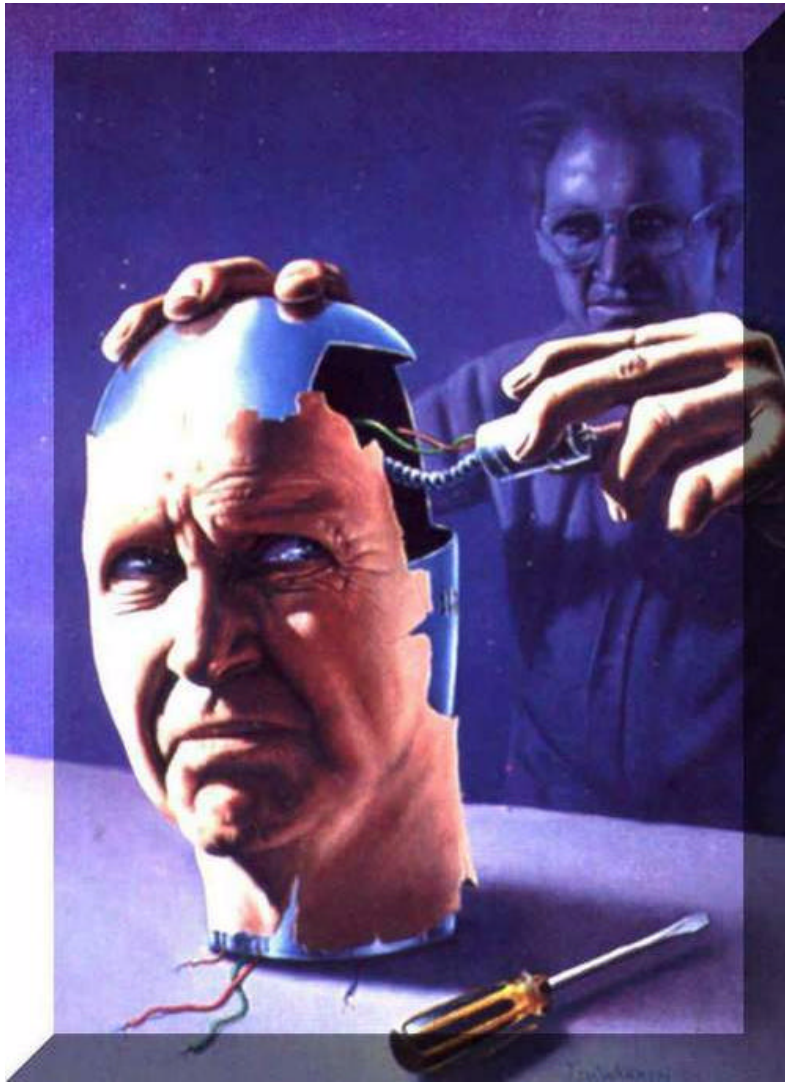

PHILIP K. DICK



WE CAN BUILD YOU

1972

To Robert and Ginny Heinlein,
whose kindness to us meant more
than ordinary words can answer.

1

Our sales technique was perfected in the early 1970s. First we put an ad in a local newspaper, in the classified.

Spinnet piano, also electronic organ, repossessed, in perfect condition, SACRIFICE. Cash or good credit risk wanted in this area, to take over payments rather than transport back to Oregon. Contact Frauzimmer Piano Company, Mr. Rock, Credit Manager, Ontario, Ore.

For years we've run this ad in newspapers in one town after another, all up and down the western states and as far inland as Colorado. The whole approach developed on a scientific, systematic basis; we use maps, and sweep along so that no town goes untouched. We own four turbine-powered trucks, out on the road constantly, one man to a truck.

Anyhow, we place the ad, say in the San Rafael Independent-Journal, and soon letters start arriving at our office in Ontario, Oregon, where my partner Maury Rock takes care of all that. He sorts the letters and compiles lists, and then when he has enough contacts in a particular area, say around San Rafael, he night-wires the truck. Suppose it's Fred down there in Mann County. When Fred gets the wire he brings out his own map and lists the calls in proper sequence. And then he finds a pay phone and telephones the first prospect.

Meanwhile, Maury has airmailed an answer to each person who's written in response to the ad.

Dear Mr. So-and-so:

We were gratified to receive your response to our notice in the San Rafael Independent-Journal. The man who is handling this matter has been away from the office for a few days now, so we've decided to forward to him your name and address with the request that he contact you and provide you with all the details.

The letter drones on, but for several years now it has done a good job for the company. However, of late, sales of the electronic organs have fallen off. For instance, in the Vallejo area we sold forty spinets not so long ago, and not one single organ.

Now, this enormous balance in favor of the spinet over the electronic organ, in terms of sales, led to an exchange between I and my partner, Maury Rock; it was heated, too.

I got to Ontario, Oregon, late, having been down south around Santa Monica discussing matters with certain do-gooders there who had invited law-enforcement officials in to scan our enterprise and method of operating . . . a gratuitous action which led to nothing, of course, since we're operating strictly legally.

Ontario isn't my hometown, or anybody else's. I hail from Wichita Falls, Kansas, and when I was high school age I moved to Denver and then to Boise, Idaho. In some respects Ontario is a suburb of Boise; it's near the Idaho border-- you go across a long metal bridge--and it's a flat land, there, where they farm. The forests of eastern Oregon don't begin that far inland. The biggest industry is the Ore-Ida potato patty factory, especially its electronics division, and then there're a whole lot of Japanese farmers who were shuffled back that way during World War Two and who grow onions or

something. The air is dry, real estate is cheap, people do their big shopping in Boise; the latter is a big town which I don't like because you can't get decent Chinese food there. It's near the old Oregon Trail, and the railroad goes through it on its way to Cheyenne.

Our office is located in a brick building in downtown Ontario across from a hardware store. We've got root iris growing around our building. The colors of the iris look good when you come driving up the desert routes from California and Nevada.

So anyhow I parked my dusty Chevrolet Magic Fire turbine convertible and crossed the sidewalk to our building and our sign:

MASA ASSOCIATES

MASA stands for MULTIPLEX ACOUSTICAL SYSTEM OF AMERICA, a made-up electronics-type name which we developed due to our electronic organ factory, which, due to my family ties, I'm deeply involved with. It was Maury who came up with Frauentzimmer Piano Company, since as a name it fitted our trucking operation better. Frauentzimmer is Maury's original old-country name, Rock being made-up, too. My real name is as I give it: Louis Rosen, which is German for roses. One day I asked Maury what Frauentzimmer meant, and he said it means womankind. I asked where he specifically got the name Rock.

"I closed my eyes and touched a volume of the encyclopedia, and it said ROCK TO SUBUD."

"You made a mistake," I told him. "You should have called yourself Maury Subud."

The downstairs door of our building dates back to 1965 and ought to be replaced, but we just don't have the funds. I pushed the door open, it's massive and heavy but swings nicely, and walked to the elevator, one of those old automatic affairs. A minute later I was upstairs stepping out in our offices. The fellows were talking and drinking loudly.

"Time has passed us by," Maury said at once to me. "Our electronic organ is obsolete."

"You're wrong," I said. "The trend is actually *toward* the electronic organ because that's the way America is going in its space exploration: electronic. In ten years we won't sell one spinet a day; the spinet will be a relic of the past."

"Louis," Maury said, "please look what our competitors have done. Electronics may be marching forward, but without us. Look at the Hammerstein Mood Organ. Look at the Waldteufel Euphoria. And tell me why anyone would be content like you merely to bang out music."

Maury is a tall fellow, with the emotional excitability of the hyperthyroid. His hands tend to shake and he digests his food too fast; they're giving him pills, and if those don't work he has to take radioactive iodine someday. If he stood up straight he'd be six three. He's got, or did have once, black hair, very long but thinning, and large eyes, and he always had a sort of disconcerted look, as if things are going all wrong on every side.

