

Fantasy and Science Fiction

OCTOBER *Including Venture Science Fiction*

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Cover by Chesley Bonestell
(Unloading empty fuel tanks on the moon)

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A new story from one of the most creatively imaginative talents now active in the science fiction field. This one is a further adventure of John Carmody, the only man who ever gave the famous detective Leopardi the slip, and now a lay brother of the order of Saint Jairus. Brer John has uncommon memories and skills for a lay brother, which may, or may not, be of assistance to him when he is ordered to the far-off planet of Wildenwooly.

A FEW MILES

by Philip José Farmer

BRER JOHN CARMODY WAS bent over, pulling out the carrots from the garden soil, when he heard his name called.

He straightened up, saying "Ough!" as he did so and putting the palm of his hand to his aching back. He waited for Brer Francis because Brer Francis had not told him to come but had merely named him.

Brer John was a short heavily built man with a square face, one drooping eyelid and a shock of blueblack hair that bristled like porcupine quills. Lay brothers of the order of St. Jairus, to which he belonged, did not shave their heads. He wore an ankle-length robe of maroon fiberglass and maroon plastic sandals. A broad plastleather belt circled his bulg-

ing stomach, and from it hung a cross and a small maroon book.

Brer Francis, a tall thin man with a narrow face and a ski-slope nose, halted before the fat man. He pointed at the bunch of carrots in the fat man's hand and said, "What happened to these, Brer?"

"Rabbits," said Brer John. He looked upwards and gestured furiously, though it was evident by his half-grin that his anger was mock.

"Rabbits! How do you explain that, heh? We live in cities that are completely roofed over and walled, and the walls go deep into the ground. Yet rabbits and mice and rats manage to get under the walls and raid our gardens and pantries. And squirrels

somehow climb into our trees, and birds, who must squeeze themselves through the interstices of the molecules of the roof, nest on every tree. And insects, who don't know how to burrow, only to fly or hop, are here at hand."

He swatted at a fly and said, "And on my nose, too. That pesky creature of Satan has been tickling my bulbous proboscis for the last past hour. However, I have refused to kill it on the grounds that it might have been sent to tempt me to anger and violence. And it has nearly succeeded, too, I might add."

"Brer John, you talk too much," said Brer Francis. "Far too much. However, I did not come here to reprimand you for that . . ."

"Though you have stayed to do so," said Brer John; and then, quickly, before Brer Francis, reddening face exploded into words, "Forgive me for that last remark. And the previous ones, too. As you said, I talk too much. It is a very grave fault, or, if not a fault, at least a characteristic to be frowned upon, and . . ."

"Brer John!" said Brer Francis. "Will you keep quiet long enough to allow me to tell you why I am here? I did not come out here to satisfy my curiosity, you know."

"Forgive me," said Brer John. "I'm all ears."

"The bishop wishes to see you. At once," said Brer Francis very quickly as if he were afraid Brer

John would interrupt if he breathed between words.

Brer John turned and threw the rabbit-damaged carrots into a cart and the good carrots into another. Then he set off towards the main building, a long low structure of pressed earth-blocks painted a dark maroon. Its high-pitched roof was raised several feet above the walls by thin poles, and a grillework of maroon metal filled the space between roof and wall. The entrances had no doors, for it was the tradition of the order never to have a locked door, and here in the controlled environment of the enclosed city, it was not necessary to keep out the weather. The roof was there only to give privacy from people flying overhead.

Brer John entered the main building and, without bothering to clean his dirty hands and face, went straight to the office of the Father Superior. When the chief called, no man loitered.

The rooms within the building did have doors, though they were unlocked. As the door to the Father Superior's office was closed, Brer John knocked.

"Come in!" said a voice within, and Brer John, not for the first time since he had joined the order as a lay brother, entered the large triangular room. He stood at the base of the triangle, and the Father Superior sat behind a large translucent desk at the apex of

the triangle. The top of the desk was loaded with piles of tapes, a stenewriter, and a vuephone. The Father Superior, however, was not dwarfed by the mountainous mass before him; he was a very tall man.

He was broad-faced with long rusty-red hair and a full rusty-red beard, which he and only he in the "inn" was entitled to wear. He was puffing on a huge Havana cigar.

Brer John, who had given up smoking for a month as a penance for one of his several sins, sniffed hungrily at the green smoke roiling around him.

The Father Superior flicked off the toggle of the stenewriter into which he had been dictating.

"Good morning, Brer John," he said. He waved a cartridge at the fat man.

"I have here an order which just came in via spaceship. You are to go to the planet of Wildenwooly at once and report to the Bishop of Breakneck. We will miss you in more ways than one, but we love you. God speed you, and our blessing."

Brer John's blue eyes widened. He did not move, and for the first time in a long time he could not talk.

The Father Superior, however, had closed his eyes and leaned back on his tiling chair while he dictated out of one corner of his mouth and puffed cigar smoke

out of the other. It was evident that he considered that he had given all orders necessary.

For a moment Brer John stared at the long ash on the end of the Father Superior's cigar. Obviously, the ash was just about to fall, and he wondered if it would fall on the long red beard beneath it.

However, the Father Superior, without opening his eyes, removed the cigar and flicked the ashes onto the stone floor.

Brer John shrugged and left the room, but the wonder was still on his face.

Outside the room, he hesitated for a few minutes. Then, sighing, he walked outside and crossed the garden to Brer Francis.

"Brer Francis, may I speak?"

"Yes," said the thin man. "If you confine yourself to the matter at hand and do not take the opportunity to run off at the tongue as usual."

"Where is Wildenwooly?" said Brer John with a tone that bordered on the pathetic.

"Wildenwooly? It is, I believe, the fourth planet of Tau Caesari. Our order has a church and an inn there," he said.

Brer John did not think that the order had a tavern on the planet. The dwellings of the order were customarily called inns because they had been so designated by the founder, St. Jairus.

"Why do you ask?" continued Brer Francis.

"I have just been ordered to go to Wildenwooly by the Father Superior." He looked hopefully at the other man.

But Brer Francis merely said, "Then you must go at once. God speed you, Brer John. Go with my love. I may have reprimanded you many times, but it has been for your good."

"I thank you for your love," said Brer John. "But I am at a loss."

"Why?"

"Why? To whom do I go to get a ticket for berth on a spaceship? Who gives me a draft on the order for travel expenses? What about a letter of introduction to the Bishop at Breakneck? I don't even know his name. I don't even know when a spaceship might leave for Wildenwooly or how long I might have to wait for it or where to wait for it. I don't even know where the spaceport is!"

"You talk too much," said Brer Francis. "You have been given all the orders you will get. Or need. As for the spaceport, it's only a few miles outside the city. And the inn on Wildenwooly is only a few miles outside the city of Breakneck. With good luck you might be there by this afternoon."

"That's all you have to say?" said Brer John unbelievably.

"Only a few miles," repeated Brer Francis. "You must leave at once. Orders, you know."

Brer John looked hard at Brer

Francis. Was he imagining or was a grin about to break out on that long lean rarely smiling face? No, he must be mistaken. The face was grim and unmoving.

"Don't be distressed," said Brer Francis. "I was once given just such an order. And so have others."

Brer John's eyes narrowed. "This is a test of some sort?"

"The order wouldn't send you forty thousand light years away *just* to test you," said Brer Francis. "You are wanted and needed at Wildenwooly. So go."

Brer John Carmody seldom hesitated. Once he had decided upon a course, and it did not customarily take him long to decide, he acted. Now he walked swiftly to the communal shower, entered the room, removed his robe, revealing a white body and legs painted black to the groin. He inserted the robe into a rectangular hole in the wall, and then he entered the shower. He did not stay long, for though the order had installed an entirely automatic shower, it had insisted that only cold water would be provided for the discomfort of its members. Once a month the order was treated to a warm shower.

