight on Wednesday and feeling strangely refreshed, attempted to get his bearings. Why was he fully dressed, and why had he been asleep? A nap, perhaps, that had stretched on too long? He tried to remember what he had been doing earlier in the day, but he was unable to find a clue. He was baffled but not disturbed; mainly he felt a tremendous urge to get to work. The images of five sculptures, fully planned and begging to be constructed, jostled in his mind. Might as well start right now, he thought. Work through till morning. That small twittering silvery one—that's a good one to start with. I'll block out the schematics, maybe even do some of the armature—

"Carole?" he called. "Carole, are you around?"

His voice echoed through the oddly empty apartment.

For the first time Mueller noticed how little furniture there was. A bed—a cot, really, not the double bed—and a table, and a tiny insulator unit for food, and a few dishes. No carpeting. Where were his sculptures, his private collection of his own best work? He walked into his studio and found it bare from wall to wall, all of his tools mysteriously swept away, just a few discarded sketches on the

floor. And his wife? "Carole? *Carole?*"

He could not understand any of this. While he dozed, it seemed, someone had cleaned the place out, stolen his furniture, his sculptures, even the carpet. Mueller had heard of such thefts. They came with a van, brazenly, posing as moving men. Perhaps they had given him some sort of drug while they worked. He could not bear the thought that they had taken his sculptures; the rest didn't matter, but he had cherished those dozen pieces dearly. I'd better call the police, he decided, and rushed toward the handset of the data unit, but it wasn't there either. Would burglars take *that* too?

Searching for some answers, he scurried from wall to wall, and saw a note in his own handwriting: *Call Freddy Munson in morning and borrow three bigs. Buy ticket to Caracas. Buy sculpting stuff.*

Caracas? A vacation, maybe? And why buy sculpting stuff? Obviously the tools had been gone before he fell asleep, then. Why? And where was his wife? What was going on? He wondered if he ought to call Freddy right now, instead of waiting until morning. Freddy might know. Freddy was always home by midnight, too. He'd have one of his damned girls with him and wouldn't want to be interrupted, but to hell with that; what good was having friends if you couldn't bother them in a time of crisis?

Heading for the nearest public communicator booth, he rushed out of his apartment and nearly collided with a sleek dunning robot in the hallway. The things show no mercy, Mueller thought. They plague you at all hours. No doubt this one was on its way to bother the deadbeat Nicholson family down the hall.

The robot said, "Mr. Paul Mueller? I am a properly qualified representative of International Fabrication Cartel, Amalgamated. I am here to serve notice that there is an unpaid balance in your account to the extent of \$9,150.55, which as of 0900 hours tomorrow morning will accrue compounded penalty interest at the rate of 5 percent per month, since you have not responded to our three previous requests for payment. I must further inform you—"

"You're off your neutrinos," Mueller snapped. "I don't owe a dime to I.F.C.! For once in my life I'm in the black, and don't try to make me believe otherwise."

The robot replied patiently, "Shall I give you a printout of the transactions? On the fifth of January 2003, you ordered the following metal products from us: three 4-meter tubes of antiqued iridium, six 10-centimeter spheres of—"

"The fifth of January, 2003, happens to be three months from now," Mueller said, "and I don't have time to listen to crazy robots. I've got an important call to make. Can I trust you to patch me into the data net without garbling things?"

"I am not authorized to permit you to make use of my facilities.!"

"Emergency override," said Mueller. "Human being in trouble. Go argue with that one!"

The robot's conditioning was sound. It yielded at once to his assertion of an emergency and set up a relay to the main communications net. Mueller supplied Freddy Munson's number. "I can provide audio only," the robot said, putting the call through. Nearly a minute passed. Then Freddy Munson's familiar deep voice snarled from the speaker grille in the robot's chest, "Who is it and what do you want?"

"It's Paul. I'm sorry to bust in on you, Freddy, but I'm in big trouble. I think I'm losing my mind, and so is everybody else."

"Maybe everybody else is. What's the problem?"