"No good musical instrument becomes obsolete," I said. But Maury had a point. What had undone us was the extensive brain-mapping of the mid 1960s and the depth-electrode techniques of Penfield and Jacobson and Olds, especially their discoveries about the mid-brain. The hypothalamus is where the emotions lie, and in developing and marketing our electronic organ we had not taken the hypothalamus into account. The Rosen factory never got in on the transmission of selective-frequency short range shock, which stimulates very specific cells of the mid-brain, and we certainly failed from the start to see how easy--and important--it would be to turn the circuit switches into a keyboard of eighty-eight black and whites.

Like most people, I've dabbled at the keys of a Hammerstein Mood Organ, and I enjoy it. But there's nothing creative about it. True, you can hit on new configurations of brain stimulation, and

hence produce entirely new emotions in your head which would never otherwise show up there. You might--theoretically--even hit on the combination that will put you in the state of nirvana. Both the Hammerstein and Waldteufel corporations have a big prize for that. But that's not music. That's escape. Who wants it?

"I want it," Maury had said back as early as December of 1978. And he had gone out and hired a cashiered electronics engineer of the Federal Space Agency, hoping he could rig up for us a new version of the hypothalamus-stimulation organ.

But Bob Bundy, for all his electronics genius, had no experience with organs. He had designed simulacra circuits for the Government. Simulacra are the synthetic humans which I always thought of as robots; they're used for Lunar exploration, sent up from time to time from the Cape.

Bundy's reasons for leaving the Cape are obscure. He drinks, but that doesn't dim his powers. He wenches. But so do we all. Probably he was dropped because he's a bad security risk; not a Communist--Bundy could never have doped out even the existence of political ideas--but a bad risk in that he appears to have a touch of hebephrenia. In other words, he tends to wander off without notice. His clothes are dirty, his hair uncombed, his chin unshaved, and he won't look you in the eye. He grins inanely. He's what the Federal Bureau of Mental Health psychiatrists call *dilapidated*. If someone asks him a question he can't figure out how to answer it; he has speech blockage. But with his hands--he's damn fine. He can do his job, and well. So the McHeston Act doesn't apply to him.

However, in the many months Bundy had worked for us, I had seen nothing invented. Maury in particular kept busy with him, since I'm out on the road.

"The only reason you stick up for that electric keyboard Hawaiian guitar," Maury said to me, "is because your dad and brother make the things. That's why you can't face the truth."

I answered, "You're using an ad hominem agreement."

"Talmud scholarship," Maury retorted. Obviously, he--all of them, in fact--were well-loaded; they had been sopping up the Ancient Age bourbon while I was out on the road driving the long hard haul.

"You want to break up the partnership?" I said. And I was willing to, at that moment, because of Maury's drunken slur at my father and brother and the entire Rosen Electronic Organ Factory at Boise with its seventeen full-time employees.

"I say the news from Vallejo and environs spells the death of our principal product," Maury said. "Even with its six-hundred-thousand possible tone combinations, some never heard by human ears. You're a bug like the rest of your family for those outer-space voodoo noises your electronic dung heap makes. And you have the nerve to call it a musical instrument. None of you Rosens have an ear. I wouldn't have a Rosen electronic sixteen-hundred-dollar organ in my home if you gave it to me at cost; I'd rather have a set of vibes."

"All right," I yelled, "you're a purist. And it isn't six-hundred-thousand; it's seven-hundred-thousand."

"Those souped-up circuits bloop out one noise and one only," Maury said, "however much it's modified--it's just basically a whistle."

"One can compose on it," I pointed out.

"Compose? It's more like creating remedies for diseases that don't exist, using that thing. I say either burn down the part of your family's factory that makes those things or damn it, Louis, convert. Convert to something new and useful that mankind can lean on during its painful ascent upward. Do you hear?" He swayed back and forth, jabbing his long finger at me. "We're in the sky, now. To the stars. Man's no longer hidebound. Do you hear?"

"I hear," I said. "But I recall that you and Bob Bundy were supposed to be the ones who were hatching up the new and useful solution to our problems. And that was months ago and nothing's come of it."

"We've got something," Maury said. "And when you see it you'll agree it's oriented toward the future in no uncertain terms."

"Show it to me."

"Okay, we'll take a drive over to the factory. Your dad and your brother Chester should be in on it; it's only fair, since it'll be them who produce it."

Standing with his drink, Bundy grinned at me in his sneaky, indirect fashion. All this inter-personal communication probably made him nervous.

"You guys are going to bring ruin down on us," I told him. "I've got a feeling."

"We face ruin anyhow," Maury said, "if we stick with your Rosen WOLFGANG MONTE VERDI electronic organ, or whatever the decal is this month your brother Chester's pasting on it."

I had no answer. Gloomily, I fixed myself a drink.

2

The Mark VII Saloon Model Jaguar is an ancient huge white car, a collector's item, with fog lights, a grill like the Rolls, and naturally hand-rubbed walnut, leather seats, and many interior lights. Maury kept his priceless old 1954 Mark VII in mint condition and tuned perfectly, but we were able to go no faster than ninety miles an hour on the freeway which connects Ontario with Boise.

The languid pace made me restless. "Listen Maury," I said, "I wish you would begin explaining. Bring the future to me right now, like you can in words."

Behind the wheel, Maury smoked away at his Corina Sport cigar, leaned back and said, "What's on the mind of America, these days?"

"Sexuality," I said.

"No."

"Dominating the inner planets of the solar system before Russia can, then."

"No."

"Okay, you tell me."

"The Civil War of 1861."

"Aw chrissakes," I said.

"It's the truth, buddy. This nation is obsessed with the War Between the States. I'll tell you why. It was the only and first national epic in which we Americans participated; that's why." He blew Corina Sport cigar smoke at me. "It matured we Americans."

"It's not on my mind," I said.

"I could stop at a busy intersection of any big downtown city in the U.S. and collar ten citizens, and six of those ten, if asked what was on their mind, would say, 'The U.S. Civil War of 1861.' And I've been working on the implications-- the practical side--ever since I figured that out, around six months ago. It has grave meaning for MASA ASSOCIATES, if we want it to, I mean; if we're alert. You know they had that Centennial a decade or so back; recall?"

"Yes," I said. "In 1961."

"And it was a flop. A few souls got out and refought a few battles, but it was nothing. Look in the back seat."

I switched on the interior lights of the car and twisting around I saw on the back seat a long newspaper-wrapped carton, shaped like a display window dummy, one of those manikins. From the lack of bulge up around the chest I concluded it wasn't a female one.

"So?" I said.

"That's what I've been working on."

"While I've been setting up areas for the trucks!"

"Right," Maury said. "And this, in time, will be so far long remembered over any sales of spinets or electronic organs that it'll make your head swim."

He nodded emphatically. "Now when we get to Boise-- listen. I don't want your dad and Chester to give us a hard time. That's why it's necessary to inform you right now. That back there is worth a billion bucks to us or anyone else who happens to find it. I've got a notion to pull off the road and demonstrate it to you, maybe at some lunch counter. Or a gas station, even; any place that's light." Maury seemed very tense and his hands were shaking more than usual.

"Are you sure," I said, "that isn't a Louis Rosen dummy, and you're going to knock me off and have it take my place?"

Maury glanced at me oddly. "Why do you say that? No, that's not it, but by chance you're close, buddy. I can see that our brains still fuse, like they did in the old days, in the early 'seventies when we

were new and green and without backing except maybe your dad and that warning-to-all-of-us younger brother of yours. I wonder, why didn't Chester become a large-animal vet like he started out to be? It would have been safer for the rest of us; we would have been spared. But instead a spinet factory in Boise, Idaho. Madness!" He shook his head.

"Your family never even did that," I said. "Never built anything or created anything. Just middlemen, schlock hustlers in the garment industry. I mean, what did they do to set us up in business, like Chester and my dad did? What is that dummy in the back seat? I want to know, and I'm not stopping at any gas station or lunch counter; I've got the distinct intuition that you really do intend to do me in or some such thing. So let's keep driving."