He stepped out, shivering, and dried off in a blast of air, also cold, which blew from vents in the wall. Then he took out his robe from a receptacle below the one in which he had inserted the

robe and put it on. And he gave a short thanksgiving that the order had at least installed a cleaning apparatus. When he got to the frontier planet of Wildenwooly, he would have to wash his clothes by hand. And probably, considering his humble position, the robes of the other members, too.

Putting on his robe, he went to his cell. This was a room, six feet by seven feet, with luminescent walls, a crucifix attached to the wall, a hammock which was rolled into a bag during the day, a desk which folded down from the wall, and a niche in the wall where he kept all his worldly possessions. These, a missal, a history of the Church from 1 A.D. to 2260 A.D., a Latin grammar, and a Life of Saint Jairus, he put into the sack formed by the hood hanging down over his shoulders. Then he got down onto his knees before the crucifix, said, "Lord and Master, let me know what I am doing. Amen," rose and walked to the door of his cell. Just before leaving, and without breaking his stride, he reached out and took a long shepherd's staff from its peg on the wall. All lay brothers were required to take that crook with them when they went into the outside world, if the encapsulated city of Fourth of July could be called the outside world.

It was past noon, and the Arizona summer sun was sliding

downhill. Brer John found the temperature only a little warmer than inside the inn. The plastic roof over the city was, at this time of the day, opaqued enough to reflect most of the rays. Even so, Brer John looked forward to getting outside the walls, even if it meant being immersed in the staggering heat of midsummer Arizona. He had long felt cooped up, and, though he had never openly complained, he had felt the urge to do so. And had accordingly confessed and made his penance.

For a moment he paused. He knew there was a spaceport near Fourth of July, but he had no idea in which direction. So he went to a cop.

The cop was one of the new types, a Mark LIV. Its face and body were made of a tantalum alloy, but the eyes were of protoplasm, copied from those of some long-dead corpse and grown in the laboratory. And it had a semi-independent action, for the brain in its metallic belly was not a mechanism controlled remotely from headquarters below the ground. Its brain was a grey protoplasmic shape like a man's, twice as large and half as intelligent. It could not carry on a decent conversation, much less an indecent one, but it could handle its job quite well, and it could not be bribed or influenced. And, unlike its predecessors, it got

around on legs instead of wheels. Its feet were flat.

Brer John looked at the name on its chest, and then said, "Officer O'Malley, where is the spaceport?"

"What spaceport?" replied the cop. The voice was loud and toneless and sent shivers down Brer John's spine. It was like talking with a man deprived of his soul.

"Ah, yes, I forgot," said Brer John. "It's been so long since I talked to a cop. And they were usually shooting at me. I must ask direct questions, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"*N'est-ce pas?*" echoed the cop. "What language do you speak? I will refer you to Headquarters," and the cop reached with a huge grey-scaled hand for the microphone attached to the side of its head.

"I speak American," said Brer John hastily. "I wish to know how to get to the Fourth of July Spaceport from here."

"Are you going by tubeway or private car?" said the cop.

Brer John put his hand into the huge pockets of his robe and then withdrew them, empty. "Shank's mare," he said sadly.

"You told me you spoke American," said the cop. "Please speak American."

"I mean, I am going to the spaceport on foot," said Brer John. "I am walking."

The cop stood silent for a mo-

ment. Its face was expressionless as metal, but Brer John, who had a vivid imagination, thought he saw puzzlement film the features and then flit away.

"I can't tell you how to get there if you walk," said the cop. "Just a moment. I'll refer you to Headquarters."

"That won't be necessary," said Brer John hastily. He could visualize himself going into a lengthy explanation to Headquarters just why he was *walking* to a city exit from this distant point. And perhaps being delayed to wait while a human cop was sent to investigate him on the spot.

"I can follow the tubeway to its end," he said. He pointed to a line of tall metal rods, each of which was surmounted by an enormous loop of metal.

"Which way do I go to the exit closest to the spaceport? Fourth of July," he added.

The cop was silent for two seconds. Then it said, "You don't mean on the date of the Fourth of July? You mean the spaceport called Fourth of July, right?"

"Right," said Brer John.

The cop pointed to the closest tubeway. "Take a North car on Number Ten Tubeway. Get off at the exit to the city. Go outside the city. Take a taxi from there to the spaceport of Fourth of July."

"Thank you," said Brer John.

"You're welcome to the services of the city," said the cop.

Brer John hurried away. The living eyes in the dead face made him uncomfortable. But he could not help wondering if the cop was truly incorruptible. Ah, if it had been the old John Carmody talking to the cop, then things might have been different! Not a humble lay brother of St. Jairus asking directions, but the cleverest crook in the cosmos trying to see if finally here was a cop who couldn't be bribed, tricked or coerced.

"John Carmody," said Brer John to himself, "you're a long way from being pure in thought. And you've just added another penance to suffer. God preserve you! You've barely left the cloister, just ventured into the outside world, and already you're thinking of the old days as the good old days. Yet you were a monster, John Carmody, a hideous monster who should have been obliterated. Not at all the lovable rogue you were picturing yourself as."

He walked below the tubeway. Overhead, a bus shot through the loops at the ends of the poles, then paused a hundred yards ahead of him and sank down to the ground to discharge its passengers. He wished he had a decicredit, vulgarly called "dessy," as fare. One decicredit would take him to the city exit and spare him the ten miles of shank's mare he had ahead of him.

He sighed, and said, "John, if wishes were horses . . ." and then he chuckled, visioning himself on a horse in this city. What a panic that would create! People running to stare at this monster seen now only on tridi or in the zoo! People running away in fright, the cops being called, and he . . . hauled off to jail. And guilty not only of secular crime but of ecclesiastical. A humble lay brother anything but humble, prancing pridefully on a horse, or was it a horse that pranced? Guilty of public display, inciting to riot and God knew what else.

He sighed again and began walking. Fortunately, he thought, a man was able to walk from one end of the city to the other if he followed the narrow path created by the poles of the tubeway. Unlike the old days, when there had been streets for a man to walk on, the city was one maze of narrow yards with high fences and a single family room in the middle of each strip of fence and grass, the main quarters being underground. And underneath the houses, the factory or offices where the house dwellers earned their living. If you could call it living.

He walked and walked, while overhead the citizens traveled in the tubeway bus or flew in their private cars (rented to them by the clutch to which they belonged). Once a robin flew over

him, and Brer John said, "Ah, John, if you believed in the pernicious doctrine of transmigration, you would wish to enter the cycle of karma again as a bird. But of course, you don't, so why sigh for the ecstasy of wings? It is your aching feet that make you think these dangerous thoughts. Go, John, go! Plod on like the weary ass that you are."

He walked for perhaps two more miles and then to his delight he saw a park open up before him. It was one of the two large parks afforded by the city, where the citizens flocked to get a facsimile of the outdoors world. Here were winding dirt paths and rocks heaped up to resemble small mountains and caves in the mountains and trees and birds and squirrels and lakes on which swans and geese and ducks swam and every now and then a fish leaped up from beneath the surface.

It was, compared to the geometric jungle from which he had just come, a paradise. Alas! this paradise had no snakes, but it had too many Adams and Eves. They swarmed everywhere with their little Abels and Cains, lolling, drinking, eating, shouting, running, screaming, bellowing, lovemaking, quarreling, laughing, scowling.

Appalled, Brer John halted. He had been shut up so long inside the walls of Our Lady of

Fourth of July that he had forgotten the manswarm.