"All my furniture's gone. A dunning robot is trying to shake me down for nine bigs. I don't know where Carole is. I can't remember what I was doing earlier today. I've got a note here about getting tickets to Caracas that I wrote myself, and I don't know why. And—"

"Skip the rest," Munson said. "I can't do anything for you. I've got problems of my own."

"Can I come over, at least, and talk?"

"Absolutely not!" In a softer voice Munson said, "Listen, Paul, I didn't mean to yell, but something's come up here, something very distressing—"

"You don't need to pretend. You've got Helene with you and you wish I'd leave you alone. Okay."

"No. Honestly," Munson said. "I've got problems, suddenly. I'm in a totally ungood position to give you any help at all. I need help myself."

"What sort? Anything I can do for you?"

"I'm afraid not. And if you'll excuse me, Paul—"

"Just tell me one thing, at least. Where am I likely to find Carole? Do you have any idea?"

"At her husband's place, I'd say."

"I'm her husband."

There was a long pause. Munson said finally, "Paul, she divorced you last January and married Peter Castine in April."

"No," Mueller said.

"What, no?"

"No, it isn't possible."

"Have you been popping pills, Paul? Sniffing something? Smoking weed? Look, I'm sorry, but I can't take time now to—"

"At least tell me what day today is."

"Wednesday."

"Which Wednesday?"

"Wednesday the eighth of May. Thursday the ninth, actually, by this time of night."

"And the year?"

"For Christ's sake, Paul—"

"The *year*?"

"2003."

Mueller sagged. "Freddy, I've lost half a year somewhere! For me it's last October. 2002. I've got some weird kind of amnesia. It's the only explanation."

"Amnesia," Munson said. The edge of tension left his voice. "Is that what you've got? Amnesia? Can there be such a thing as an epidemic of amnesia? Is it contagious? Maybe you better come over here after all. Because amnesia's my problem too."

Thursday, May 9, promised to be as beautiful as the previous day had been. The sun once again beamed on San Francisco; the sky was clear, the air warm and tender. Commander Braskett awoke early as always, punched for his usual spartan breakfast, studied the morning xerofax news, spent a

hour dictating his memoirs, and, about nine, went out for a walk. The streets were strangely crowded. He found, when he got down to the shopping district along Haight Street. People were wandering about aimlessly, dazedly, as though they were sleepwalkers. Were they drunk? Drugged? Three times in five minutes Commander Braskett was stopped by young men who wanted to know the date. Not the time, the *date*. He told them, crisply, disdainfully; he tried to be tolerant, but it was difficult for him not to despise people who were so weak that they were unable to refrain from poisoning their minds with stimulants and narcotics and psy-chedelics and similar trash. At the corner of Haight and Masonic a forlorn-looking pretty girl of about seventeen, with wide blank blue eyes, halted him and said, "Surely this city is San Francisco, isn't it? I mean, I was supposed to move here from Pittsburgh in May, and this is May, this is San Francisco, right?" Commander Braskett nodded brusquely and turned away, pained. He was relieved to see an old friend, Lou Sandler, the manager of the Bank of America office across the way. Sandler was standing outside the bank door. Commander Braskett crossed to him and said, "Isn't it a disgrace, Lou, the way this whole street is filled with addicts this morning? What is this some historical pageant of the 1960's?" And Sandler gave him an empty smile and said, "Is that my name? Lou? You wouldn't happen to know the last name too, would you? Somehow it's slipped my mind." In that moment Commander Braskett realized that something terrible had happened to his city and perhaps to his country, and that the leftist takeover he had long dreaded must now be at hand, and that it was time for him to don his old uniform again and do what he could to strike back at the enemy.

In joy and in confusion, Nate Haldersen awoke that morning realizing that he had been transformed in some strange and wonderful way. His head was throbbing, but not painfully. It seemed to him that a terrible weight had been lifted from his shoulders, that the fierce dead hand about his throat had at last relinquished its grip.

He sprang from bed, full of questions.

Where am I? What kind of place is this? Why am I not at home? Where are my books? Why do I feel so happy?

This seemed to be a hospital room.

