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**SCIENCE FICTION**

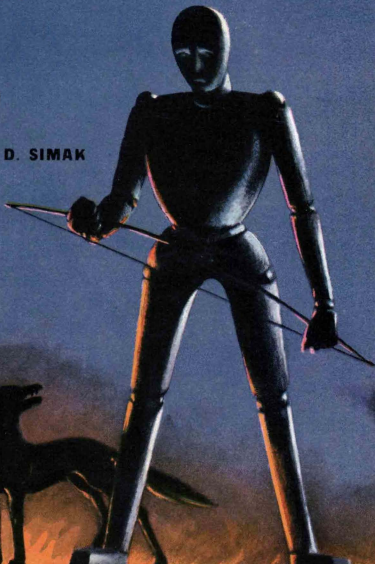
DECEMBER 1947

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**AESOP**

BY

**CLIFFORD D. SIMAK**





# Astounding SCIENCE FICTION

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### COVER BY ALEJANDRO

Illustrations by Cartier, Napoli, Orban and Rogers

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Editor  
JOHN W. CAMPBELL, JR.



*The old robot had made a better world of it than Man had. But there was still the problem of the Websters—who were curious, and their curiosity was deadly, its end predictable. But there was a solution—*

# AESOP

BY  
CLIFFORD  
D. SIMAK

Illustrated by Cartier



The gray shadow slid along the rocky ledge, heading for the den, mewing to itself in frustration and bitter disappointment—for the Words had failed.

The slanting sun of early afternoon picked out a face and head and body, indistinct and murky, like a haze of morning mist rising from a gully.

Suddenly the ledge pinched off and the shadow stopped, bewildered, crouched against the rocky wall—for there was no den. The ledge pinched off before it reached the den!

It whirled around like a snapping whip, stared back across the valley. And the river was all wrong. It

flowed closer to the bluffs than it had flowed before. There was a swallow's nest on the rocky wall and there'd never been a swallow's nest before.

The shadow stiffened and the tufted tentacles upon its ears came up and searched the air.

There was life! The scent of it lay faint upon the air, the feel of it vibrated across the empty notches of the marching hills.

The shadow stirred, came out of its crouch, flowed along the ledge.

There was no den and the river was different and there was a swallow's nest plastered on the cliff.

The shadow quivered, drooling mentally.

The Words had been right. They had not failed. This was a different world.

A different world—different in more ways than one. A world so full of life that it hummed in the very air. Life, perhaps, that could not run so fast nor hide so well.

The wolf and bear met beneath the great oak tree and stopped to pass the time of day.

"I hear," said Lupus, "there's been killing going on."

Bruin grunted. "A funny kind of killing, brother. Dead, but not eaten."

"Symbolic killing," said the wolf.

Bruin shook his head. "You can't tell me there's such a thing as symbolic killing. This new psychology the Dogs are teaching us is going just a bit too far. When there's killing going on, it's for either hate or hunger. You wouldn't catch me killing something that I didn't eat."

He hurried to put matters straight. "Not that I'm doing any killing, brother. You know that."

"Of course not," said the wolf.

Bruin closed his small eyes lazily, opened them and blinked. "Not, you understand, that I don't turn over a rock once in a while and lap up an ant or two."

"I don't believe the Dogs would consider that killing," Lupus told him, gravely. "Insects are a little

different than animals and birds. No one has ever told us we can't kill insect life."

"That's where you're wrong," said Bruin. "The Canons say so very distinctly. You must not destroy life. You must not take another's life."

"Yes, I guess they do," the wolf admitted sanctimoniously. "I guess you're right, at that, brother. But even the Dogs aren't too fussy about a thing like insects. Why, you know, they're trying all the time to make a better flea powder. And what's flea powder for, I ask you? Why, to kill fleas. That's what it's for. And fleas are life. Fleas are living things."

Bruin slapped viciously at a small green fly buzzing past his nose.

"I'm going down to the feeding station," said the wolf. "Maybe you would like to join me."

"I don't feel hungry," said the bear. "And, besides, you're a bit too early. Ain't time for feeding yet."

Lupus ran his tongue around his muzzle. "Sometimes I just drift in, casual like you know, and the Webster that's in charge gives me something extra."

"Want to watch out," said Bruin. "He isn't giving you something extra for nothing. He's got something up his sleeve. I don't trust them Websters."

"This one's all right," the wolf declared. "He runs the feeding station and he doesn't have to. Any robot could do it. But he went and asked for the job. Got tired of

lolling around in them foxed-up houses, with nothing to do but play. And he sits around and laughs and talks, just like he was one of us. That Peter is a good Joe."

The bear rumbled in his throat. "One of the Dogs was telling me that Jenkins claims Webster ain't their name at all. Says they aren't Websters. Says that they are men—"

"What's men?" asked Lupus.

"Why, I was just telling you. It's what Jenkins says—"

"Jenkins," declared Lupus, "is getting so old he's all twisted up. Too much to remember. Must be all of a thousand years."

"Seven thousand," said the bear. "The Dogs are figuring on having a big birthday party for him. They're fixing up a new body for him for a gift. The old one he's got is wearing out—in the repair shop every month or two."

The bear wagged his head sagely. "All in all, Lupus, the Dogs have done a lot for us. Setting up feeding stations and sending out medical robots and everything. Why, only last year I had a raging toothache—"

The wolf interrupted. "But those feeding stations might be better. They claim that yeast is just the same as meat, has the same food value and everything. But it don't taste like meat—"

"How do you know?" asked Bruin.

The wolf's stutter lasted one split second. "Why . . . why, from what my granddad told me. Regular old hellion, my granddad. He

had him some venison every now and then. Told me how red meat tasted. But then they didn't have so many wardens as they have nowadays."