He paused, and at the same time he heard a sound that shut up the uproar. A fire siren whooping in the distance.

He turned and saw the smoke pouring from an eat-house on the edge of the park. And overhead, shooting through the air, the red needle shape of a fire engine.

Brer John ran towards the eat-house. It was one of the few aboveground dining places in the city, a building constructed to resemble an Early American log-house. Here the picknickers could go to eat in "atmosphere" and get away from the vast and dimly clean and bright cafeterias of the clutches where they habitually ate.

The owner of the YE OLDE ARIZONA LOGHAUS stood in the doorway and barred Brer John's entrance.

"No looting!" he shouted. "I'll kill the first man that tries to come in!" He held in his big meaty hands a butcher's cleaver.

Brer John halted and said, between gasps, "I've no wish to loot, my friend. I ran to see if I could help."

"No help needed," said the owner, still holding his cleaver poised. "I had a fire a couple years ago, and the mob broke in and stole everything before the cops could get here. I'll have no more of that."

Brer John felt himself pushed from behind. He looked over his shoulder and saw that he was being urged forward by the pressure of many men and women behind him. Obviously, they wanted to burst in and steal everything they could lay their hands on and wreck the eathouse before the police arrived. It was the custom when anything broke down in the city, an expression of the resentment they felt at their hemmed-in lives and at the non-human representatives of the authorities.

The owner stepped back inside the doorway and shouted, "So help me, I'll split the skull of the first man or woman who tries to get in!"

The mob yelled with fury, and it snarled at him for having the effrontery to spoil their sport. It thrust forth a pseudopod of force, and Brer John found himself, willy-nilly, the vanguard and vicar of violence.

Luckily, at that moment, the shadow of the fire engine fell on the crowd, and the next moment a spray of foam drenched them. They fell back, panting, the oxygen suddenly cut from around their noses and mouths. Brer John himself almost strangled before he could fight his way out of the foam that roiled hipdeep around him.

Immediately afterwards, the copcars, sirens screaming, slid down out of the sky. And the cops

poured out of the cars, light gleaming from the metal rings of their legs and round metal chests and the living black eyes, wet in the dead metal faces, moving back and forth. Their voices roared above the crowd's, and in a short time they had returned order to the park. The firemen walked into the eathouse, and in ten minutes came out. Most of them took off in their fire engines; one company stayed behind to clean up the foam. A lone cop recorded a report from the owner, and then he, too, left.

The owner was a short dark beefy man of about fifty. He had a thick black walrus moustache, through which he cursed fluently and loudly in American, Lingo, and Mexican for five minutes. Then he began locking the doors of the eathouse.

Brer John, one of the few people who had remained to watch, said, "Why are you closing? Hasn't the place been cleaned up?"

He was not really worried about *why*; he hoped that somehow he would be able to get a meal from the man. His stomach had been growling like a starving dog for half an hour.

"Oh, it's clean enough," said the man. "But the autochef is out of order. It started smoking; that's why I called the firemen."

"Can't you have it repaired?" said Brer John.

"Not until I sign a new contract with the Electrical Mainte-

nance Union," growled the man. "And that I won't do. They're on strike now for higher wages. Well, I don't give a damn. I'll go out of business before I deal with them. Or wait until my brother Juan gets here from Mexico. He's an electronics tech; he's going into business with me, and he can keep the autochef going. But he won't get here until next week. When he does, we'll show the bastards."

"It just so happens," said Brer John, grinning, his mouth watering at the thought of all the goodies within, "that I am an electronics expert, among other things. I could repair the chef for you."

The man looked at him from under thick brows. "And just what's in it for you?"

"A good meal," said Brer John. "And enough busfare and taxi fare to get me to the spaceport."

The man looked around, then said, "Ain't you worried about the union? They'll be down on us like a bus whose antigrav has given out."

Brer John hesitated. The growling of his belly was loud. He said, "I don't wish to be called a scab. But if it is true that your brother is going to fix it anyway, then I see no harm in repairing the machinery a few days before he gets here. Besides, I'm hungry."

"O.K." said the owner. "It's your funeral. But I oughta warn you that there's a picket stationed in the kitchen."

"Will he resort to violence?" asked Brer John.

The owner took the cigar out of his mouth and stared at the brother. Then he said, "Where you been all your life?"

"I was gone from Earth quite a few years," said Brer John. "And my life here on Earth has been quite cloistered since my return."

He did not think it necessary to add that the first year had been spent at John Hopkins, where he had been undergoing rehabilitation therapy after surrendering himself to the police.

The owner shrugged and led Brer John through the dining rooms into the kitchen. There he pointed at a large painting hanging from the wall, Trudeau's *Morning On Antares II*. "Looks like a picture," he said. "It's the picket. A TV receiver. The union monitors it from its headquarters. Once they see you working on the chef, they'll be down on us like the wolf on the fooled."

"I don't wish to suggest anything illegal or unethical," said Brer John. "But what would happen if we—I—turned off the picket's power?"

"You can't turn it off unless you was to smash it," said the owner gloomily. "The power switch is remote-controlled by the union."

"What about hanging a sheet over it?" said Brer John.

"An alarm would go off at

union headquarters," replied the owner. "And I'd be hauled off to jail by one of those stinking zombie cops. It's against the law for me to interfere with the vision of the picket in any way. I even have to keep the lights on in the kitchen day and night. And what's worse, I have to pay the light bill, not the _____ing union."

The use of the four-letter word did not bother Brer John. Such words had long ago ceased to be equated with vulgarity or immorality; it made no difference whether one used words of English or Latin origin in describing bodily functions or as expletives. Twenty-third century culture, however, did have other taboo words, and the owner could have offended Brer John by using them.

The brother asked for pliers, cutters, a screwdriver, and insulating tape. Then he stuck his head into the hole left by the removal of the wall-panels by the firemen. The owner began pacing back and forth, his big cigar puffing like signals sent by an Indian frantically asking for money from home.

"Maybe I shouldn't ought to of let you start doing this," he said. "The union'll have its goon squad on the way. Maybe they'll try to wreck the place. Maybe they'll start a lawsuit against me. It ain't as if you was my brother fixing that damn chef. They can't do nothing if the repairman is part-owner of the place."

Brer John wished he had insisted upon being fed before beginning work. His stomach rumbled louder than ever, and his intestines felt as if they had turned cannibal.

"Why not call a cop?" he said. "He can maintain order."

"I hate those metal-bellied zombies," said the owner. "So does any decent man. It's got so people won't call a cop unless they absolutely have to. People are beginning to take the law in their own hands 'cause they hate to deal with the cops. I'd rather have the joint wrecked and pay for it than ask them damn zombies for help."

"Impersonal uncorruptible law enforcement has always been an ideal," said Brer John. "So, now we have it . . ."

"Brer John, if you wasn't a man of the cloth, I'd tell you where to stick it," said the owner. "But you get the message. Say, tell me, how come you monks are called Brer instead of Brother?"

"Because that is the way our founder, St. Jairus, pronounced brother," said Brer John. "He was born on the planet of Hawaiki, where the Polynesian colonists developed their own brand of American. Ah, here's the trouble! Burned-out transformer in the high voltage power supply. Lucky for us the malfunction is so obvious. Maybe not so lucky unless we can replace the transformer. Do you have spare parts? Or do

you, I suppose, depend upon the maintenance men to supply the parts?"

The owner grinned and said, "Usually I do. But my brother phoned me and said to lay in all the parts I'd need before the union caught on he was coming. You see, once they knew I was using him, the union'd fix it up with the suppliers in L.A. not to sell me any stuff. Oh, those bastards! One way or another, they'll turn off your switch!"