"I can't describe it in words."

"Sure you can. You're an A-one snow-job artist."

"Okay. I'll tell you why that Civil War Centennial failed. Because all the original participants who were willing to fight and lay down their lives and die for the Union, or for the Confederacy, are dead. Nobody lives to be a hundred, or if they do they're good for nothing--they can't fight, they can't handle a rifle. Right?"

I said, "You mean you have a mummy back there, or one of what in the horror movies they call the 'undead'?"

"I'll tell you exactly what I have. Wrapped up in those newspapers in the back seat I have Edwin M. Stanton."

"Who's that?"

"He was Lincoln's Secretary of War."

"Aw!"

"No, it's the truth."

"When did he die?"

"A long time ago."

"That's what I thought."

"Listen," Maury said, "I have an electronic simulacrum back in the back seat, there. I built it, or rather we had Bundy build it. It cost me six thousand dollars but it was worth it. Let's stop at that roadside cafe and gas station up along the road, there, and I'll unwrap it and demonstrate it to you; that's the only way."

I felt my flesh crawl. "You will indeed."

"Do you think this is just some bagatelle, buddy?"

"No. I think you're absolutely serious."

"I am," Maury said. He began to slow the car and flash the directional signal. "I'm stopping where it says Tommy's Italian Fine Dinners and Lucky Lager Beer."

"And then what? What's a demonstration?"

"We'll unwrap it and have it walk in with us and order a chicken and ham pizza; that's what I mean by a demonstration."

Maury parked the Jaguar and came around to crawl into the back. He began tearing the newspaper from the human-shaped bundle, and sure enough, there presently emerged an elderly-looking gentleman with eyes shut and white beard, wearing archaically-styled clothing, his hands folded over his chest.

"You'll see how convincing this simulacrum is," Maury said, "when it orders its own pizza." He began to tinker with switches which were available at the back of the thing.

All at once the face assumed a grumpy, taciturn expression and it said in a growl, "My friend, remove your fingers from my body, if you will." It pried Maury's hands loose from it, and Maury grinned at me.

"See?" Maury said. The thing had sat up slowly and was in the process of methodically brushing itself off; it had a stern, vengeful look, now, as if it believed we had done it some harm, possibly sapped it and knocked it out, and it was just recovering. I could see that the counter man in Tommy's Italian Fine Dinners would be fooled, all right; I could see that Maury had made his point already. If I hadn't seen it spring to life I would believe myself it was just a sour elderly gentleman in old-style clothes and a split white beard, brushing itself off with an attitude of outrage.

"I see," I said.

Maury held open the back door of the Jaguar, and the Edwin M. Stanton electronic simulacrum slid over and rose to a standing position in a dignified fashion.

"Does it have any money?" I asked.

"Sure," Maury said. "Don't ask trifling questions; this is the most serious matter you've ever had facing you." As the three of us started across the gravel to the restaurant, Maury went on, "Our entire economic future and that of America's involved in this. Ten years from now you and I could be wealthy, due to this thing, here."

The three of us had a pizza at the restaurant, and the crust was burned at the edges. The Edwin M. Stanton made a noisy scene, shaking its fist at the proprietor, and then after finally paying our bill, we left.

By now we were an hour behind schedule, and I was beginning to wonder if we were going to get to the Rosen factory after all. So I asked Maury to step on it, as we got back into the Jaguar.

"This car'll crack two hundred," Maury said, starting up, "with that new dry rocket fuel they have out."

"Don't take unnecessary chances," the Edwin M. Stanton told him in a sullen voice as the car roared out onto the road. "Unless the possible gains heavily outweigh the odds."

"Same to you," Maury told it.

The Rosen Spinet Piano & Electronic Organ Factory at Boise, Idaho, doesn't attract much notice, since the structure itself, technically called the plant, is a flat, one-story building that looks like a single-layer cake, with a parking lot behind it, a sign over the office made of letters cut from heavy plastic, very modern, with recessed red lights behind. The only windows are in the office.

At this late hour the factory was dark and shut, with no one there. We drove on up into the residential section, then.

"What do you think of this neighborhood?" Maury asked the Edwin M. Stanton.

Seated upright in the back of the Jaguar the thing grunted, "Rather unsavory and unworthy."

"Listen," I said, "my family lives down here near the industrial part of Boise so as to be in easy walking distance from the factory." It made me angry to hear a mere fake criticizing genuine humans, especially a fine person like my dad. And as to my brother--few radiation-mutants ever made the grade in the spinet and electronic organ industry outside of Chester Rosen. *Special birth* persons, as they are called. There is so much discrimination and prejudice in so many fields . . . most professions of high social status are closed to them.

It was always disappointing to the Rosen family that Chester's eyes are set beneath his nose, and his mouth is up where his eyes ought to be. But blame H-bomb testing in the 'fifties and 'sixties for him--and all the others similar to him in the world today. I can remember, as a kid, reading the many

medical books on birth defects--the topic has naturally interested many people for a couple of decades, now--and there are some that make Chester nothing at all. One that always threw me into a week-long depression is where the embryo disintegrates in the womb and is born in pieces, a jaw, an arm, handful of teeth, separate fingers. Like one of those plastic kits out of which boys build a model airplane. Only, the pieces of the embryo don't add up to anything; there's no glue in this world to stick it together.

And there're embryos with hair growing all over them, like a slipper made from yak fur. And one that dries up so that the skin cracks; it looks like it's been maturing outdoors on the back step in the sun. So lay off Chester.

The Jaguar had halted at the curb before the family house, and there we were. I could see lights on inside the house, in the living room; my mother, father and brother were watching TV.

"Let's send the Edwin M. Stanton up the stairs alone," Maury said. "Have it knock on the door, and we'll sit here in the car and watch."

"My dad'll recognize it as a phony," I said, "a mile away. In fact he'll probably kick it back down the steps, and you'll be out the six hundred it cost you." Or whatever it was Maury had paid for it, and no doubt charged against MASA's assets.

"I'll take the chance," Maury said, holding the back door of the car open so that the contraption could get out. To it he said, "Go up there to where it says 1429 and ring the bell. And when the man comes to the door, you say, 'Now he belongs to the ages.' And then just stand."

"What does that mean?" I said. "What kind of opening remark is that supposed to be?"

"It's Stanton's famous remark that got him into history," Maury said. "When Lincoln died."

"'Now he belongs to the ages,' "the Stanton practiced as it crossed the sidewalk and started up the steps.

"I'll explain to you in due course how the Edwin M. Stanton was constructed," Maury said to me. "How we collected the entire body of data extant pertaining to Stanton and had it transcribed down at UCLA into instruction punch-tape to be fed to the ruling monad that serves the simulacrum as a brain."

"You know what you're doing?" I said, disgusted. "You're wrecking MASA, all this kidding around, this harebrained stuff--I never should have gotten mixed up with you."

"Quiet," Maury said, as the Stanton rang the doorbell.

The front door opened and there stood my father in his trousers, slippers, and the new bathrobe I had given him at Christmas. He was quite an imposing figure, and the Edwin M. Stanton, which had started on its little speech, halted and shifted gears.

"Sir," it finally said, "I have the privilege of knowing your boy Louis."

"Oh yes," my father said. "He's down in Santa Monica right now."

The Edwin M. Stanton did not seem to know what Santa Monica was, and it stood there at a loss. Beside me in the Jaguar, Maury swore with exasperation, but it struck me funny, the simulacrum standing there like some new, no-good salesman, unable to think up anything at all to say and so standing mute.

But it was impressive, the two old gentlemen standing there facing each other, the Stanton with its split white beard, its old-style garments, my father looking not much newer. The meeting of the patriarchs, I thought. Like in the synagogue.

My father at last said to it, "Won't you step inside?" He held the door open, and the thing passed on inside and out of sight; the door shut, leaving the porch lit up and empty.