Bruin closed his eyes, opened them again. "I been wondering how fish taste," he said. "There's a bunch of trout down in Pine Tree creek. Been watching them. Easy to reach down with my paw and scoop me out a couple."

He added hastily. "Of course, I never have."

"Of course not," said the wolf.

One world and then another, running like a chain. One world treading on the heels of another world that plodded just ahead. One world's tomorrow another world's today. And yesterday is tomorrow and tomorrow is the past.

Except, there wasn't any past. No past, that was; except the figment of remembrance that fitted like a night-winged thing in the shadow of one's mind. No past that one could reach. No pictures painted on the wall of time. No film that one could run backward and see what-once-had-been.

Joshua got up and shook himself, sat down and scratched a flea. Ichabod sat stiffly at the table, metal fingers tapping.

"It checks," the robot said. "There's nothing we can do about it. The factors check. We can't travel in the past."

"No," said Joshua.

"But," said Ichabod, "we know where the cobbles are."

"Yes," said Joshua, "we know

where the cobbles are. And maybe we can reach them. Now we know the road to take."

One road was open, but another road was closed. Not closed, of course, for it had never been. For there wasn't any past, there never had been any, there wasn't room for one. Where there should have been a past there was another world.

Like two dogs walking in one another's tracks. One dog steps out and another dog steps in. Like a long, endless row of ball bearings running down a groove, almost touching, but not quite. Like the links of an endless chain running on a wheel with a billion billion sprockets.

"We're late," said Ichabod, glancing at the clock. "We should be getting ready to go to Jenkins' party."

Joshua shook himself again. "Yes, I suppose we should. It's a great day for Jenkins, Ichabod. Think of it . . . seven thousand years."

"I'm all fixed up," Ichabod said, proudly. "I shined myself this morning, but you need a combing. You've got all tangled up."

"Seven thousand years," said Joshua. "I wouldn't want to live that long."

Seven thousand years and seven thousand worlds stepping in one another's tracks. Although it would be more than that. A world a day. Three hundred sixty-five times seven thousand. Or maybe a world a minute. Or maybe even one world every second. A second

was a thick thing—thick enough to separate two worlds, large enough to hold two worlds. Three hundred sixty-five times seven thousand times twenty-four times sixty times sixty—

A thick thing and a final thing. For there was no past. There was no going back. No going back to find out about the things that Jenkins talked about—the things that might be truth or twisted memory warped by seven thousand years. No going back to check up on the cloudy legends that told about a house and a family of Websters and a closed dome of nothingness that squatted in the mountains far across the sea.

Ichabod advanced upon him with a comb and brush and Joshua winced away.

"Ah, shucks," said Ichabod, "I won't hurt you any."

"Last time," said Joshua, "you darn near skinned me alive. Go easy on those snags."

The wolf had come in, hoping for a between-meals snack, but it hadn't been forthcoming and he was too polite to ask. So now he sat, bushy tail tucked neatly around his feet, watching Peter work with the knife upon the slender wand.

Fatso, the squirrel, dropped from the limb of an overhanging tree, lit on Peter's shoulder.

"What you got?" he asked.

"A throwing stick," said Peter.

"You can throw any stick you want to," said the wolf. "You don't need a fancy one to throw.

You can pick up just any stick and throw it."

"This is something new," said Peter. "Something I thought up. Something that I made. But I don't know what it is."

"It hasn't got a name?" asked Fatso.

"Not yet," said Peter. "I'll have to think one up."

"But," persisted the wolf, "you can throw a stick. You can throw any stick you want to."

"Not as far," said Peter. "Not as hard."

Peter twirled the wand between his fingers, feeling the smooth roundness of it, lifted it and sighted along it to make sure that it was straight.

"I don't throw it with my arm," said Peter. "I throw it with another stick and a cord."

He reached out and picked up the thing that leaned against the tree trunk.

"What I can't figure out," said Fatso, "is what you want to throw a stick for."

"I don't know," said Peter. "It is kind of fun."

"You Websters," said the wolf, severely, "are funny animals. Sometimes I wonder if you have good sense."

"You can hit any place you aim at," said Peter, "if your throwing stick is straight and your cord is good. You can't just pick up any piece of wood. You have to look and look—"

"Show me," said Fatso.

"Like this," said Peter, lifting up the shaft of hickory. "It's

tough, you see. Springy. Bend it and it snaps back into shape again. I tied the two ends together with a cord and I put the throwing stick like this, one end against the string and then pull back—"

"You said you could hit anything you wanted to," said the wolf. "Go ahead and show us."

"What shall I hit?" asked Peter. "You pick it out and—"

Fatso pointed excitedly. "That robin, sitting in the tree."

Swiftly Peter lifted his hands, the cord came back and the shaft to which the cord was tied bent into an arc. The throwing stick whistled in the air. The robin toppled from the branch in a shower of flying feathers. He hit the ground with a soft, dull thud and lay there on his back—tiny, helpless, clenched claws pointing at the treetops. Blood ran out of his beak to stain the leaf beneath his head.

Fatso stiffened on Peter's shoulders and the wolf was on his feet. And there was a quietness, the quietness of unstirring leaf, of floating clouds against the blue of noon.

Horror slurred Fatso's words "You killed him! He's dead! You killed him!"

Peter protested, numb with dread. "I didn't know. I never tried to hit anything alive before. I just threw the stick at marks—"

"But you killed him. And you should never kill."

"I know," said Peter. "I know you never should. But you told

me to hit him. You showed him to me. You—"

"I never meant for you to kill him," Fatso screamed. "I just thought you'd touch him up. Scare him. He was so fat and sassy—"

"I told you the stick went hard."

The Webster stood rooted to the ground.

*Far and hard*, he thought. *Far and hard—and fast.*

"Take it easy, pal," said the wolf's soft voice. "We know you didn't mean to. It's just among us three. We'll never say a word."