"Ah well, they must ensure their living, too," said Brer John. "There's something to be said for both sides in a labor-management dispute."

"The hell there is!" said the owner, clamping down on his cigar. "Besides, I ain't no management. I'm a proprietor who has to pay highway robbery prices to keep my electronic stuff going, that's what."

"Show me where you keep those parts," said Brer John.

He paused. A loud knocking had penetrated the kitchen from the front of the eathouse.

The owner scowled and said, "They're here. But they can't get in unless I unlock the doors. Or they bust 'em down."

He hurried into a room behind the kitchen. Brer John followed, and there he picked out the transformer he needed. When he came back into the kitchen, the knocking was louder and more furious.

"Do you intend to let them in?" asked Brer John.

"If I don't, they'll kick the door open," said the owner. "And I can't do a damn thing about it. According to the law, they got a perfect right to make sure nobody except the owner fixes up the electronic equipment. And they're trying to get a law passed to keep a man from doing that."

"Yes, it's true that a man has increasingly little liberty and rights," said Brer John. "On Earth, that is. That is why the individualist and nonconformist leave Earth in such great numbers for the frontier planets."

He paused, frowned as if he were thinking deeply, and said, "Perhaps that is why I am being sent to Wildenwooly." He sighed and added, "Though it looks as if I may not be getting there."

He turned to the open panel and said, "You keep them out as long as you can without resorting to violence. Perhaps, by the time they get here, I can have this repaired."

It did not take him long, for the transformer needed only to be clipped onto the circuit board and the terminals plugged in. He laughed. It was so simple that the owner, if he had taken the time to examine the situation, could easily have done the repair work himself. But he, like many, thought of electronics as being such a highly mysterious and complex science,

that he needed an expert. Though there were many things that only a highly trained technician could troubleshoot, this was not one of them.

He withdrew the upper part of his body from the opening just in time to see the owner being pushed by four maintenance men into the kitchen. These were dressed in scarlet coveralls and electric-blue caps and wore their emblems on their chests and backs, a lightning streak crossed by a screwdriver.

On seeing Brer John they halted in astonishment; apparently they had not seen him on the picket but had been told to go to Ye Olde Arizona Loghaus and stop the scab.

Their leader, a six-foot-six man with the protruding brows and thick jaw of a pugilist, stepped forward. "I don't know what you're doing here, brother," he said. "But you better have a good reason."

Another man, shorter than the first but broader, said, "Perhaps the Father didn't know what he was doing?"

The big man whirled on the broad man. "He ain't no Father!" he snarled. "If you was one of our faith, you'd know that. He's a monk or a friar or a lay brother, something like that. But he ain't no priest!"

"I'm a lay brother of the Order of St. Jairus," said Brer John. "Brer John is the name."

"Well, Brer John," said the big

man. "Maybe you've been shut up behind those walls so long meditating that you don't know that you're scabbing on us, taking the bread out of our mouths."

"I knew what I was doing," said Brer John. "By not fixing the auto-chef, I was taking the bread out of this man's mouth—," he pointed to the owner. "And I was also depriving many people of the chance to get away from those ghastly soulless clutch cafeterias."

"All this capitalist has to do is pay us what we want, and he can feed as many people as he can handle," snarled the big man.

"Well," said Brer John, "the trouble has been fixed."

The big man turned purple and clenched his fists.

"Shame on you," said Brer John. "You are ready to strike a man of your own faith, a member of a holy order, too. And yet that man—" he pointed to the broad man—"a man of another faith, if any, is ready to take a reasonable attitude."

"He's one of them damn Universal Light people," said the big man. "Always ready to consider the other fellow's side, even if it's to his own injury."

"Then the more shame to you," said Brer John.

"I didn't come here to be shamed!" roared the big man. "I come here to get rid of a sneaky little scab hiding behind a rebel. More shame to you, I say!"

"And just what do you propose to do?" said Brer John. He was shaking all over, not from fear of injury but from the fear that he might lose his self-control and attack the big man. And thus betray his own principles. Not to mention the principles of the order to which he belonged. What if they heard of this incident! What would they say, what action take?

"I propose first to throw you out," said the big man. "And then I propose to take out that transformer you put in."

"You can't do that!" bellowed the owner. "What's done is done!"

"Wait a minute," said Brer John to the owner. "No use getting upset. Let them take the transformer out. You can put it back in yourself, and there's not a thing they can do."

Again the big man purpled, and his eyes bulged out. "He will like hell!" he said. "If the picket sees him do anything like that, or even try to, we'll be down on him like the roof of the city fell in!"

"There ain't a thing you can do about it," said the owner, smiling smugly. "Go ahead. Take the transformer out. I'll just stand here and watch how you do it so's I'll know how to, too."

"He's right," said the broad man. "We can't do a thing if the trouble's that simple."

"Say, who's side you on?" roared the big man. "You a scab?"

"No. I just want to be legal,"

said the broad man. "Anyway, we can hire human pickets to picket the place."

"Are you out of your skull?" said the big man. "You know the Human Picket Union just upped their hourly rates, and we can't afford to hire any. And we don't have enough men of our own to spare for picketing. Besides, them damn pickets are pushing through a law to make it illegal for anybody except a picket union member to picket. The nerve of them guys!"

Brer John smiled and shook his head and ts-ktsked.

"I'm warning you!" shouted the big man, shaking his fist in the direction of the owner and Brer John. "If you re-repair the auto-chef, you won't have an eat-house to run!"

The owner, whose own face had been purpling, suddenly jumped on the big man and bowled him over. The two went down together, locked in furious, if not deadly, combat. Another of the goon squad took a poke at Brer John. Brer John ducked, and before he could think, his reflexes took over. He threw up his left to block the fellow's punch, and seeing him wide open, slammed him in the belly with a hard right.

A fierce joy ran through him. Before he could recollect what he should be doing, he had done what he should not. Excellent student of karate, judo, sabate, *akrantu*,

and *visperwun*, and veteran of a hundred bar-room and back alley brawls, he went into action like a maddened lynx mother who thought her kittens were in danger. A chop of the palm-edge against a neck, a thrust of stiff fingers into a soft gut, a hard heel of a foot against a chin, a knee in the groin and an elbow in the throat, and all except the big man were out of the fight. Following the Biblical precept of saving the best for the last, Brer John incapacitated the big man by pulling him from the owner and working him over with palm, fingers, knee, foot, and elbow. The big man went down like a tree attacked by a thousand woodpeckers.

The owner struggled to his feet and was astonished to see Brer John on his knees, eyes closed, praying.

"What's the matter?" said the owner. "You hurt?"

"Not physically," said Brer John, getting to his feet. He did not believe in long prayers when they were informal. "I am hurt because I failed."

"Failed?" said the owner, looking around at the unconscious or groaning men. "Did one of them get away?"

"No," said Brer John. "Only it should be I who am on the floor, not they. I lost my temper, and also my self-respect. I should have let them do what they wanted to with me but never lifted a finger."

"———" cried the owner. "Look at it this way. You saved these men from being murderers! Believe me, they'd have had to kill me before I would have let them mess up my autochef. No, you've done them, and me, a great service. Though I don't know what's going to happen once they go back to headquarters. There'll be hell to pay."

"There usually is," said Brer John. "What will you do?"

"Don't say that," said the owner. "The last time you asked that, we had a free-for-all. But I'll tell you what. I'm going to drag these goons out—and I could use some help from you—and then I'm going to lock the door, and then, much as I hate to have anything to do with those metal-bellies, I'm going to call the cops. They can station a flatfoot here and keep the goons from bombing or wrecking the place. I'll say that much for the zombies, they can't be scared by threats or influence."