There was a veil across his mind. He pierced its filmy folds and realized that he had committed himself to—to Fletcher Memorial—last—August—no, the August before last—suffering with severe emotional disturbance brought on by—brought on by—

He had never felt happier than at this moment.

He saw a mirror. In it was the reflected upper half of Nathaniel Haldersen, Ph.D. Nate Haldersen smiled at himself. Tall, stringy, long-nosed man, absurdly straw-colored hair, absurd blue eyes, thin lips, smiling. Bony body. He undid his pajama top. Pale, hairless chest; bump of bone like an epaulet on each shoulder. I have been sick a long time, Haldersen thought. Now

I must get out of here, back to my classroom. End of leave of absence. Where are my clothes?

"Nurse? Doctor?" He pressed his call button three times. "Hello? Anyone here?"

No one came. Odd; they always came. Shrugging, Haldersen moved out into the hall. He saw three orderlies, heads together, buzzing at the far end. They ignored him. A robot servitor carrying breakfast trays glided past. A moment later one of the younger doctors came running through the hall, and would not stop when Haldersen called to him. Annoyed, he went back into his room and looked about for clothing. He found none, only a little stack of magazines on the closet floor. He thumbed the call button three more times. Finally one of the robots entered the room.

"I am sorry," it said, "but the human hospital personnel is busy at present. May I serve you, Dr. Haldersen?"

"I want a suit of clothing. I'm leaving the hospital."

"I am sorry, but there is no record of your discharge. Without authorization from Dr. Bryce, Dr. Reynolds, or Dr. Kamakura, I am not permitted to allow your departure."

Haldersen sighed. He knew better than to argue with a robot. "Where are those three gentlemen right now?"

"They are occupied, sir. As you may know, there is a medical emergency in the city this morning, and Dr. Bryce and Dr. Kamakura are helping to organize the committee of public safety. Dr. Reynolds did not report for duty today and we are unable to trace him. It is believed that he is a victim of the current difficulty."

"What current difficulty?"

"Mass loss of memory on the part of the human population," the robot said.

"An epidemic of amnesia?"

"That is one interpretation of the problem."

"How can such a thing—" Haldersen stopped. He understood now the source of his own joy this morning. Only yesterday afternoon he had discussed with Tim Bryce the application of memory-destroying drugs to his own trauma, and Bryce had said—

Haldersen no longer knew the nature of his own trauma. "Wait," he said, as the robot began to leave the room. "I need information. Why have I been under treatment here?"

"You have been suffering from social displacements and dysfunctions whose origin, Dr. Bryce feels, lies in a situation of traumatic personal loss."

"Loss of what?"

"Your family, Dr. Haldersen."

"Yes. That's right. I recall, now—I had a wife and two children. Emily. And a little girl—Margaret Elizabeth, something like that. And a boy named John. What happened to them?"

"They were passengers aboard Intercontinental Airways Flight 103, Copenhagen to San Francisco, September 5, 1991. The plane underwent explosive decompression over the Arctic Ocean and there were no survivors."

Haldersen absorbed the information as calmly as though he were hearing of the assassination of Julius Caesar. "Where was I when the accident occurred?"

"In Copenhagen," the robot replied. "You had intended to return to San Francisco with your family on Flight 103; however, according to your data file here, you became involved in an emotional relationship with a woman named Marie Rasmussen, whom you had met in Copenhagen, and failed to return to your hotel in time to go to the airport. Your wife, evidently aware of the situation, chose not to wait for you. Her subsequent death, and that of your children, produced a traumatic guilt reaction which you came to regard yourself as responsible for their terminations."

"I *would* take that attitude, wouldn't I?" Haldersen said. "Sin and retribution. Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa. I always had a harsh view of sin, even while I was sinning. I should have been an Old Testament prophet."

"Shall I provide more information, sir?"

"Is there more?"

"We have in the files Dr. Bryce's report headed, *The Job Complex: A Study in the Paralysis Guilt.*"

"Spare me that," Haldersen said. "All right, go."