Fatso leaped from Peter's shoulder, screamed at them from the branch above. "I will," he shrieked. "I'm going to tell Jenkins."

The wolf snarled at him with a sudden, red-eyed rage. "You dirty little squealer. You lousy tattletale."

"I will so," yelled Fatso. "You just wait and see. I'm going to tell Jenkins."

He flickered up the tree and ran along a branch, leaped to another tree.

The wolf moved swiftly.

"Wait," said Peter, sharply.

"He can't go in the trees all the way," the wolf said, swiftly. "He'll have to come down to the ground to get across the meadow. You don't need to worry."

"No," said Peter. "No more killings. One killing is enough."

"He will tell, you know."

Peter nodded. "Yes, I'm sure he will."

"I could stop him telling."

"Someone would see you and tell

on you," said Peter. "No, Lupus, I won't let you do it."

"Then you better take it on the lam," said Lupus. "I know a place where you could hide. They'd never find you, not in a thousand years."

"I couldn't get away with it," said Peter. "There are eyes watching in the woods. Too many eyes. They'd tell where I had gone. The day is gone when anyone can hide."

"I guess you're right," the wolf said slowly. "Yes, I guess you're right."

He wheeled around and stared at the fallen robin.

"What you say we get rid of the evidence?" he asked.

"The evidence—"

"Why, sure—" The wolf paced forward swiftly, lowered his head. There was a crunching sound. Lupus licked his chops and sat down, wrapped his tail around his feet.

"You and I could get along," he said. "Yes, sir, I have the feeling we could get along. We're so very much alike."

A telltale feather fluttered on his nose.

The body was a lulu.

A sledge hammer couldn't dent it and it would never rust. And it had more gadgets than you could shake a stick at.

It was Jenkins' birthday gift. The line of engraving on the chest said so very neatly:

### To Jenkins from the Dogs.

But I'll never wear it, Jenkins told himself. It's too fancy for me,



too fancy for a robot that's as old as I am. I'd feel out of place in a gaudy thing like that.

He rocked slowly back and forth in the rocking chair, listening to the whimper of the wind in the eaves.

They meant well. And I wouldn't hurt them for the world. I'll have to wear it once in a while just for the looks of things. Just to please the Dogs. Wouldn't be right for me not to wear it when they went to so much trouble to get it made for me. But not for every day.—just for my very best.

Maybe to the Webster picnic. Would want to look my very best when I go to the picnic. It's a great affair. A time when all the Websters in the world, all the Websters left alive, get together. And they want me with them. Ah, yes, they always want me with them. For I am a Webster robot. Yes, sir, always was and always will be.

He let his head sink and mumbled words that whispered in the room. Words that he and the room remembered. Words from long ago.

A rocker squeaked and the sound was one with the time-stained room. One with the wind along the eaves and the mumble of the chimney's throat.

Fire, thought Jenkins. It's been a long time since we've had a fire. Men used to like a fire. They used to like to sit in front of it and look into it and build pictures in the flames. And dream—

But the dreams of men, said Jenkins, talking to himself—the dreams of men are gone. They've gone to

Jupiter and they're buried at Geneva and they sprout again, very feebly, in the Websters of today.

The past, he said. The past is too much with me. And the past has made me useless. I have too much to remember—so much to remember that it becomes more important than the things there are to do. I'm living in the past and that is no way to live.

For Joshua says there is no past and Joshua should know. Of all the Dogs, he's the one to know. For he tried hard enough to find a past to travel in, to travel back in time and check up on the things I told him. He thinks my mind is failing and that I spin old robot tales, half-truth, half-fantasy, touched up for the telling.

He wouldn't admit it for the world, but that's what the rascal thinks. He doesn't think I know it, but I do.

He can't fool me, said Jenkins, chuckling to himself. None of them can fool me. I know them from the ground up—I know what makes them tick. I helped Bruce Webster with the first of them. I heard the first word that any of them said. And if they've forgotten, I haven't—not a look or word or gesture.

Maybe it's only natural that they should forget. They have done great things. I have let them do them with little interference, and that was for the best. That was the way Jon Webster told me it should be, on that night of long ago. That was why Jon Webster did whatever he had to do to close off the city of Geneva. For it was Jon Webster.

It had to be he. It could be no one else.

He thought he was sealing off the human race to leave the earth clear for the Dogs. But he forgot one thing. Oh, yes, said Jenkins, he forgot one thing. He forgot his own son and the little band of bow and arrow faddists who had gone out that morning to play at being cavemen—and cavewomen, too.

And what they played, thought Jenkins, became a bitter fact. A fact for almost a thousand years. A fact until we found them and brought them home again. Back to the Webster House, back to where the whole thing started.

Jenkins folded his hands in his lap and bent his head and rocked slowly to and fro. The rocker

creaked and the wind raced in the eaves and a window rattled. The fireplace talked with its sooty throat, talked of other days and other folks, of other winds that blew from out the west.

The past, thought Jenkins. It is a footless thing. A foolish thing when there is so much to do. So many problems that the Dogs have yet to meet.

Overpopulation, for example. That's the thing we've thought about and talked about too long. Too many rabbits because no wolf or fox may kill them. Too many deer because the mountain lions and the wolves must eat no venison. Too many skunks, too many mice, too many wildcats. Too many squirrels, too many porcupines, too many bear.

Forbid the one great check of killing and you have too many lives. Control disease and succor injury with quick-moving robot medical



technicians and another check is gone.

Man took care of that, said Jenkins. Yes, men took care of that. Men killed anything that stood within their path—other men as well as animals.

Man never thought of one great animal society, never dreamed of skunk and coon and bear going down the road of life together, planning with one another, helping one another—setting aside all natural differences.