Brer John began helping the owner carry the men out of the eat-house. They had, however, no sooner placed the four on the sidewalk and locked the door than they heard the siren of a police car.

"I have to go now," said Brer John. "I can't afford to have my name on the police records or in the papers. My superiors would frown on such unfavorable publicity. And it wouldn't do me any good either," he added, thinking

of his pre-Christian days. It was possible that he might be taken back to John Hopkins for further observation.

"What will I tell the cops?" wailed the owner.

"Tell the truth," said Brer John. "Always tell the truth. I'm sorry I failed you so miserably. I have a lot to learn yet. And I'm still hungry," he said, but it was doubtful if the owner heard the last phrase, for Brer John was running in his shapeless maroon robe like a frightened bear for the shelter of a copse of trees in the park.

Once inside the grove, he stopped. Not because he had planned to, but because he ran across a picnic blanket and his feet slipped on a bowl of potato salad. He fell face forward in a plate of fish eggs. And lay there, half-stunned, vaguely aware of the howls and shrieks of laughter around him.

When he managed to sit up and look around, he saw that he was surrounded by six teenage boys and girls. Luckily for him, they were in a holiday mood. If they'd been in an ugly mood, they might have been able to harm or perhaps even to kill him. They were dressed in the uniform of the "skunks" as others called them and as they called themselves. These were black-and-white striped jumpers with close-fitting hoods, and their legs were painted with vertical black and white stripes.

The eyes of the girls were ringed with black paint, and the eyes of the boys were painted with black semi-circles.

"Gimp the high priest!" screamed one of the boys. He pointed with red-painted fingernails. "Ain't him a dud!"

"A real dong-dong," said one of the girls. She bent over Brer John and pulled a little string hanging from the side of her jumper. Her breasts leaped out of the low-cut bodice and stared at him with two red-pupilled blue-rimmed eyes. The rest howled and screamed and threw themselves gasping on the grass.

Brer John averted his eyes. He had heard of the trick the juvenile girls liked to play; the false breasts which leaped out at the startled stranger like a jack-in-a-box. But he wasn't sure that these were false.

The girl stuffed the device back into her grotesquely out-thrust bosom. She smiled at Brer John, and he saw that she would have been a pretty girl if it hadn't been for the absurdly painted face. "What's ionizing, Willie?" she said to him.

Brer John rose, and, while he wiped his face with a handkerchief he took from his pocket, he said, "I am running from the cops."

He couldn't have said anything else that would have more quickly gained their sympathy.

"Hopping the deadpans? Ain't him a dudud? Don't him look some priest? Scratch one, him's some monk, nothing a priest, you short-cut to zero."

Home among my own, thought Brer John, and hot on the heels of that thought a fierce denial. No, they are not my own. My brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, sinners, too, but I am not home. I can understand them, how and why they are, but I will not be one of them. I will hurt no man with malice aforethought.

"Pink some me," said the girl who had popped out her bosom, false or otherwise. "Me'll straight you some hole." Brer John interpreted that to mean that he was to give her his hand and she would lead him to a hiding place.

"Me'll stick my nose along," said a youth who was distinguished from the others by his tallness and the closeness of his black eyes.

"Some poxy," said the girl, which seemed to mean that the boy was to come along. She led Brer John out of the grove and down a winding path and then through another grove where they stepped over couples in various degrees of passion, and then up over an artificial hill and under an artificial waterfall and into another collection of trees. Brer John looked overhead from time to time. A police car was still hanging in the air, but evidently they hadn't spotted him yet. Sud-

denly, the girl pulled him into a thick collection of bushes and sat down in the middle of them. The youth forced his body between the girl and Brer John and began drinking from the bucket of beer which he had brought along.

The girl handed Brer John a sandwich, and he devoured it. His stomach growled, and his mouth salivated. By the time he'd eaten it, the boy had put the bucket down, and the girl handed the bucket to Brer John. He drank it eagerly in great gulps. But the boy tore the bucket from his hands.

"Don't no road," he said, which freely translated meant, "Don't be a hog."

"Some you dudud," said the girl. "Frwhat you jet some?"

Brer John interpreted this to mean that she wanted to know from what he was running. He told them that he was a lay brother of the order of St. Jairus, one who had not yet taken his final vows. As a matter of fact, inside a week his year would be up, and if he then wished to quit the society, he could do so. He didn't even have to notify his superiors.

He did not tell them that he suspected that this order to go to Wildenwooly at the same time that his year was up had been authorized so he could make up his mind whether he wished to remain with the order of St. Jairus.

He told them that there was a possibility that he might go into

the priesthood, but he wasn't sure that he wouldn't be happier by remaining a simple brother. He would get all the dirty menial tasks, true, but he also would not have the tremendous responsibilities that came with being a priest.

Also, though he did not say so, he did not want the humiliation of being refused permission to enter the priesthood. He was not sure that he was worthy.

There was silence except for the loud gulplings of the youth as he drank from the bucket. Brer John looked out through the bushes and saw that they were next to a fence. Just beyond the fence was a narrow strip of dirt and then a deep moat. On the other side of the moat was a large bare space of rock and, beyond it, a cave. Evidently this was the cage of some animal, and it had been prepared to resemble the natural habitat of the animal.

He looked for the animal but could not see it. Then, he saw a sign by the fence.

HOROWITZ

A fierce meat-eating giant bird of the planet Feral.

Highly intelligent. Named after its discoverer, Alexander Horowitz. Please do not tease.

This area monitored.

The girl reached out a hand and stroked Brer John's chin. "Some scratch," she said.

She turned to the youth and jerked her thumb in an invitation for him to leave.

"Whyn't some ionize?" she said.

He narrowed his eyes and said, "Me? Summun want rigor mortis?"

"Me never no monk-monk before," said the girl, and she laughed, while her blue eyes looked at Brer John with a look he knew too well.

The boy snarled, "Monk-monk?" and then Brer John understood that the girl was punning. Monk-monk, he remembered now, was an extremely vulgar word which had replaced one of the formerly tabooed four-letter words.

"Monk-monk the monk-monk," said the boy. "Me monk-monk summun if summun ain't getting the monk-monk off the pad."

He turned to Brer John. "Ionize, gutbutt!"

Suddenly, a knife was in the girl's hand, and the point was at the boy's throat. "Me seesaw rigor mortis," she said crooningly.

"Some?" said the boy amazedly, jerking his thumb at Brer John.

The girl nodded her head. "Me some. Never no monk-monk a monk-monking monk, comprehend? You ionize sooner than later. Some seesaw rigor mortis, no?"

The boy put his hands on the ground behind him and tried to back away from her. She followed him, the knife held to his throat.

As she did so, Brer John's hand

flashed out and knocked the knife from her grasp. All three dived for it, and their heads came together. Brer John saw stars; by the time he'd recovered, the youth had grabbed him by the throat and was trying to strangle him. Brer John fought back; his stiff fingers plunged into the boy's stomach, the boy said, "Oof!" and released his hold. The girl, knife in hand, leaped at the boy. He turned and hit her on the jaw with his fist and knocked her unconscious to the ground. Then, before Brer John could move in close enough, the boy grabbed him by the front of the robe and lifted him high and helpless in the air. And the next Brer John knew, he was flying over the fence. He hit the ground hard, rolled over, felt the world slipping away beneath him, knew briefly that he was falling into the moat, fell backwards, and then . . . heard a voice shrieking, "Hey, John, hey, John! Here I am, John!"

He woke to hear the same voice calling, "Hey, John! Here I am!"