"How about that," I said to Maury.

We followed after it. The door being unlocked, we went on inside.

There in the living room sat the Stanton, in the middle of the sofa, its hands on its knees, discoursing with my dad, while Chester and my mother went on watching the TV.

"Dad," I said, "you're wasting your time talking to that thing. You know what it is? A machine Maury threw together in his basement for six bucks."

Both my father and the Edwin M. Stanton paused and glanced at me.

"This nice old man?" my father said, and he got an angry, righteous expression; his brows knitted and he said loudly, "Remember, Louis, that man is a frail reed, the most feeble thing in nature, but goddamn it, mein Sohn, a thinking reed. The entire universe doesn't have to arm itself against him; a drop of water can kill him." Pointing his finger at me excitedly, my dad roared on, "But if the entire universe were to crush him, you know what? You know what I say? Man would still be more noble!" He pounded on the arm of his chair for emphasis. "You know why, mein Kind? Because he knows that he dies and I'll tell you something else; he's got the advantage over the god-damn universe because it doesn't know a thing of what's going on. And," my dad concluded, calming down a little, "all our dignity consists in just that. I mean, man's little and can't fill time and space, but he sure can make use of the brain God gave him. Like what you call this 'thing,' here. This is no thing. This is *ein Mensch*, a man. Say, I have to tell you a joke." He launched, then, into a joke half in Yiddish, half in English.

When it was over we all smiled, although it seemed to me that the Edwin M. Stanton's was somewhat formal, even forced.

Trying to think back to what I had read about Stanton, I recalled that he was considered a pretty harsh guy, both during the Civil War and the Reconstruction afterward, especially when he tangled with Andrew Johnson and tried to get him impeached. He probably did not appreciate my dad's humanitarian-type joke because he got the same stuff from Lincoln all day long during his job. But there was no way to stop my dad anyhow; his own father had been a Spinoza scholar, well known, and although my dad never went beyond the seventh grade himself he had read all sorts of books and documents and corresponded with literary persons throughout the world.

"I'm sorry, Jerome," Maury said to my dad, when there was a pause, "but I'm telling you the truth." Crossing to the Edwin M. Stanton, he reached down and fiddled with it behind the ear.

"Glop," the Stanton said, and then became rigid, as lifeless as a window-store dummy; the light in its eyes expired, its arms paused and stiffened. It was graphic, and I glanced to see how my dad was taking it. Even Chester and my mom looked up from the TV a moment. It really made one pause and consider. If there hadn't been philosophy in the air already that night, this would have started it; we all became solemn. My dad even got up and walked over to inspect the thing firsthand.

"Oy gewalt." He shook his head.

"I could turn it back on," Maury offered.

"*Nein, das geht mir nicht.*" My dad returned to his easy chair, made himself comfortable, and then asked in a resigned, sober voice, "Well, how did the sales at Vallejo go, boys?" As we got ready to answer he brought out an Anthony & Cleopatra cigar, unwrapped it and lit up. It's a fine-quality Havana-filler cigar, with a green outer wrapper, and the odor filled the living room immediately. "Sell lots of organs and AMADEUS GLUCK spinets?" He chuckled.

"Jerome," Maury said, "the spinets sold like lemmings, but not one organ moved."

My father frowned.

"We've been involved in a high-level confab on this topic," Maury said, "with certain facts emerging. The Rosen electronic organ--"

"Wait," my dad said. "Not so fast, Maurice. On this side of the Iron Curtain the Rosen organ has no peer." He produced from the coffee table one of those masonite boards on which we have

mounted resistors, solar batteries, transistors, wiring and the like, for display. "This demonstrates the workings of the Rosen true electronic organ," he began. "This is the rapid delay circuit, and--"

"Jerome, I know how the organ works. Allow me to make my point."

"Go ahead." My dad put aside the masonite board, but before Maury could speak, he went on, "But if you expect us to abandon the mainstay of our livelihood simply because salesmanship--and I say this knowingly, not without direct experience of my own--when and because salesmanship has deteriorated, and there isn't the will to sell--"

Maury broke in, "Jerome, listen. I'm suggesting expansion."

My dad cocked an eyebrow.

"Now, you Rosens can go on making all the electronic organs you want," Maury said, "but I know they're going to diminish in sales volume all the time, unique and terrific as they are. What we need is something which is really new; because after all, Hammerstein makes those mood organs and they've gone over good, they've got that market sewed up airtight, so there's no use our trying that. So here it is, my idea."

Reaching up, my father turned on his hearing aid.

"Thank you, Jerome," Maury said. "This Edwin M. Stanton electronic simulacrum. It's as good as if Stanton had been alive here tonight discussing topics with us. What a sales idea that is, for educational purposes, like in the schools. But that's nothing; I had that in mind at first, but here's the authentic deal. Listen. We propose to President Mendoza in our nation's Capitol that we abolish war and substitute for it a ten-year-spaced-apart centennial of the U.S. Civil War, and what we do is, the Rosen factory supplies all the participants, simulacra--that's the plural, it's a Latin type word--of *everybody*. Lincoln, Stanton, Jeff Davis, Robert E. Lee, Longstreet, and around three million simple ones as soldiers we keep in stock all the time. And we have the battles fought with the participants really killed, these made-to-order simulacra blown to bits, instead of just a grade-B movie type business like a bunch of college kids doing Shakespeare. Do you get my point? You see the scope of this?"

We were all silent. Yes, I thought, there is scope to it.

"We could be as big as General Dynamics in five years," Maury added.

My father eyed him, smoking his A & C. "I don't know, Maurice. I don't know." He shook his head.

"Why not? Tell me, Jerome, what's wrong with it?"

"The times have carried you away, perhaps," my father said in a slow voice tinged with weariness. He sighed. "Or am I getting old?"

"Yeah, you're getting old!" Maury said, very upset and flushed.

"Maybe so, Maurice." My father was silent for a little while and then he drew himself up and said, "No, your idea is too--ambitious, Maurice. We are not that great. We must take care not to reach too high for maybe we will topple, *nicht wahr?*"

"Don't give me that German foreign language," Maury grumbled. "If you won't approve this. . . I'm too far into it already, I'm sorry but I'm going ahead. I've had a lot of good ideas in the past which we've used and this is the best so far. It is the times, Jerome. We have to *move*."

Sadly, to himself, my father resumed smoking his cigar.

3

Still hoping my father would be won over, Maury left the Stanton--on consignment, so to speak--and we drove back to Ontario. By then it was nearly midnight, and since we both were depressed by my father's weariness and lack of enthusiasm Maury invited me to stay overnight at his house. I was glad to accept; I felt the need of company.

When we arrived we found his daughter Pris, who I had assumed was still back at Kasanin Clinic at Kansas City in the custody of the Federal Bureau of Mental Health. Pris, as I knew from what Maury had told me, had been a ward of the Federal Government since her third year in high school; tests administered routinely in the public schools had picked up her "dynamism of difficulty," as the psychiatrists are calling it now--in the popular vernacular, her schizophrenic condition.

"She'll cheer you up," Maury said, when I hung back. "That's what you and I both need. She's grown a lot since you saw her last; she's no child anymore. Come on." He dragged me into the house by one arm.

She was seated on the floor in the living room wearing pink pedal pushers. Her hair was cut short and in the years since I had seen her she had lost weight. Spread around her lay colored tile; she was in the process of cracking the tile into irregular pits with a huge pair of long-handled cutting pliers.

"Come look at the bathroom," she said, hopping up. I followed warily after her.

On the bathroom walls she had sketched all sorts of sea monsters and fish, even a mermaid; she had already partially tiled them with every color imaginable. The mermaid had red tiles for tits, one bright tile in the center of each breast.

The panorama both repelled and interested me.

"Why not have little light bulbs for nipples?" I said. "When someone comes in to use the can and turns on the light the nipples light up and guide him on his way."