But the Dogs had. And the Dogs had done it.

Like a Br'er Rabbit story, thought Jenkins. Like the childhood fantasy of a long gone age. Like the story in the Good Book about the Lion and the Lamb lying down together. Like a Walt Disney cartoon except that the cartoon never had rung true, for it was based on the philosophy of mankind.

The door creaked open and feet were on the floor. Jenkins shifted in his chair.

"Hello, Joshua," he said. "Hello, Ichabod. Don't you please come in? I was just sitting here and thinking."

"We were passing by," said Joshua, "and we saw a light."

"I was thinking about the lights," said Jenkins, nodding soberly. "I was thinking about the night five thousand years ago. Jon Webster had come out from Geneva, the first man to come here for many hundred years. And he was upstairs in bed and all the Dogs were sleeping and I stood there by the window looking out across the river. And

there were no lights. No lights at all. Just one great sweep of darkness. And I stood there, remembering the day when there had been lights and wondering if there ever would be lights again."

"There are lights now," said Joshua, speaking very softly. "There are lights all over the world tonight. Even in the caves and dens."

"Yes, I know," said Jenkins. "It's even better than it was before."

Ichabod clumped across the floor to the shining robot body standing in the corner, reached out one hand and stroked the metal hide, almost tenderly.

"It was very nice of the Dogs," said Jenkins, "to give me the body. But they shouldn't have. With a little patching here and there, the old one's good enough."

"It was because we love you," Joshua told him. "It was the smallest thing the Dogs could do. We have tried to do other things for you, but you'd never let us do them. We wish that you would let us build you a new house, brand new, with all the latest things."

Jenkins shook his head. "It wouldn't be any use, because I couldn't live there. You see, this place is home. It has always been my home. Keep it patched up like my body and I'll be happy in it."

"But you're all alone."

"No, I'm not," said Jenkins. "The house is simply crowded."

"Crowded?" asked Joshua.

"People that I used to know," said Jenkins.

"Gosh," said Ichabod, "what a

body! I wish I could try it on."

"Ichabod!" yelled Joshua. "You come back here. Keep your hands off that body—"

"Let the youngster go," said Jenkins. "If he comes over here some time when I'm not busy—"

"No," said Joshua.

A branch scraped against the eave and tapped with tiny fingers along the window pane. A shingle rattled and the wind marched across the roof with tripping, dancing feet.

"I'm glad you stopped by," said Jenkins. "I want to talk to you."

He rocked back and forth and one of the rockers creaked.

"I won't last forever," Jenkins said. "Seven thousand years is longer than I had a right to expect to hang together."

"With the new body," said Joshua, "you'll be good for three times seven thousand more."

Jenkins shook his head. "It's not the body I'm thinking of. It's the brain. It's mechanical, you see. It was made well, made to last a long time, but not to last forever. Sometime something will go wrong and the brain will quit."

The rocker creaked in the silent room.

"That will be death," said Jenkins. "That will be the end of me."

"And that's all right. That's the way it should be. For I'm no longer any use. Once there was a time when I was needed."

"We will always need you," Joshua said softly. "We couldn't get along without you."

But Jenkins went on, as if he had not heard him.

"I want to tell you about the Websters. I want to talk about them. I want you to understand."

"I will try to understand," said Joshua.

"You Dogs call them Websters and that's all right," said Jenkins. "It doesn't matter what you call them, just so you know what they are."

"Sometimes," said Joshua, "you call them men and sometimes you call them Websters. I don't understand."

"They were men," said Jenkins, "and they ruled the earth. There was one family of them that went by the name of Webster. And they were the ones who did this great thing for you."

"What great thing?"

Jenkins hitched the chair around and held it steady.

"I am forgetful," he mumbled. "I forget so easily. And I get mixed up."

"You were talking about a great thing the Websters did for us."

"Eh," said Jenkins. "Oh, so I was. So I was. You must watch them. You must care for them and watch them. Especially you must watch them."

He rocked slowly to and fro and thoughts ran in his brain, thoughts spaced off by the squeaking of the rocker.

You almost did it then, he told himself. You almost spoiled the dream.

But I remembered in time. Yes. Jon Webster, I caught myself in time. I kept faith, Jon Webster.

I did not tell Joshua that the

Dogs once were pets of men, that men raised them to the place they hold today. For they must never know. They must hold up their heads. They must carry on their work. The old fireside tales are gone and they must stay gone forever.

Although I'd like to tell them. Lord knows, I'd like to tell them. Warn them against the thing they must guard against. Tell them how we rooted out the old ideas from the cavemen we brought back from Europe. How we untaught them the many things they knew. How we left their minds blank of weapons, how we taught them love and peace.

And how we must watch against the day when they'll pick up those trends again—the old human way of thought.

"But, you said," persisted Joshua. Jenkins waved his hand. "It was nothing, Joshua. Just an old robot's mumbling. At times my brain gets fuzzy and I say things that I don't mean. I think so much about the past—and you say there isn't any past."

Ichabod squatted on his haunches on the floor and looked up at Jenkins.

"There sure ain't none," he said. "We checked her, forty ways from Sunday, and all the factors check. They all add up. There isn't any past."

"There isn't any room," said Joshua. "You travel back along the line of time and you don't find the past, but another world, another bracket of consciousness. The earth

would be the same, you see, or almost the same. Same trees, same rivers, same hills, but it wouldn't be the world we know. Because it has lived a different life, it has developed differently. The second back of us is not the second back of us at all, but another second, a totally separate sector of time. We live in the same second all the time. We move along within the bracket of that second, that tiny bit of time that has been allotted to our particular world."