He was flat on his back, staring upwards past the grey walls of the moat and up at the roof of the city. The roof was no longer transparent, allowing the blue of the Arizona sky to come through undiminished. Night had fallen outside the roof, and now the roof itself was a glow bright as day, shining with energy stored during the day and released at sunset.

Brer John groaned and tried to sit up to see if he had any broken bones. But he could not move.

"Holy Mother!" he breathed. "I'm paralyzed! St. Jairus preserve me!"

But he was not totally paralyzed. He could move his legs and his arms. It was just that his chest felt as if it were crushed against the earth by a great weight.

He turned his head, and he almost fainted with fright. It was a weight that was holding him down. A huge bird . . .

It had been squatting by his side, its giant claw placed on his chest, pinning him to the ground. Now that it saw the man had his eyes open, it rose to one foot, still keeping the other placed on him.

"Hey, John!" it screamed. "Here I am, John!"

"So you are," said Brer John. "Would you mind letting me up?" But he did not expect anything, for it was obvious that the huge bird—if it was a bird—had a parrot's power to mimic.

Slowly, he moved his arms, not wishing to alarm the horowitz, for that must be what it was. It could have torn him open at any moment with its tremendous three-toed foot or with its moa-sized beak. Evidently it had leaped down into the moat after him, with what purpose, he didn't know.

His arms bent at the elbows, he lowered the upper parts to feel his chest. He had wondered what it

was that lay on his chest, which was bare, probably because the big bird had ripped his robe open.

He felt sick. An egg lay on his chest.

It was a small egg, not much larger than a barnyard hen's. He couldn't imagine why a creature that large would lay such a small egg, why it would lay it on him. But it was and it had.

The horowitz, seeing the man's hands feel the egg, screamed with protest. Its huge beak stabbed down at his face. Brer John closed his eyes, and breathed in the rotten breath of the meat-eating creature. But the beak did not touch him, and after a moment he opened his eyes. The beak was poised a few inches above his face, ready to complete its descent if he harmed the egg.

Brer John gave a longer than usual prayer, then he tried to think of a way to get out of his predicament.

And could not. He dared not try to escape by force, and he could not, for one of the few times in his life, talk his way out. He did turn his head to look up at the edge of the moat from which he had fallen, supposing that some spectators would notice him. But there were none. And in a moment he realized why. The people who had been in the park probably had gone home to supper or to work, and the second shift at the clutches had not yet come into the

park. And, of course, it was possible that nobody would come by for a long time. Nor did he dare to shout for fear of alarming the horowitz.

He was forced to lie motionless on his back and wait until the big bird left him. If it intended to leave him. It did not seem likely that it would. For some reason it had jumped into the moat to lay its egg on him. And it could not jump back out. Which meant that in time it would get hungry.

"Who would have thought that when I was told to go to Wildenwooly that I might perish in the city zoo only halfway out of the city. Strange and wondrous are the ways of the Lord," he muttered.

He lay, staring upwards at the glowing roof, at the huge beak and black red-rimmed eyes of the bird, and occasionally at the top of the moat, hoping for a passerby.

After a time he felt his chest tickling beneath the egg. The tickling grew stronger with every minute, and he had an insane desire to scratch, insane because to indulge would be to die.

"Holy Mother," he said, "if you are torturing me to make me think on my sins before I die, you are certainly succeeding. Or would be if I weren't so concerned with the tickling and itching itself. I can barely think of my most grievous faults because of the disturbing everlasting damnable itching. I have to scratch! I must!"

But he did not dare. To do so would have been to commit suicide, and that, the unpardonable sin because it could not be regretted, was unthinkable. Or perhaps not unthinkable because he *was* thinking of it; what *was* the correct word—undoable? No, but it did not matter. If he could only scratch!

Presently, after what seemed hours but probably was not more than fifteen minutes, the itching quit. Life again became endurable, even if not pleasant.

It was at that precise minute that the youth who had thrown him into the moat appeared above him.

"Grab time!" called the youth. "Me'll drop a rope!"

Brer John watched the boy tie one end of a rope to the fence and then throw the other end down into the moat. He wondered if the youth expected him to walk over and draw himself up, meanwhile blithely ignoring the huge bird. He wanted to call out and tell him he couldn't even sit up, but he was afraid his voice might alarm the creature.

However, he did not have to initiate any action. The second the rope touched the floor of the moat the horowitz released its hold on the man and ran to the rope. It seized it in its two small hands and, bracing its feet against the side of the moat, swarmed up.

Brer John jumped up and

shouted, "Don't let it get out of the moat, son! It'll kill you!"

The youth stared at the creature coming swiftly up the rope. Just as the bird's head came over the edge of the moat, the youth came out of his paralysis. He stepped up to the bird and kicked savagely at the beaked head. The bird gave a cry, loosed its hold on the rope, and fell backwards. It struck the earth, rolled a few feet, and lay stunned, its eyes glazed.

Brer John did not hesitate. He ran to the rope and began hauling himself up hand over hand on it. Halfway up, he felt the rope straighten out beneath him. Looking down, he saw the horowitz had recovered and was following him up the rope. It began squawking furiously, intermingling its cries with screams of "Hey, John! Here I am, John!"

Brer John climbed a few feet higher, then hung there while he kicked at the crested head beneath him. His foot drove solidly into the creature's skull, and once again the bird lost its hold and fell backwards to the ground. Gasping for breath, it lay there long enough for Brer John to pull the rope out of its reach.

"We must notify the zoo personnel," he said. "Otherwise, the poor creature might starve to death. Besides, I have something that is the property of the zoo."

"Me don't scratch you," said the youth. Brer John interpreted

this to mean that he didn't understand him. "Dum-dum some rigor mortised summum."

"The bird was only obeying the dictates of its nature," said Brer John. "Unlike you or me, it doesn't have free will."

"Will-swill," said the youth. "Gimp the baldun."

"You mean, look at the egg?" replied Brer John. He looked down to examine the strange situation of the egg. It had not fallen off his chest when he rose but had clung to his skin as if glued on. He pulled it away from his chest, and the skin stretched with it.

"Curioser and curioser," he said. "Perhaps the bird secretes an adhesive when it lays an egg. But why should it?"

Then he thought of his manners and his gratitude, and he said, "I thank you for coming to my rescue. Though I must admit I was surprised since—forgive me for mentioning it—you were the one who threw me down there."

"Goed out of me frying-pan," said the youth, meaning that he had lost his head. "Goed monk-monk gimping the trangle smack-smacking summum. Her's no monk-monking good. Gived her the ivory-doctor."

"Knocked her teeth out?" said Brer John.

"Scratch," said the youth. "Telled the trangle ionize. Daily dozen gived me cross-gimps."

"You told the girl to get lost be-

cause she was always getting you in trouble?"

"Scratch. Rigor mortis summum; me get sing-singed grey fat fried."

"You might kill someone and get sent to an institution where your personality would be changed? Possibly. However, your act in coming back shows you have promise. I wish I could repay you, but I have nothing to give you."

Suddenly, he began scratching furiously, and he added, "Except for these monk-monking lice that bird gave me. Is there anything I could do for you?"

The youth shrugged hopelessly. "Round-round. You going to Wildenwooly?"

Brer John nodded. The youth looked up at the glowing roof overhead.

"Bye-bye, maybe me go some there. Nothing but daily dozen in-and-out on The Anthheap. Is a different dummy out in deep space."

"Yes, getting off Earth and on a frontier planet might make a new man of you," said Brer John. "And you might learn to speak American, too. Well, God bless you, my boy. I must go. And if you should get to Wildenwooly before I do, tell them I'm doing my best to get there. Holy Mary, it's only a few miles, said Brer Francis!"