He was alone. The Job Complex, he thought. Not really appropriate, was it? Job was a man without sin, and yet he was punished grievously to satisfy a whim of the Almighty. A little presumptuous, I say, to identify myself with him. Cain would have been a better choice. Cain said unto the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear. But Cain was a sinner. I was a sinner. I sinned and Emily died for it. When, eleven, eleven-and-a-half years ago? And now I know nothing at all about it except what the machine just told me. Redemption through oblivion, I'd call it. I have expiated my sin and now I'm free. I have no business staying in this hospital any longer. Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. I've got to get out of here. Maybe I can be some help to others.

He belted his bathrobe, took a drink of water, and went out of the room. No one stopped him. The elevator did not seem to be running, but he found the stairs, and walked down, a little creakily. He had not been this far from his room in more than a year. The lower floors of the hospital were in chaos—doctors, orderlies, robots, patients, all milling around excitedly. The robots were trying to calm people and get them back to their proper places. "Excuse me," Haldersen said serenely. "Excuse me. Excuse me." He left the hospital, unmolested, by the front door. The air outside was as fresh as young wine; he felt like weeping when it hit his nostrils. He was free. Redemption through oblivion. The disaster high above the Arctic no longer dominated his thoughts. He looked upon it precisely as if it had happened to the family of some other man, long ago. Haldersen began to walk briskly down Van Ness, feeling vigor returning to his legs with every stride. A young woman, sobbing wildly, erupted from a building and collided with him. He caught her, steadied her, was surprised at his own strength as he kept her from toppling. She trembled and pressed her head against his chest. "Can I do anything for you?" he asked. "Can I be of any help?"

Panic had begun to enfold Freddy Munson during dinner at Ondine's Wednesday night. He had begun to be annoyed with Helene in the midst of the truffled chicken breasts, and so he had started to think about the details of business; and to his amazement he did not seem to have the details quite right in his mind; and so he felt the early twinges of terror.

The trouble was that Helene was going on and on about the art of sonic sculpture in general and Paul Mueller in particular. Her interest was enough to arouse faint jealousies in Munson. Was she getting ready to leap from his bed to Paul's? Was she thinking of abandoning the wealthy, glamorous but essentially prosaic stockbroker for the irresponsible, impecunious, fascinatingly gifted sculptor? Of course, Helene kept company with a number of other men, but Munson knew them and discounted them as rivals; they were nonentities, escorts to fill her idle nights when he was too busy for her. Paul Mueller, however, was another case. Munson could not bear the thought that Helene might leave him for Paul. So he shifted his concentration to the day's maneuvers. He had extracted a thousand shares of the \$5.87 convertible preferred of Lunar Transit from the Schaeffer account, pledging it as collateral to cover his shortage in the matter of the Comsat debentures, and then, tapping the Howard account for five thousand Southeast Energy Corporation warrants, he had—or had those warrants come out of the Brewster account? Brewster was big on utilities. So was Howard, but that account was heavy on Mi

Atlantic Power, so would it also be loaded with Southeast Energy? In any case, had he put those warrants up against the Zurich uranium futures, or were they riding as his markers in the Antarctic oil lease thing? He could not remember.

He could not remember.

He could not remember.

Each transaction had been in its own compartment. The partitions were down, suddenly. Numbers were spilling about in his mind as though his brain were in free fall. All of today's deals were tumbling. It frightened him. He began to gobble his food, wanting now to get out of here, to get rid of Helene, to get home and try to reconstruct his activities of the afternoon. Oddly, he could remember quite clearly all that he had done yesterday—the Xerox switch, the straddle on Steel—but today was washing away minute by minute.

"Are you all right?" Helene asked.

"No, I'm not," he said. "I'm coming down with something."

"The Venus Virus. Everybody's getting it."

"Yes, that must be it. The Venus Virus. You'd better keep clear of me tonight."