"The way we keep time was to blame," said Ichabod. "It was the thing that kept us from thinking of it in the way it really was. For we thought all the time that we were passing through time when we really weren't, when we never have. We've just been moving along with time. We said, there's another second gone, there's another minute and another hour and another day, when, as a matter of fact the second or the minute or the hour was never gone. It was the same one all the time. It had just moved along and we had moved with it."

Jenkins nodded. "I see. Like driftwood on the river. Chips moving with the river. And the scene changes along the river bank, but the water is the same."

"That's roughly it," said Joshua. "Except that time is a rigid stream and the different worlds are more firmly fixed in place than the driftwood on the river."

"And the cobbles live in those other worlds?"

Joshua nodded. "I am sure they must."

"And now," said Jenkins, "I suppose you are figuring out a way to travel to those other worlds."

Joshua scratched softly at a flea.

"Sure he is," said Ichabod. "We need the space."

"But the cobblies—"

"The cobblies might not be on all the worlds," said Joshua. "There might be some empty worlds. If we can find them, we need those empty worlds. If we don't find space, we are up against it. Population pressure will bring on a wave of killing. And a wave of killing will set us back to where we started out."

"There's already killing," Jenkins told him, quietly.

Joshua wrinkled his brow and laid back his ears. "Funny killing. Dead, but not eaten. No blood. As if they just fell over. It has our medical technicians half crazy. Nothing wrong. No reason that they should have died."

"But they did," said Ichabod.

Joshua hunched himself closer, lowered his voice. "I'm afraid, Jenkins. I'm afraid that—"

"There's nothing to be afraid of."

"But there is. Angus told me. Angus is afraid that one of the cobblies . . . that one of the cobblies got through."

A gust of wind sucked at the fireplace throat and gamboled in the eaves. Another gust hooted in some near, dark corner. And fear came out and marched across the roof, marched with thumping, deadened footsteps up and down the shingles.

Jenkins shivered and held himself

tight and rigid against another shiver. His voice grated when he spoke.

"No one has seen a cobbly."

"You might not see a cobbly."

"No," said Jenkins. "No. You might not see one."

And that is what Man had said before. You did not see a ghost and you did not see a haunt—but you sensed that one was there. For the water tap kept dripping when you had shut it tight and there were fingers scratching at the pane and the dogs would howl at something in the night and there'd be no tracks in the snow.

*And there were fingers scratching on the pane.*

Joshua came to his feet and stiffened, a statue of a dog, one paw lifted, lips curled back in the beginning of a snarl. Ichabod crouched, toes dug into the floor—listening, waiting.

The scratching came again.

"Open the door," Jenkins said to Ichabod. "There is something out there wanting to get in."

Ichabod moved through the hushed silence of the room. The door creaked beneath his hand. As he opened it, the squirrel came bounding in, a gray streak that leaped for Jenkins and landed in his lap.

"Why, Fatso," Jenkins said.

Joshua sat down again and his lip uncurled, slid down to hide his fangs. Ichabod wore a silly metal grin.

"I saw him do it," screamed Fatso. "I saw him kill the robin."

He did it with a throwing stick.  
And the feathers flew. And there  
was blood upon the leaf."

"Quiet," said Jenkins, gently.  
"Take your time and tell me. You  
are too excited. You saw someone  
kill a robin."

Fatso sucked in a breath and his  
teeth were chattering.

"It was Peter," he said.

"Peter?"

"Peter, the Webster."

"You said he threw a stick?"

"He threw it with another stick.  
He had the two ends tied together  
with a cord and he pulled on the  
cord and the stick bent—"

"I know," said Jenkins. "I  
know."

"You know! You know all about  
it?"

"Yes," said Jenkins, "I know all  
about it. It was a bow and arrow."

And there was something in the  
way he said it that held the other  
three to silence, made the room  
seem big and empty and the tapping  
of the branch against the pane a  
sound from far away, a hollow,  
ticking voice that kept on complain-  
ing without the hope of aid.

"A bow and arrow?" Joshua fi-  
nally asked. "What is a bow and  
arrow?"

And that was it, thought Jenkins.  
What is a bow and arrow?

It is the beginning of the end.  
It is the winding path that grows  
to the roaring road of war.

It is a plaything and a weapon  
and a triumph in human engineer-  
ing.

It is the first faint stirring of an  
atom bomb.

It is a symbol of a way of life.  
And it's a line in a nursery rhyme.  
*Who killed Cock Robin?*

*I, said the sparrow.*

*With my bow and arrow,*

*I killed Cock Robin.*

And it was a thing forgotten.  
And a thing relearned.

It is the thing that I've been  
afraid of.

He straightened in his chair, came  
slowly to his feet.

"Ichabod," he said, "I will need  
your help."

"Sure," said Ichabod. "Anything  
you like."

"The body," said Jenkins. "I  
want to wear my new body. You'll  
have to unseat my brain case—"

Ichabod nodded. "I know how  
to do it, Jenkins."

Joshua's voice had a sudden edge  
of fear. "What is it, Jenkins?  
What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to the Mutants," Jen-  
kins said, speaking very slowly.  
"After all these years, I'm going to  
ask their help."

The shadow slithered down the  
hill, skirting the places where the  
moonlight flooded through forest  
openings. He glimmered in the  
moonlight—and he must not be  
seen. He must not spoil the hunting  
of the others that came after.

There would be others. Not in  
a flood, of course, but carefully  
controlled. A few at a time and  
well spread out so that the life of  
this wondrous world would not take  
alarm.

Once it did take alarm, the end  
would be in sight.

The shadow crouched in the darkness, low against the ground, and tested the night with twitching, high-strung nerves. He separated out the impulses that he knew, cataloguing them in his knife-sharp brain, filing them neatly away as a check against his knowledge.

And some he knew and some were mystery and others he could guess at. But there was one that held a hint of horror.