He began walking away. Behind him rose a harsh wail of "Hey, John! Here I am, John! Your old buddy, John!"

He shuddered and crossed himself and continued walking. But he could not forget the monster in the moat. The vermin that now swarmed under his robe and drove him almost frantic would not allow him to forget. Neither would the egg attached to his chest.

It was the combination of the two which decided him to find a secluded spot on the lagoon and bathe. He had hopes he could drown the bird-lice and unglue the adhesive which made the egg stick so tightly. Finding a place where he would not be seen was not, however, so easy. The first shift was streaming from the clutches into the park and was lying on the sandy beaches or swimming. Brer John did his best to avert his eyes from the naked as he passed through them. But it was impossible not to catch more than a glimpse of the women as they lay on the sand or ran before him. And, after a while, he quit trying. After all, he told himself, he had been accustomed all his life to seeing them all undressed at the beach and in his own home before he had gone into the order of St. Jairus. And all the fulminations of the Church had not been able to stop the faithful from following the custom any more than it had been able in the previous centuries to keep them from swimming in the abbreviated bathing suits. The Church had long ceased protesting against nude

public bathing, but it still denounced the appearance of nudes in the streets. Though what its policy would be twenty years from now was unpredictable. Occasionally, a nude did venture on the street or in the markets and was arrested for indecent exposure, just as women in shorts or bathing suits outside of the beach had been arrested in the early part of—the Twentieth Century? The laity might go undressed in the public bathing places, but the clergy did not. In fact, they were forbidden even to be at such places. And he, Brer John, was disobeying the rules of his order, not to mention the Church as a whole, by being here.

But expediency sometimes dictated the breaking of rules, and the bird-lice biting madly into him demanded that he get rid of them at once before he made a spectacle of himself.

Brer John went halfway around the lagoon before he found what he was looking for. This was a high bank which was shielded from view by a group of bushes. He pushed through the foliage, and almost put his foot on a couple who must have thought they were alone in the Garden of Eden. He stepped over them and plunged on until he could not see them, though he was still distressed by the sounds.

Quickly, he slid his robe off and then let himself down the high bank of mud into the water. He

shivered as the relatively cold water hit him, then after a moment he felt quite comfortable. Remembering the fable of how the fox rid himself of fleas, he slowly immersed himself. He had a hope that the insects would climb up his body as the water came towards them and that when he had ducked his head, they would be left to shift for themselves.

His head went under, and he held his breath while he counted one hundred and eighty seconds. Then he lifted his head above the water. He didn't see the collection of insects floating before his nose that he had expected. But the lice must have gone somewhere, for he no longer was being bitten.

Then he tried to pull the egg away from his skin and allow the water to soften the glue. But he had no success.

"It's as if it had put out tendrils into my skin," he said.

His eyes widened, and he paled. "Good St. Jaius! Maybe that's what *did* happen!"

He forced himself to push back the rising panic and to think, if not calmly, at least coherently. Perhaps the horowitz had egg-laying habits analogous to that of the wasp. It might be its instinct to place the egg on a corpse or even living creature. And the egg might send forth small fleshy roots to hook into the bloodstream of its host. And through the roots it would draw the nourishment it

needed to grow larger and to develop into an embryo. The horowitz might have taken an evolutionary step which would place it among placental creatures, the difference being that the embryo would develop on the *outside* of the body of its host instead of *inside*.

Brer John didn't feel much like taking a strictly biological and zoological attitude. This thing attached to his body was a monstrous leech, and it was sucking the blood from him.

It might not be necessarily fatal. And he could kill the egg now, and, presumably, the roots would dissolve.

But there was the ethical view to consider. The egg was not his property to dispose of as he wished. It belonged to the zoo.

Brer John squelched his desire to rip out the thing by the bloody tendrils and to throw it away as far as possible. He must return it to the zoo authorities. Even if that would involve much time while he told the long and complex story of just how he had happened to be in a situation where he could have an egg laid on him.

He scrambled back up the bank. And stood dismayed. His robe was gone.

Brer John had always thought of himself as a strong man. But tears ran down his cheeks, and he groaned, "Worse and worse! Every step I take towards Wildenwooly

puts me back two steps! How will I ever get out of this mess?"

He looked up at the sky. No sky, just a blaze of light from a man-made roof. Light but no revelation.

He thought of the motto of the order of St. Jairus. *Do as he would do.*

"Yes, but he was never in such a situation!" he said aloud.

However, he thought, consideration of the life of St. Jairus did show that he had always taken the lesser of two evils, unless doing so might lead to an evil even greater than the one rejected. In which case one chose the greater evil, if one had to choose.

"John," he said to himself, "you are not a philosopher. You are a man of action, however ill-advised that action may be. You have never really thought your way out of a mess. Which is why you may be in this particular one. But you have always trusted to the wisdom of your feeling to extricate yourself. So, act!"

The first thing he had to do was to clothe himself. He could remain nude while he searched the beach for whoever might have stolen his clothes. But he did not think it likely that the thief, or prankster, would be in evidence. And he had no means for covering the egg on his chest. That would lead to an intense curiosity and probable trouble for him before he had gotten far. The cops might be

called, he might go to jail. And he would have much explaining to do, not only to the secular authorities but to his superior.

No. He must find clothing. Then he must get money to call the director of the zoo and get rid of the egg. Then, somehow, he must get the money for fare to Wildenwooly.

Cautiously, he pushed back into the bushes. The couple over whom he had stumbled were still there, but they now seemed to be asleep in each other's arms. Muttering under his breath, "Only a loan. I will see you get it back," he reached out and took the man's clothes from the bush on which they hung. Then he retreated to the edge of the bank and put them on.

He found the experience distasteful for several reasons. One, he was giving the police another reason to look for him. Two, when the man woke up, he would be in Brer John's difficult position of getting off the beach and home without his clothes, though, doubtless, he could send the woman after some. Three, the puffkilt he was putting on was covered with garish mustardyellow circles and pink dots. This was not only an esthetic crime in itself but, four, the puffkilt was soiled and smelly. Five, the dickey which he put on his chest was an electric-blue with crystal sequins.

"Horrible taste," said Brer John,

shuddering. He was aware that he made a ridiculous figure.

"Better than having an egg hanging from our chest," he said, and he set off across the part towards the city.

He intended to enter a public phone booth and there find out the address of the zoo director. Then he would walk to the zoo director's house and tell him about the egg. What would happen then, he told himself, would be up to God and the agile (?) wits of Brer John. But somehow, he must also contrive to get the stolen (borrowed) clothes back to the owner with some recompense.

Brer John walked swiftly towards the edge of the park. He did not look behind him as he passed the white-fleshed bodies and many-colored legs of the beach-people. But he felt what he had not felt for a long time, the prickling frightening half-exhilarating sensation that at any moment the cry of "Stop, thief!" would ring out. And he would be in full flight ahead of the pack.

Not that there was much chance of that. The man had been sleeping too deeply.

"Stop, thief!" rang the cry.

Automatically, Brer John increased his pace, but he did not start running yet. Instead, he pointed dramatically to one side at a man who was running by a happy coincidence away from those beside him.

"There he goes!" he yelled. And the crowd surged around him, running after the innocent who fled when every man was pursuing. Unfortunately, the crowd by Brer John ran into the crowd behind the man who was running after Brer John and the stolen clothes. Somebody pushed somebody, and within two seconds a full-scale brawl had spread through this section of the park.

A cop's whistle blew; a number of men piled upon the cop and bore the metal man under by sheer weight. Brer John decided that now was as good a time as any to run.