No doubt she had gotten into this tiling orgy due to years of occupational therapy at Kansas City; the mental health people were keen on anything creative. The Government has literally tens of thousands of patients in their several clinics throughout the country, all busy weaving or painting or dancing or making jewelry or binding books or sewing costumes for plays. And all the patients are there involuntarily, committed by law. Like Pris, many of them had been picked up during puberty, which is the time psychosis tends to strike.

Undoubtedly Pris was much better now, or they would not have released her into the outer world. But she still did not look normal or natural to me. As we walked back to the living room together I took a close look at her; I saw a little hard, heart-shaped face, with a widow's crown, black hair, and due to her odd make-up, eyes outlined in black, a Harlequin effect, and almost purple lipstick; the whole color scheme made her appear unreal and doll-like, lost somewhere back behind the mask which she had created out of her face. And the skinniness of her body put the capper on the effect: she looked to me like a dance of death creation animated in some weird way, probably not through the usual assimilation of solid and liquid foods . . . perhaps she chewed only walnut shells. But anyhow, from one standpoint she looked good, although unusual to say the least. For my money, however, she looked less normal than the Stanton.

"Sweet Apple," Maury said to her, "we left the Edwin M. Stanton over at Louis' dad's house."

Glancing up, she said, "Is it off?" Her eyes burned with a wild, intense flame, which both startled and impressed me.

"Pris," I said, "the mental health people broke the mold when they produced you. What an eerie yet fine-looking chick you turned out to be, now that you've grown up and gotten out of there."

"Thanks," she said, with no feeling at all; her tone had, in former times, been totally flat, no matter what the situation, including big crises. And that was the way with her still.

"Get the bed ready," I said to Maury, "so I can turn in." Together, he and I unfolded the guest bed in the spare room; we tossed sheets and blankets on it, and a pillow. His daughter made no move to help; she remained in the living room snipping tile.

"How long's she been working on that bathroom mural?" I asked.

"Since she got back from K.C. Which has been quite a while, now. For the first couple of weeks she had to report back to the mental health people in this area. She's not actually out; she's on probation and receiving out-patient therapy. In fact you could say she's on loan to the outside world."

"Is she better or worse?"

"A lot better. I never told you how bad she got, there in high school before they picked it up on their test. We didn't know what was wrong. Frankly, I thank god for the McHeston Act; if they hadn't picked it up, if she had gone on getting sicker, she'd be either a total schizophrenic paranoid or a dilapidated hebephrenic, by now. Permanently institutionalized for sure."

I said, "She looks so strange."

"What do you think of the tiling?"

"It won't increase the value of the house."

Maury bristled. "Sure it will."

Appearing at the door of the spare room, Pris said, "I asked, *is it off?*" She glowered at us as if she had guessed we were discussing her.

"Yes," Maury said, "unless Jerome turned it back on to discourse about Spinoza with it."

"What's it know?" I asked. "Has it got a lot of spare random useless type facts in it? Because if not my dad won't be interested long."

Pris said, "It has the same facts that the original Edwin M. Stanton had. We researched his life to the nth degree."

I got the two of them out of my bedroom, then took off my clothes and went to bed. Presently I heard Maury say goodnight to his daughter and go off to his own bedroom. And then I heard nothing--except, as I had expected, the snap-snap of tile being cut.

For an hour I lay in bed trying to sleep, falling off and then being brought back by the noise. At last I got up, turned on the light, put my clothes back on, smoothed my hair in place, rubbed my eyes, and came out of the spare room. She sat exactly as I had seen her first that evening, yogi-style, now with an enormous heap of broken tile around her.

"I can't sleep with that racket," I told her.

"Too bad." She did not even glance up.

"I'm a guest."

"Go elsewhere."

"I know what using that pliers symbolizes," I told her. "Emasculating thousands upon thousands of males, one after another. Is that why you left Kasanin Clinic? To sit here all night doing this?"

"No. I'm getting a job."

"Doing what? The labor market's glutted."

"I have no fears. There's no one like me in the world. I've already received an offer from a company that handles emigration processing. There's an enormous amount of statistical work involved."

"So it's someone like you," I said, "who'll decide which of us can leave Earth."

"I turned it down. I don't intend to be just another bureaucrat. Have you ever heard of Sam K. Barrows?"

"Naw," I said. But the name did sound familiar.

"There was an article on him in *Look*. When he was twenty he always rose at five a.m., had a bowl of stewed prunes, ran two miles around the streets of Seattle, then returned to his room to shave and take a cold shower. And then he went off and studied his law books."

"Then he's a lawyer."

"Not anymore," Pris said. "Look over in the bookcase. The copy of *Look* is there."

"Why should I care?" I said, but I went to get the magazine.

Sure enough, there on the cover in color was a man labeled:

SAM K. BARROWS, AMERICA'S MOST ENTERPRISING
NEW YOUNG MULTI-MILLIONAIRE

It was dated June 18, 1981, so it was fairly recent. And sure enough, there came Sam, jogging up one of the waterfront streets of downtown Seattle, in khaki shorts and gray sweatshirt, at what appeared to be sunup, puffing happily, a man with head shining due to being smooth-shaven, his eyes like the dots stuck in a snowman's face: expressionless, tiny. No emotion there; only the lower half of the face seemed to be grinning.

"If you saw him on TV--" Pris said.

"Yeah," I said, "I saw him on TV." I remembered now, because at the time--a year ago--the man had struck me unfavorably. His monotonous way of speaking. . . he had leaned close to the reporter and mumbled at him very rapidly. "Why do you want to work for him?" I asked.

"Sam Barrows," Pris said, "is the greatest living land speculator in existence. Think about that."

"That's probably because we're running out of land," I said. "All the realtors are going broke because there's nothing to sell. Just people and no place to put them." And then I remembered.

Barrows had solved the real estate speculation problem. In a series of far-reaching legal actions, he had managed to get the United States Government to permit private speculation in land on the other planets. Sam Barrows had single-handedly opened the way for subdividers on Luna, Mars and Venus. His name would go down in history forever.

"So that's the man you want to work for," I said. "The man who polluted the untouched other worlds." His salesman sold from offices all over the United States his glowingly described Lunar lots.

"Polluted untouched other worlds," Pris mimicked. "A slogan of those conservationists."

"But true," I said. "Listen, how are you going to make use of your land, once you've bought it? How do you live on it? No water, no air, no heat, no--"

"That will be provided," Pris said.

"How?"

"That's what makes Barrows the great man he is," Pris said. "His vision. Barrows Enterprises is working day and night--"

"A racket," I broke in.

There was silence, then. A strained silence.

"Have you ever actually spoken to Barrows?" I asked. "It's one thing to have a hero; you're a young girl and it's natural for you to worship a guy who's on the cover of magazines and on TV and he's rich and single-handedly he opened up the Moon to loan sharks and land speculators. But you were talking about getting a job."

Pris said, "I applied for a job at one of his companies. And I told them I wanted to see him personally."

"They laughed."

"No, they sent me into his office. He sat there and listened to me for a whole minute. Then, of course, he had to take care of other business; they sent me on to the personnel manager's office."

"What did you say to him in your minute?"

"I looked at him. He looked at me. You've never seen him in real life. He's incredibly handsome."

"On television," I said, "he's a lizard."

"I told him that I can screen dead beats. No time-wasters could get past me if I was his secretary. I know how to be tough and yet also I never turn away anyone who matters. You see, I can turn it on and off. Do you comprehend?"

"But can you open letters?" I said.

"They have machines who do that."

"Your father does that. That's Maury's job with us."

"And that's why I'd never work for you," Pris said. "Because you're so pathetically small. You hardly exist. No, I can't open letters. I can't do any routine jobs. I'll tell you what I can do. It was my idea to build the Edwin M. Stanton simulacrum."

I felt a deep unease.