He pressed himself close against the ground and held his ugly head out straight and flat and closed his perceptions against the throbbing of the night, concentrating on the thing that was coming up the hill.

There were two of them and the two were different. A snarl rose in his mind and bubbled in his throat and his tenuous body tensed into something that was half slavering expectancy and half cringing outland terror.

He rose from the ground, still crouched, and flowed down the hill, angling to cut the path of the two who were coming up.

Jenkins was young again, young and strong and swift—swift of brain and body. Swift to stride along the wind-swept, moon-drenched hills. Swift to hear the talking of the leaves and the sleepy chirp of birds—and more than that.

Yes, much more than that, he admitted to himself.

The body was a lulu. A sledge hammer couldn't dent it and it would never rust. But that wasn't all.

Never figured a body'd make this much difference to me. Never knew how ramshackle and worn out the old one really was. A poor job from the first, although it was the best that could be done in the days when it was made. Machinery sure is wonderful, the tricks they can make it do.

It was the robots, of course. The wild robots. The Dogs had fixed it up with them to make the body. Not very often the Dogs had much truck with the robots. Got along all right and all of that—but they got along because they let one another be, because they didn't interfere, because neither one was nosey.

There was a rabbit stirring in his den—and Jenkins knew it. A raccoon was out on a midnight prow and Jenkins knew that, too—knew the cunning, sleek curiosity that went on within the brain behind the little eyes that stared at him from the clump of hazel brush. And off to the left, curled up beneath a tree, a bear was sleeping and dreaming as he slept—a glutton's dream of wild honey and fish scooped out of a creek, with ants licked from the underside of an upturned rock as relish for the feast.

And it was startling—but natural. As natural as lifting one's feet to walk, as natural as normal hearing was. But it wasn't hearing and it wasn't seeing. Nor yet imagining. For Jenkins knew with a cool, sure certainty about the rabbit in the den and the coon in the hazel brush and the bear who dreamed in his sleep beneath the tree.

And this, he thought, is the kind



of bodies the wild robots have—for certainly if they could make one for me, they'd make them for themselves.

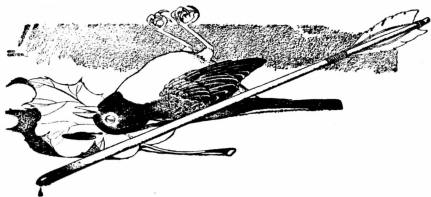
They have come a long ways, too, in seven thousand years, even as the Dogs have traveled far since the exodus of humans. But we paid no attention to them, for that was the way it had to be. The robots went their way and the Dogs went theirs and they did not question what one another did, had no curiosity about what one another did. While the robots were building spaceships and shooting for the stars, while they built bodies, while they worked with mathematics and mechanics, the Dogs had worked with animals, had forged a brotherhood of the things that had been wild and hunted in the days of Man—had listened to the cobbles and tried to probe the depths of time to find there was no time.

And certainly if the Dogs and robots have gone as far as this, the Mutants had gone farther still. And they will listen to me, Jenkins said,

they will have to listen, for I'm bringing them a problem that falls right in their laps. Because the Mutants are men—despite their ways, they are the sons of Man. They can bear no rancor now, for the name of Man is a dust that is blowing with the wind, the sound of leaves on a summer day—and nothing more.

Besides, I haven't bothered them for seven thousand years—not that I ever bothered them. Joe was a friend of mine, or as close to a friend as a Mutant ever had. He'd talk with me when he wouldn't talk with men. They will listen to me—they will tell me what to do. And they will not laugh.

Because it's not a laughing matter. It's just a bow and arrow, but it's not a laughing matter. It might have been at one time, but history takes the laugh out of many things. If the arrow is a joke, so is the atom bomb, so is the sweep of disease-laden dust that wipes out whole cities, so is the screaming rocket that arcs and falls ten thou-



sand miles away and kills a million people.

Although now there are no million people. A few hundred, more or less, living in the houses that the Dogs built for them because then the Dogs still knew what human beings were, still knew the connection that existed between them and looked on men as gods. Looked on men as gods and told the old tales before the fire of a winter evening and built against the day when Man might return and pat their heads and say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

And that wasn't right, said Jenkins striding down the hill, that wasn't right at all. For men did not deserve that worship, did not deserve the godhood. Lord knows I loved them well enough, myself. Still love them, for that matter—but not because they are men, but because of the memory of a few of the many men.

It wasn't right that the Dogs should build for Man. For they were doing better than Man had ever done. So I wiped the memory out and a long, slow work it was. Over the long years I took away the legends and misted the memory and now they call men Websters and think that's what they are.

I wondered if I had done right. I felt like a traitor and I spent bitter nights when the world was asleep and dark and I sat in the rocking chair and listened to the wind moaning in the eaves. For it was a thing I might not have the right to do. It was a thing the Websters might not have liked. For that was the

hold they had on me, that they still have on me, that over the stretch of many thousand years I might do a thing and worry that they might not like it.

But now I know I'm right. The bow and arrow is the proof of that. Once I thought that Man might have got started on the wrong road, that somewhere in the dim, dark savagery that was his cradle and his toddling place, he might have got off on the wrong foot, might have taken the wrong turning. But I see that I was wrong. There's one road and one road alone that Man may travel—the bow and arrow road.

I tried hard enough, Lord knows I really tried.

When we rounded up the stragglers and brought them home to Webster House, I took away their weapons, not only from their hands but from their minds. I re-edited the literature that could be re-edited and I burned the rest. I taught them to read again and sing again and think again. And the books had no trace of war or weapons, no trace of hate or history, for history is hate—no battles or heroics, no trumpets.

But it was wasted time. Jenkins said to himself. I know now that it was wasted time. For a man will invent a bow and arrow, no matter what you do.