He reached the edge of the park and began running through a narrow alley formed by the fences around the small yards of private houses. It was a twisting labyrinthian alley in which he could easily lose any ground pursuit. But a cop's car was scooting overhead towards the riot in the park, so Brer John vaulted over a fence lithely as a cat despite his round-stomached bulk. He landed easily and crouched against the fence, hugging it to avoid observance from the air.

The footsteps of a man running went by the fence and faded into the distance. Brer John smiled, then the smile froze as a low growl came from behind him.

Slowly, he turned his head. He was inside the yard of a typical house. The fence encircled a small

plot of grass in the center of which was a roofed patio. The patio held a table and a few chairs and a *chaise-longue* and the entrance to the house underneath the ground. No human beings were in evidence, but a dog was very much so. It was a huge Doberman-Pinscher, and it was ready to charge.

Back over the fence went Brer John, the dog so close to him that he felt its jaws clash at the edge of his puffkilt. Then he was running again.

However, after he had sputtered for a hundred yards and looked behind him to make sure that the dog hadn't come over the fence after him, he slowed to a fast walk. He saw a public phone booth and made for it. Before he was at its door, a man stepped up to him and seized his elbow.

"Wanta talk to you," he said. "Me can solve all your problems for you in a micro."

Brer John looked at the man closely. He was small and thin and had a ratty face. His legs were painted barber-pole fashion with red and white stripes, his kilt and dickey were sequined with imitation diamonds, and he wore a tricorne hat with a long plume. These were enough to identify him as one of the lower classes; the plastic imitation bone stuck through the septum of his nose marked him at once as a lower-class criminal.

"Me got switches," the man said, meanwhile darting glances from side to side and turning his head like a robin afraid the cat was sneaking up on him. "Heard 'bout ya quick as ya robe was snatched. Heard 'bout the egg, too. That's what wanta talk ta ya 'bout. Ya sell the egg ta me; me sell the egg to a rich beast in Phoenix. Him's queer, get it? Eats, uh, rare delicacies, gets his rockets off. Been vine out long time good zoola horowitz egg. Scratch?"

"Scratch," said Brer John. "You mean a rich man in Phoenix pays big prices for food hard to get, like the ancient Chinese paid high for so-called thousand year old eggs?"

"Scratch. Know ya need ticket to Wildenwooly. Can finger."

"I'm tempted, *friend*," said Brer John. "You would solve my temporal difficulties."

"Do? Buzz-buzz. Only drag is, have to go ta Phoenix first. Slice egg off here, no buzz-buzz. Egg rigor mortis; no carry from fat beast."

"You tempt me, *friend*," said Brer John. "But, fortunately I remember that I will also have eternal difficulties if I deal with you. Moreover, this egg so fondly clutching my breast is not my property. It belongs to the zoo."

The man's eyes narrowed. "No buzz-buzz. Come anyway."

He pulled a whistle from a pocket on his puffkilt and blew.

No sound issued, but three men stepped out from the corner of a tavern. All three held airguns, which doubtless contained darts whose tips were smeared with a paralytic.

Brer John leaped like an uncoiling rattler striking. The ratty little man squawked with terror, and his hand darted towards his pocket. But Brer John chopped him into unconsciousness with the edge of his palm, and he thrust the man before him. There was a whacking sound as two darts hit the sagging form. Then Brer John, holding the man into the air before him, managed to run towards the three gunmen. Another dart thwacked into the flesh of his shield, and then he was on them. Or they were on him; it was hard to tell. He went down; he was up; airguns hissed in the air and missed; one man cried out as a dart hit him; another folded as stiff fingers drove into his soft belly; then the butt of a gun came down on Brer John's temple.

Stars . . . blackness.

He woke to find himself lying on a couch in a strange room. And a strange man was looking down at him.

"I protest against this high-handed misuse of a fellow human being," said Brer John. "If you think you can get away with this, you're mistaken. I was once known as John Carmody, the only man who ever gave the famous detective

Leopardi the slip. I'll hunt you down and I'll . . . turn you over to the authorities," he ended mildly.

The man smiled and said, "I'm not what you think, Brer John. The crooks who tried to snatch you were caught by a police car immediately after you were knocked out. They were injected, and they made a full confession. And you were injected, too. We know the full story. A most amazing one, too, and I've heard some weird ones."

Brer John sat up and felt dizzy. The man said, "Take it easy. Allow me to introduce myself. I'm John Richards, the director of the zoo."

Brer John felt at his chest. The egg was still attached.

"Wait a minute," he said. "The horowitz has a parrot's mimicking powers. Just as a guess, you taught it to call you by your name, John? Scratch? I mean, right?"

"Right," said John Richards. "And if it'll make you feel any better, I can solve your problem."

"The last time I heard that, I almost got kidnapped," said Brer John. But he smiled. "All right. What is this solution?"

"Just this. We have been waiting for a long time for the horowitz to lay its egg; we even had a host animal ready. Your appearance upset everything. But it doesn't necessarily ruin everything. If you would be willing to sign a

contract to go to Feral, the native planet of the horowitz, and there allow yourself to be studied until the egg fully develops, then—”

“You give me hope, Mr. Richards. But there is something about your tone I don’t like. What will this involve? Especially how much time will it take?”

“We—the Feral Study Grant group—would like you to go to Feral and there live as one of them while—”

“As one of them? How? They’d kill me!”

“Not at all. They don’t kill the host animal until after the embryo is—uh—born. But we would step in just before that time. You’ll be under close observance all the time. I wouldn’t try to deceive you into thinking it couldn’t involve danger. But if you agree, you’ll be doing science a marvelous service. You can give us a much more detailed, and personal, account than we could get by watching through long-distance scopes.

“And, Brer John, at the end of your service, we’ll guarantee you immediate passage to Wildenwooly. Plus a substantial contribution to your order there.”

“How long will it be before I get to Wildenwooly?”

“About four months.”

Brer John closed his eyes. Richards could not tell if he were praying or thinking. Probably, he decided, it was both.

Then Brer John opened his

eyes, and he smiled. “If I took a job on Earth, I’d have to work two years to pay for the passage. I might be able to do something else, but offhand I can’t think of anything. And from the strange course of events, I think I was led into that moat and thence into your hands. At least, I choose to think so.

“I’ll go to Feral for four months. The best route is not necessarily the straightest one. Success in circuit lies.”

Brer John was sitting in the waiting room of the spaceport, meditating and also thanking God that the loose robe of his order allowed the egg attached to his breast to be well hidden. Within a few minutes a bell would sound, and it would be time to board the *Rousehound*.

A man came in, placed his traveling bag on the floor, and sat down next to him. The man fidgeted a while, looking at Brer John every now and then. Brer John smiled whenever his eye was caught, and he said nothing. He was learning the value of silence. Presently, the man said, “Going frontier, Father?”

“Call me Brer,” said Brer John. “I am not a priest but a lay brother. Yes, I am going frontier. To Wildenwooly.”

“Wildenwooly? Me, too! Thank God, I’ll be off Earth! What a dull restricted place! Nothing exciting ever happens here. Same old in-

and-out, up-and-down, day after day. Now, you take Wildenwooly! There's a place calling to every red-blooded freedom-loving adventurous man! Why, I understand you can't walk more than a mile or two before more strange and wonderful things happen to

you than in a lifetime on this grey globe."

"Bless you!" said Brer John.

The man looked at the brother and moved away. He never did understand why Brer John's face turned red and his hand doubled up as if to strike a blow.

EDITOR'S NOTE: We are regretful that we must leave Brer John while he remains attached to that egg. However, Philip José Farmer promises early word concerning events on Feral. We recommend to you the virtue of patience . . . and suggest keeping a watchful eye on these pages.