"Maury wouldn't have thought of it," Pris said. "Bundy-- he's a genius. He's inspired. But it's idiot savantry that he has; the rest of his brain is totally deteriorated by the hebephrenic process. I designed the Stanton and he built it, and it's a success; you saw it. I don't even want or need the credit; it was fun. Like this." She had resumed her tile snipping. "Creative work," she said.

"What did Maury do? Tie its shoelaces?"

"Maury was the organizer. He saw to it that we had our supplies."

I had the dreadful feeling that this calm account was god's truth. Naturally, I could check with Maury. And yet--it did not seem to me that this girl even knew how to lie; she was almost the opposite from her father. Perhaps she took after her mother, whom I had never met. They had been divorced, a broken family, long before I met Maury and became his partner.

"How's your out-patient psychoanalysis coming?" I asked her.

"Fine. How's yours?"

"I don't need it," I said.

"That's where you're wrong. You're very sick, just like me." She smiled up at me. "Face facts."

"Would you stop that snap-snapping? So I can go to sleep?"

"No," she answered. "I want to finish the octopus tonight."

"If I don't get sleep," I said, "I'll drop dead."

"So what."

"Please," I said.

"Another two hours," Pris said.

"Are they all like you?" I asked her. "The people who emerge from the Federal clinics? The new young people who get steered back on to course? No wonder we're having trouble selling organs."

"What sort of organs?" Pris said. "Personally I've got all the organs I want."

"Ours are electronic."

"Mine aren't. Mine are flesh and blood."

"So what," I said. "Better they were electronic and you went to bed and let your houseguest sleep."

"You're no guest of mine. Just my father's. And don't talk to me about going to bed or I'll wreck your life. I'll tell my father you propositioned me, and that'll end MASA ASSOCIATES and your career, and then you'll wish you never saw an organ of any kind, electronic or not. So toddle on to bed, buddy, and be glad you don't have worse troubles than not being able to sleep." And she resumed her snapsnapping.

I stood for a moment, wondering what to do. Finally I turned and went back into the spare room, without having found any rejoinder.

My god, I thought. Beside her, the Stanton contraption is all warmth and friendliness.

And yet, she had no hostility toward me. She had no sense that she had said anything cruel or hard--she simply went on with her work. Nothing had happened, from her standpoint. I didn't matter to her.

If she had really disliked me--but could she do that? Did such a word mean anything in connection with her? Maybe it would be better, I thought as I locked my bedroom door. It would mean something more human, more comprehensible, to be disliked by her. But to be brushed off purposelessly, just so she would not be interfered with, so she could go on and finish her work--as if I were a variety of restraint, of possible interference and nothing more.

She must see only the most meager outer part of people, I decided. Must be aware of them in terms only of their coercive or non-coercive effects on her. . . thinking that, I lay with one ear pressed against the pillow, my arm over the other, dulling the snap-snapping noise, the endless procession of cuttings-off that passed one by one into infinity.

I could see why she felt attracted to Sam K. Barrows. Birds of a feather, or rather lizards of a scale. On the TV show, and again now, looking at the magazine cover. . . it was as if the brain part of Barrows, the shaved dome of his skull, had been lopped off and then skillfully replaced with some servo-system or some feedback circuit of selenoids and relays, all of which was operated from a distance off. Or operated by Something which sat upstairs there at the controls, pawing at the switches with tiny tricky convulsive motions.

And so odd that this girl had helped create the almost likable electronic simulacrum, as if on some subconscious level she was aware of the massive deficiency in herself, the emptiness dead center, and was busy compensating for it. . .

The next morning Maury and I had breakfast down the street from the MASA building at a little cafe. As we faced each other across the booth I said,

"Listen, how sick is your daughter right now? If she's still a ward of the mental health people she must still be--"

"A condition like hers can't be cured," Maury said, sipping his orange juice. "It's a life-long process that either moves into less or into more difficult stages."

"Would she still be classified under the McHeston Act as a 'phrenic if they were to administer the Benjamin Proverb Test at this moment to her?"

Maury said, "It wouldn't be the Benjamin Proverb Test; they'd use the Soviet test, that Vigotsky-Luria colored blocks test, on her at this point. You just don't realize how early she branched off from the norm, if you could be said to be part of the 'norm.'"

"In school I passed the Benjamin Proverb Test." That was the *sine qua non* for establishing the norm, ever since 1975, and in some states before that.

"I would say," Maury said, "from what they told me at Kasanin, when I went to pick her up, that right now she wouldn't be classified as a schizophrenic. She was that for only three years, more or less. They've rolled her condition back to before that point, to her level of integration of about her

twelfth year. And that's a non-psychotic state and hence it doesn't come in under the McHeston Act . . . so she's free to roam around."

"Then she's a neurotic."

"No, it's what they call *atypical* development or latent or borderline psychosis. It can develop either into a neurosis, the obsessional type, or it can flower into full schizophrenia, which it did in Pris's case in her third year in high school."

While he ate his breakfast Maury told me about her development. Originally she had been a withdrawn child, what they call encapsulated or introverted. She kept to herself, had all sorts of secrets, such as a diary and private spots in the garden. Then, when she was about nine years old she started having fears at night, fears so great that by ten she was up a good deal of the night roaming about the house. When she was eleven she had gotten interested in science; she owned a chemistry set and did nothing after school but fiddle with that--she had few or no friends, and didn't seem to want any.

It was in high school that real trouble had begun. She had become afraid to enter large public buildings, such as classrooms, and even feared the bus. When the doors of the bus closed she thought she was being suffocated. And she couldn't eat in public. Even if one single person was watching her, that was enough, and she had to drag her food off by herself, like a wild animal. And at the same time she had become compulsively neat. Everything had to be in its exact spot. She'd wander about the house all day, restlessly, making certain everything was clean--she'd wash her hands ten to fifteen times in a row.

"And remember," Maury added, "she was getting very fat. She was hefty when you first met her. Then she started dieting. She starved herself to lose weight. And she's still losing it. She's always avoiding one food after another; she does that even now."

"And it took the Proverb Test to tell you that she was mentally ill?" I said. "With a history like that?"

He shrugged. "We deluded ourselves. We told ourselves she was merely neurotic. Phobias and rituals and the like . . ."

What bothered Maury the most was that his daughter, somewhere along the line, had lost her sense of humor. Instead of being giggly and silly and sloppy as she had once been she had now become as precise as a calculator. And not only that. Once she had cared about animals. And then, during her stay at Kansas City, she had suddenly gotten so she couldn't stand a dog or a cat. She had gone on with her interest in chemistry, however. And that--a profession--seemed to him a good thing.

"Has the out-patient therapy here helped her?"

"It keeps her at a stable level; she doesn't slide back. She still has a strong hypochondriacal trend and she still washes her hands a lot. She'll never stop that. And she's still overprecise and withdrawn; I can tell you what they call it. Schizoid personality. I saw the results of the ink-blot test Doctor Horstowski made." He was silent for a time. "That's her out-patient doctor, here in this area, Region Five--counting the way the mental health Bureau counts. Horstowski is supposed to be good, but he's in private practice, so it costs us a hell of a lot."

"Plenty of people are paying for that," I said. "You're not alone, according to the TV ads. What is it, one person out of every four has served time in a Federal Mental Health Clinic?"

"I don't mind the clinic part because that's free; what I object to is this expensive out-patient follow-up. It was her idea to come home from Kasanin Clinic, not mine. I keep thinking she's going to go back there, but she threw herself into designing the simulacrum, and when she wasn't doing that

she was mosaicing the bathroom walls. She never stops being active. I don't know where she gets the energy."