He had come down the long hill and crossed the creek that tumbled toward the river and now he was climbing again, climbing against the

dark, hard uplift of the cliff-crowned hill.

There were tiny rustlings and his new body told his mind that it was mice, mice scurrying in the tunnels they had fashioned in the grass. And for a moment he caught the little happiness that went with the running, playful mice, the little, unformed, uncoagulated thoughts of happy mice.

A weasel crouched for a moment on the bole of a fallen tree and his mind was evil, evil with the thought of mice, evil with remembrance of the old days when weasels made a meal of mice. Blood hunger and fear, fear of what the Dogs might do if he killed a mouse, fear of the hundred eyes that watched against the killing that once had stalked the world.

But a man had killed. A weasel dare not kill, and a man had killed. Without intent, perhaps, without maliciousness. But he had killed. And the Canons said one must not take a life.

In the years gone by others had killed and they had been punished. And the man must be punished, too. But punishment was not enough. Punishment, alone, would not find the answer. The answer must deal not with one man alone, but with all men, with the entire race. For what one of them had done, the rest were apt to do. Not only apt to do, but bound to do—for they were men, and men had killed before and would kill again.

The Mutant castle reared black against the sky, so black that it shimmered in the moonlight. No

light came from it and that was not strange at all, for no light had come from it ever. Nor, so far as anyone could know, had the door ever opened into the outside world. The Mutants had built the castles, all over the world, and had gone into them and that had been the end. The Mutants had meddled in the affairs of men, had fought a sort of chuckling war with men and when the men were gone, the Mutants had gone, too.

Jenkins came to the foot of the broad stone steps that led up to the door and halted. Head thrown back, he stared at the building that reared its height above him.

I suppose Joe is dead, he told himself. Joe was long-lived, but he was not immortal. He would not live forever. And it will seem strange to meet another Mutant and know it isn't Joe.

He started the climb, going very slowly, every nerve alert, waiting for the first sign of chuckling humor that would descend upon him.

But nothing happened.

He climbed the steps and stood before the door and looked for something to let the Mutants know that he had arrived.

But there was no bell. No buzzer. No knocker. The door was plain, with a simple latch. And that was all.

Hesitantly, he lifted his fist and knocked and knocked again, then waited. There was no answer. The door was mute and motionless.

He knocked again, louder this time. Still there was no answer.

Slowly, cautiously, he put out a

hand and seized the latch, pressed down with his thumb. The latch gave and the door swung open and Jenkins stepped inside.

"You're cracked in the brain," said Lupus. "I'd make them come and find me. I'd give them a run they would remember. I'd make it tough for them."

Peter shook his head. "Maybe that's the way you'd do it, Lupus, and maybe it would be right for you. But it would be wrong for me. Websters never run away."

"How do you know?" the wolf asked pitilessly. "You're just talking through your hair. No Webster had to run away before and if no Webster had to run away before, how do you know they never—"

"Oh, shut up," said Peter.

They traveled in silence up the rocky path, breasting the hill.

"There's something trailing us," said Lupus.

"You're just imagining," said Peter. "What would be trailing us?"

"I don't know, but—"

"Do you smell anything?"

"Well, no."

"Did you hear anything or see anything?"

"No, I didn't, but—"

"Then nothing's following us," Peter declared, positively. "Nothing ever trails anything any more."

The moonlight filtered through the treetops, making the forest a mottled black and silver. From the river valley came the muffled sound of ducks in midnight argument. A soft breeze came blowing up the

hillside, carrying with it a touch of river fog.

Peter's bowstring caught in a piece of brush and he stopped to untangle it. He dropped some of the arrows he was carrying and stooped to pick them up.

"You better figure out some other way to carry them things," Lupus growled at him. "You're all the time getting tangled up and dropping them and—"

"I've been thinking about it," Peter told him, quietly. "Maybe a bag of some sort to hang around my shoulder."

They went on up the hill.

"What are you going to do when you get to Webster House?" asked Lupus.

"I'm going to see Jenkins," Peter said. "I'm going to tell him what I've done."

"Fatso's already told him."

"But maybe he told him wrong. Maybe he didn't tell it right. Fatso was excited."

"Lame-brained, too," said Lupus.

They crossed a patch of moonlight and plunged on up the darkling path.

"I'm getting nervous," Lupus said. "I'm going to go back. This is a crazy thing you're doing. I've come part way with you, but—"

"Go back, then," said Peter, bitterly. "I'm not nervous. I'm—"

He whirled around, hair rising on his scalp.

For there was something wrong—something in the air he breathed, something in his mind—an eerie, disturbing sense of danger and much more than danger, a loathsome feel-

ing that clawed at his shoulder blades and crawled along his back with a million prickly feet.

"Lupus!" he cried. "Lupus!"

A bush stirred violently down the trail and Peter was running, pounding down the trail. He ducked around a bush and skidded to a halt. His boy came up and with one motion he picked an arrow from his left hand, nocked it to the cord.

Lupus was stretched upon the ground, half in shade and half in moonlight. His lip was drawn back to show his fangs. One paw still faintly clawed.

Above him crouched a shape. A shape—and nothing else. A shape that spat and snarled, a stream of angry sound that screamed in Peter's brain. A tree branch moved in the wind and the moon showed through and Peter saw the outline of the face—a faint outline, like the half-erased chalk lines upon a dusty board. A skull-like face with mewling mouth and slitted eyes and ears that were tufted with tentacles.

The bow cord hummed and the arrow splashed into the face—splashed into it and passed through and fell upon the ground. And the face was there, still snarling.

Another arrow nocked against the cord and back, far back, almost to the ear. An arrow driven by the snapping strength of well-seasoned straight-grained hickory—by the hate and fear and loathing of the man who pulled the cord.

The arrow spat against the chalky outlines of the face, slowed and shivered, then fell free.