They skipped dessert and cleared out fast. He dropped Helene off at her flat; she hardly seemed disappointed, which bothered him, but not nearly so much as what was happening to his mind. Alone finally, he tried to jot down an outline of his day, but even more had left him now. In the restaurant he had known which stocks he had handled, though he wasn't sure what he had done with them. Now he couldn't even recall the specific securities. He was out on the limb for millions of dollars of other people's money, and every detail was in his mind, and his mind was falling apart. By the time Paul Mueller called, a little after midnight, Munson was growing desperate. He was relieved, but not exactly cheered, to learn that whatever strange thing had affected his mind had hit Mueller a little harder. Mueller had forgotten everything since last October.

"You went bankrupt," Munson had to explain to him. "You had this wild scheme for setting up a central clearing house for works of art, a kind of stock exchange—the sort of thing only an artist would try to start. You wouldn't let me discourage you. Then you began signing notes, and taking on contingent liabilities, and before the project was six weeks old you were hit with half a dozen lawsuits and it all began to go sour."

"When did this happen, precisely?"

"You conceived the idea at the beginning of November. By Christmas you were in severe trouble. You already had a bunch of personal debts that had gone unpaid from before, and your assets melted away, and you hit a terrible bind in your work and couldn't produce a thing. You really don't remember a thing of this, Paul?"

"Nothing."

"After the first of the year the fastest-moving creditors started getting decrees against you. They impounded everything you owned except the furniture, and then they took the furniture. You borrowed from all of your friends, but they couldn't give you nearly enough, because you were borrowing thousands and you owed hundreds of thousands."

"How much did I hit you for?"

"Eleven bigs," Munson said. "But don't worry about that now."

"I'm not. I'm not worrying about a thing. I was in a bind in my work, you say?" Mueller chuckled.

"That's all gone.

I'm itching to start making things. All I need are the tools—I mean, money to buy the tools."

"What would they cost?"

"Two-and-a-half bigs," Mueller said.

Munson coughed. "All right. I can't transfer the money to your account, because your creditors would lien it right away. I'll get some cash at the bank. You'll have three bigs tomorrow, and welcome to it."

"Bless you, Freddy." Mueller said, "This kind of amnesia is a good thing, eh? I was so worried about money that I couldn't work. Now I'm not worried at all. I guess I'm still in debt, but I'm not fretting. Tell me what happened to my marriage, now."

"Carole got fed up and turned off," said Munson. "She opposed your business venture from the start. When it began to devour you, she did what she could to untangle you from it, but you insisted on trying to patch things together with more loans, and she filed for a decree. When she was free, Pete Castine moved in and grabbed her."

"That's the hardest part to believe. That she'd marry an art dealer, a totally noncreative person, a parasite, really—"

"They were always good friends," Munson said. "I won't say they were lovers, because I don't know, but they were close. And Pete's not that horrible. He's got taste, intelligence, everything an artist needs except the gift. I think Carole may have been weary of gifted men, anyway."

"How did I take it?" Mueller asked.

"You hardly seemed to notice, Paul. You were so busy with your financial shenanigans."

Mueller nodded. He sauntered to one of his own works, a three-meter-high arrangement of oscillating rods that ran the whole sound spectrum into the high kilohertz, and passed two fingers over the activator eye. The sculpture began to murmur. After a few moments Mueller said, "You sounded awfully upset when I called, Freddy. You say you have some kind of amnesia too?"

Trying to be casual about it, Munson said, "I find I can't remember some important transactions carried out today. Unfortunately, my only record of them is in my head. But maybe the information will come back to me when I've slept on it."

"There's no way I can help you with that."

"No. There isn't."

"Freddy, where is this amnesia coming from?"

Munson shrugged. "Maybe somebody put a drug in the water supply, or spiked the food, or something. These days, you never can tell. Look, I've got to do some work, Paul. If you'd like to sleep here tonight—"

"I'm wide awake, thanks. I'll drop by again in the morning."

When the sculptor was gone, Mueller struggled for a feverish hour to reconstruct his data, and failed. Shortly before two he took a four-hour-sleep pill. When he awakened, he realized in dismay that he had no memories whatever for the period from April 1 to noon yesterday. During those five weeks he had engaged in countless securities transactions, using other people's property as collateral, and counting on his ability to get each marker in his game back into its proper place before anyone was likely to go looking for it. He had always been able to remember everything. Now he

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