I said, "When I consider all the people I know who've been victims of mental illness it's amazing. My aunt Gretchen, who's at the Harry Stack Sullivan Clinic at San Diego. My cousin Leo Roggis. My English teacher in high school, Mr. Haskins. The old Italian down the street who was on a pension, George Oliveri. I remember a buddy of mine in the Service, Art Boles; he had 'phrenia and went to the Fromm-Reichmann Clinic at Rochester, New York. There was Alys Johnson, a girl I went with in college; she's at Samuel Anderson Clinic in Area Three, which would be in Baton Rouge, La. And a man I worked for, Ed Yeats; he had 'phrenia that became paranoia. And Waldo Dangerfield, another buddy of mine. Gloria Milstein, a girl I knew who had really enormous breasts like pears; she's god knows where, but she was picked up by a personnel psych test when she was applying for a typing job; the Federal people swooped down and grabbed her--off she went. She was cute. And John Franklin Mann, a used car salesman I knew; he tested out as a dilapidated 'phrenic and was carted off, probably to Kasanin, because he's got relatives in Missouri. And Marge Morrison, another girl I knew; she had the hebe' version, which always bothers me. She's out again, though; I got a card from her. And Bob Ackers, a roommate I had. And Eddy Weiss--"

Maury had risen to his feet. "We better get going."

Together we left the cafe. "You know this Sam Barrows?" I asked.

"Sure. I mean, not personally; I know him by reputation. He's the darndest fellow. He'll bet on anything. If one of his mistresses--and that's a story in itself--if one of his mistresses dived out of a hotel window he'd bet on which end hit the pavement first, her head or her tail. He's like one of the old-time speculators reborn, one of those captains of finance. Life's a gamble to a guy like that. I admire him."

"So does Pris."

"Admire, hell--adores. She met him. They stared each other down--it was a draw. He galvanized or magnetized her or some darn thing. For weeks afterward she could hardly talk."

"Was that when she was job-hunting?"

Maury nodded. "She didn't get the job, but she did get into the sanctum sanctorum. Louis, that guy can scent out possibilities on all sides, opportunities no one else could see in a million years. You ought to dip into *Fortune*, sometime; they did a big write-up on him around ten months ago."

"From what she told me Pris made quite a pitch to him that day."

"She told him she had incredible worth that no one recognized. He was supposed to recognize it, evidently. Anyhow, she said that in his organization, working for him, she'd rise to the top and be known all over the universe. But otherwise, she'd just go on as she was. She told him she was a gambler, too; she wanted to stake everything on going to work for him. Can you beat that?"

"No," I said. She hadn't told me that part.

After a pause Maury said, "The Edwin M. Stanton was her idea."

Then it was true. That made me feel really bad, to hear that. "And it was her idea that it would be of Stanton?"

"No, it was my idea. She wanted it to look like Sam Barrows. But there wasn't enough data to feed to its ruling monad guidance system, so we got reference books on historical characters. And I was always interested in the Civil War; it was a hobby of mine years ago. So that settled that."

"I see," I said.

"She still has Barrows on her mind all the time. It's what her analyst calls an obsessive idea."

We walked on toward the office of MASA ASSOCIATES.

4

When we entered our office we found my brother Chester on the phone from Boise, reminding us that we had left the Edwin M. Stanton in the family living room, and asking us to pick it up, please.

"Well, we'll try to get out sometime today," I promised him.

Chester said, "It's sitting where you left it. Father turned it on for a few minutes this morning to see if it got the news."

"What news?"

"The morning news. The summary, like David Brinkley." He meant *gave* the news. So my family had in the meantime decided that I was right; it was a machine after all and not a person.

"Did it?" I asked.

"No," Chester said. "It talked about the unnatural impudence of commanders in the field."

When I had hung up the phone Maury said, "Maybe Pris would get it."

"Does she have a car?" I asked.

"She can take the Jag. Maybe you better go along with her, though, in case there's still a chance your dad's interested."

Later in the day Pris showed up at the office, and soon we were on our way back to Boise.

For the first part of the trip we drove in silence, Pris behind the wheel. All at once she said, "Do you have connections with someone who's interested in the Edwin M. Stanton?" She eyed me.

"No. What a strange question."

"What's your real motive for coming along on this trip? You do have a concealed motive . . . it radiates from every pore of your body. If it were up to me I wouldn't let you within a hundred yards of the Stanton."

As she continued to eye me, I knew I was in for more dissection.

"Why aren't you married?" she asked.

"I don't know."

"Are you a homosexual?"

"No!"

"Did some girl you fell in love with find you too ugly?"

I groaned.

"How old are you?"

That seemed reasonable enough, and yet, in view of the general attitude she held, I was wary of even that. "Ummm," I murmured.

"Forty?"

"No. Thirty-three."

"But your hair is gray on the sides and you have funny-looking snaggly teeth."

I wished I was dead.

"What was your first reaction to the Stanton?" Pris asked.

I said, "I thought, 'What a kindly-looking old gentleman that is there.'"

"You're lying, aren't you?"

"Yes!"

"What did you actually think?"

"I thought, 'What a kindly-looking old gentleman that is there, wrapped up in newspapers.'"

Pris said thoughtfully, "You probably are queer for old men. So your opinion isn't worth anything."

"Listen, Pris, somebody is going to brain you with a tire iron, someday. You understand?"

"You can barely handle your hostility, can you? Is that because you're a failure in your own eyes? Maybe you're being too hard on yourself. Tell me your childhood dreams and goals and I'll tell you if--"

"Not for a billion dollars."

"Are they shameful?" She continued to study me intently. "Did you do shameful sexual things with yourself, like it tells about in the psych books?"

I felt as if I were about to pass out.

"Obviously I hit on a sensitive topic with you," Pris said. "But don't be ashamed. You don't do it anymore, do you? I suppose you still might. . . you're not married, and normal sexual outlets are denied you." She pondered that. "I wonder what Sam does, along the sex line."

"Sam Vogel? Our driver, now in the Reno, Nevada, area?"

"No. Sam K. Barrows."

"You're obsessed," I said. "Your thoughts, your speech, your tiling the bathroom--your involvement in the Stanton."

"The simulacrum is brilliantly original."

"What would your analyst say about it?"

"Milt Horstowski? I told him. He already said."

"Tell me," I said. "Didn't he say this is a deranged manic compulsion of some kind?"

"No, he agreed that I should be doing something creative. When I told him about the Stanton he complimented me on it and hoped it would work out."

"Probably you gave him one hell of a biased account."

"No. I told him the truth."

"About *refighting the Civil War with robots*?"

"Yes. He said it had flair."

"Jesus Christ," I said. "They're all crazy."

"All," Pris said, reaching out and ruffling my hair, "but you, buddy boy. Right?"

I could say nothing.

"You take things so seriously," Pris drawled. "Relax and enjoy life. You're an anal type. Duty bound. You ought to let those old sphincter muscles let go for once . . . see how it feels. You want to be bad; that's the secret desire of the anal type. They feel they must do their duty, though; that's why they're so pedantic and given to having doubts all the time. Like this; you have doubts about this."

"I don't have doubts. I just have a yawning sense of absolute dread."

Pris laughed, rumped my hair.

"It's funny," I said. "My overwhelming fear."

"It's not an overwhelming fear you feel," Pris said matter-of-factly. "It's simply a little bit of natural carnal earthly lust. Some for me. Some for loot. Some for power. Some for fame." She indicated, with her thumb and first finger, a small amount. "About that much in total. That's the size of your great big overwhelming emotions." Lazily, she glanced at me, enjoying herself.

We drove on.

In Boise, at my family's home, we picked up the simulacrum, re-wrapped it in newspapers, and lugged it to the car. We returned to Ontario and Pris let me off at the office. There was little conversation between us on the return trip; Pris was withdrawn and I smoldered with anxiety and resentment toward her. My attitude seemed to amuse her. I was wise enough, however, to keep my mouth closed.

When I entered the office I found a short, plump, dark-haired woman waiting for me. She wore a heavy coat and carried a briefcase. "Mr. Rosen?"

"Yeah," I said, wondering if she was a process server.

"I'm Colleen Nild. From Mr. Barrows' office. Mr. Barrows asked me to drop by here and speak to you, if you have a moment." She had a low, rather uncertain voice, and looked, I thought, like someone's niece.

"What does Mr. Barrows want?" I asked guardedly, showing her to a chair. I seated myself facing her.

"Mr. Barrows had me make a carbon of a letter he has prepared for Miss Pris Frauenzimmer, a carbon for you." She held out three thin sheets, onion-skin, in fact; I saw somewhat blurred, dimmed, but obviously very correctly-typed business correspondence. "You're the Rosen family from Boise, aren't you? The people who propose to manufacture the simulacra?"

Scanning the letter, I saw the word *Stanton* pop up again and again; Barrows was answering a letter from Pris having to do with it. But I could not get the hang of Barrows' thoughts; it was all too diffuse.

Then all at once I got the drift.

Barrows had obviously misunderstood Pris. He thought the idea of refighting the Civil War with electronic simulacra, manufactured at our factory in Boise, was a civic enterprise, a do-gooding patriotic effort along the lines of improving the schools and reclaiming the deserts, not a business proposition at all. That's what she gets, I said to myself. Yes, I was right; Barrows was thanking her for her idea, for thinking of him in connection with it . . . but, he said, he received requests of this sort daily, and already had his hands full with worthy efforts. For instance a good deal of his time was spent in fighting condemnation of a war-time housing tract somewhere in Oregon . . . the letter became so vague, at that point, that I lost the thread completely.

"Can I keep this?" I asked Miss Nild.

"Please do. And if you'd like to comment, I'm sure Mr. Barrows would be interested in anything you have to say."

I said, "How long have you worked for Mr. Barrows?"

"Eight years, Mr. Rosen." She sounded happy about it.

"Is he a billionaire, like the papers say?"

"I suppose so, Mr. Rosen." Her brown eyes twinkled, enlarged by her glasses.

"Does he treat his employees good?"

She smiled without answering.

"What's this housing project, this Green Peach Hat, that Barrows is talking about in the letter?"

"That's a term for Gracious Prospect Heights, one of the greatest multiple-unit housing developments in the Pacific Northwest. Mr. Barrows always calls it that, although originally it was a term of derision. The people who want to tear it down invented the term and Mr. Barrows took it over-- the term, I mean--to protect the people who live there, so they won't feel spat upon. They appreciate that. They got up a petition thanking him for his help in blocking condemnation proceedings; there were almost two thousand signatures."

"Then the people who live there don't want it torn down?"

"Oh no. They're fiercely loyal to it. A group of do-gooders have taken it upon themselves to meddle, housewives and some society people who want to increase their own property values. They want to see the land used for a country club or something on that order. Their group is called the Northwest Citizens' Committee for Better Housing. A Mrs. Devorac heads it."

I recalled having read about her in the Oregon papers; she was quite up in the fashionable circles, always involved in causes. Her picture appeared on the first page of section two regularly.

"Why does Mr. Barrows want to save this housing tract?" I asked.

"He is incensed at the idea of American citizens deprived of their rights. Most of them are poorer people. They'd have no place to go. Mr. Barrows understands how they feel because he lived in rooming houses for years . . . you know that his family had no more money than anyone else? That he made his money on his own, through his own hard work and efforts?"

"Yes," I said. She seemed to be waiting for me to go on, so I said, "It's nice he still is able to identify with the working class, even though he's now a billionaire."

"Since most of Mr. Barrows' money was made in real estate, he has an acute awareness of the problems people face in their struggle to obtain decent housing. To society ladies such as Silvia Devorac, Green Peach Hat is merely an unsightly conglomeration of old buildings; none of them have gone inside--it would never occur to them to do so."

"You know," I said, "hearing this about Mr. Barrows goes a long way to make me feel that our civilization isn't declining."

She smiled her informal, warm smile at me.

"What do you know about this Stanton electronic simulacrum?" I asked her.

"I know that one has been built. Miss Frauzimmer mentioned that in her communications both by mail and over the phone to Mr. Barrows. I believe Mr. Barrows also told me that Miss Frauzimmer wanted to put the Stanton electronic simulacrum onto a Greyhound bus and have it ride unaccompanied to Seattle, where Mr. Barrows is currently. That would be her way of demonstrating graphically its ability to merge with humans and be unnoticed."

"Except for its funny split beard and old-fashioned vest."

"I was unaware of those factors."

"Possibly the simulacrum could argue with a cab driver as to the shortest route from the bus terminal to Mr. Barrows' office," I said. "That would be an additional proof of its humanness."

Colleen Nild said, "I'll mention that to Mr. Barrows."

"Do you know the Rosen electronic organ, or possibly our spinet pianos?"

"I'm not sure."

"The Rosen factory at Boise produces the finest electronic chord organ in existence. Far superior to the Hammerstein Mood Organ, which emits a noise nothing more adequate than a modified flute-sound."

"I was unaware of that, too," Miss or Mrs. Nild said. "I'll mention that to Mr. Barrows. He has always been a music lover."

I was still involved in reading Barrows' letter when my partner returned from his midday coffee break. I showed it to him.

"Barrows writing to Pris," he said, seating himself to pore over it. "Maybe we're in, Louis. Could it be? I guess it isn't a figment of Pris's mind after all. Gosh, the man's hard to follow; is he saying he is or he isn't interested in the Stanton?"

"Barrows seems to say he's completely tied up right now with a pet project of his own, that housing tract called Green Peach Hat."

"I lived there," Maury said. "In the late 'fifties."

"What's it like?"

"Louis, it's hell. The dump ought to be burned to the ground; only a match--nothing else--would help that place."

"Some do-gooders agree with you."

Maury said in a low, tense voice, "If they want someone to burn it down I'll do it personally for them. You can quote me, too. Sam Barrows owns that place."

"Ah," I said.

"He's making a fortune in rentals off it. Slum rentals is one of the biggest rackets in the world today; you get back like five to six hundred percent return on your investment. Well, I suppose we can't let personal opinion enter into business. Barrows is still a shrewd businessman and the best person to back the simulacra, even if he is a rich fink. But you say this letter is a rejection of the idea?"

"You could phone him and find out. Pris seems to have phoned him."

Picking up the phone, Maury dialed.

"Wait," I said.

He glared at me.

"I've got an intuition," I said, "of doom."

Into the phone, Maury said, "Mr. Barrows."

I grabbed the phone from him and hung it up.

"You--" He quivered with anger. "What a coward." Lifting the receiver he once more dialed. "Operator, I was cut off." He looked around for the letter; it had Barrows' number on it. I picked up the letter and crumpled it into a ball and tossed it across the room.

Cursing at me he slammed down the receiver.

We faced each other, breathing heavily.

"What's wrong with you?" Maury said.

"I don't think we should get tangled up with a man like that."

"*Like what?*"

I said, "Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad!"

That shook him. "What do you mean?" he mumbled, tipping his head and regarding me bird-like. "You think I'm batty to call, do you? Ought to be at the funny clinic. Maybe so. But anyhow I intend to." Going past me he fished up the crumpled ball of paper, smoothed it, memorized the number, and returned to the phone. Again he placed the call.

"It's the end of us," I said.

An interval passed. "Hello," Maury said suddenly. "Let me talk to Mr. Barrows, please. This is Maury Rock in Ontario, Oregon."

Another interval.

"Mr. Barrows! This is Maury Rock." He got a set grin on his face; he bent over, resting his elbow on his thigh. "I have your letter here, sir, to my daughter, Pris Frauentzimmer. . . regarding our world-shaking invention, the electronic simulacrum, as personified by the charming, old-time characterization of Lincoln's Secretary of War, Edwin McMasters Stanton." A pause in which he gaped at me vacantly. "Are you interested, sir?" Another pause, much longer this time.

You're not going to make the sale, Maury, I said to myself.

"Mr. Barrows," Maury said. "Yes, I see what you mean. That's true, sir. But let me point this out to you, in case you overlooked it."

The conversation rambled on for what seemed an endless time. At last Maury thanked Barrows, said goodbye, and hung up.

"No dice," I said.

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