Another arrow and back with the cord. Farther yet this time. Farther for more power to kill the thing that would not die when an arrow struck it. A thing that only slowed an arrow and made it shiver and then let it pass on through.

Back and back—and back. And then it happened.

The bow string broke.

For an instant, Peter stood there with the useless weapon dangling in one hand, the useless arrow hanging from the other. Stood and stared across the little space that separated him from the shadow horror that crouched across the wolf's gray body.

And he knew no fear. No fear, even though the weapon was no more. But only flaming anger that shook him and a voice that hammered in his brain with one screaming word:

KILL—KILL—KILL

He threw away the bow and stepped forward, hands hooked at his side, hooked into puny claws.

The shadow backed away—backed away in a sudden pool of fear that lapped against its brain—fear and horror at the flaming hatred that beat at it from the thing that walked toward it. Hatred that seized and twisted it. Fear and horror it had known before—fear and horror and disquieting resignation—but this was something new. This was a whiplash of torture that seared across its nerves, that burned across its brain.

This was hatred.

The shadow whimpered to itself—whimpered and mewled and backed

away and sought with frantic fingers of thought within its muddled brain for the symbols of escape.

The room was empty—empty and old and hollow. A room that caught up the sound of the creaking door and flung it into muffled distances, then hurled it back again. A room heavy with the dust of forgetfulness, filled with the brooding silence of aimless centuries.

Jenkins stood with the door pull in his hand, stood and flung all the sharp alertness of the new machinery that was his body into the corners and the darkened alcoves. There was nothing. Nothing but the silence and the dust and darkness. Nor anything to indicate that for many years there had been anything but silence, dust and darkness. No faintest tremor of a residuary thought, no footprints on the floor, no fingermarks scrawled across the table.

An old song, an incredibly old song—a song that had been old when he had been forged, crept out of some forgotten corner of his brain. And he was surprised that it still was there, surprised that he had ever known it—and knowing it, dismayed at the swirl of centuries that it conjured up, dismayed at the remembrance of the neat white houses that had stood upon a million hills, dismayed at the thought of men who had loved their acres and walked them with the calm and quiet assurance of their ownership.

*Annie doesn't live here any more.*

Silly, said Jenkins to himself. Silly that some absurdity of an all-

but-vanished race should rise to haunt me now. Silly.

*Annie doesn't live here any more. Who killed Cock Robin? I, said the sparrow—*

He closed the door behind him and walked across the room.

Dust-covered furniture stood waiting for the man who had not returned. Dust-covered tools and gadgets lay on the table tops. Dust covered the titles of the rows of books that filled the massive bookcase.

They are gone, said Jenkins, talking to himself. And no one knew the hour or the reason of their going. Nor even where they went. They slipped off in the night and told no one they were leaving. And sometimes, no doubt, they think back and chuckle—chuckle at the thought of our thinking that they still are here, chuckle at the watch we keep against their coming out.

There were other doors and Jenkins strode to one. With his hand upon the latch he told himself the futility of opening it, the futility of searching any further. If this one room was old and empty, so would be all the other rooms.

His thumb came down and the door came open and there was a blast of heat, but there was no room. There was desert—a gold and yellow desert stretching to a horizon that was dim and burnished in the heat of a great blue sun.

A green and purple thing that might have been a lizard, but wasn't, skittered like a flash across the sand, its tiny feet making the sound of eerie whistling.

Jenkins slammed the door shut, stood numbed in mind and body.

A desert. A desert and a thing that skittered. Not another room, not a hall, nor yet a porch—but a desert.

And the sun was blue—blue and blazing hot.

Slowly, cautiously, he opened the door again, at first a crack and then a little wider.

The desert still was there.

Jenkins slammed the door and leaned with his back against it, as if he needed the strength of his metal body to hold out the desert, to hold out the implication of the door and desert.

They were smart, he told himself. Smart and fast on their mental feet. Too fast and too smart for ordinary men. We never knew just how smart they were. But now I know they were smarter than we thought.

This room is just an anteroom to many other worlds, a key that reaches across unguessable space to other planets that swing around unknown suns. A way to leave this earth without ever leaving it—a way to cross the void by stepping through a door.

There were other doors and Jenkins stared at them, stared and shook his head.

Slowly he walked across the room to the entrance door. Quietly, unwilling to break the hush of the dust-filled room, he lifted the latch and let himself out and the familiar world was there. The world of moon and stars, of river fog drifting up between the hills, of

treetops talking to one another across the notches of the hills.

The mice still ran along their grassy burrows with happy mouse thoughts that were scarcely thoughts. An owl sat brooding in the tree and his thoughts were murder.

So close, thought Jenkins. So close to the surface still, the old blood-hunger, the old bone-hate. But we're giving them a better start than Man had—although probably it would have made no difference what kind of a start mankind might have had.

And here it is again, the old blood-lust of Man, the craving to be different and to be stronger, to impose his will by things of his devising—things that make his arm stronger than any other arm or paw, to make his teeth sink deeper than any natural fang, to reach and hurt across distances that are beyond his own arm's reach.

I thought I could get help. That is why I came here. And there is no help.

No help at all. For the Mutants were the only ones who might have helped and they have gone away.

It's up to you, Jenkins told himself, walking down the stairs. Mankind's up to you. You've got to stop them, somehow. You've got to change them somehow. You can't let them mess up the thing the Dogs are doing. You can't let them turn the world again into a bow and arrow world.

He walked through the leafy darkness of the hollow and knew the scent of moldy leaves from the autumn's harvest beneath the new

green of growing things and that was something, he told himself, he'd never known before.

His old body had no sense of smell.

Smell and better vision and a sense of knowing, of knowing what a thing was thinking, to read the thoughts of raccoons, to guess the thoughts of mice, to know the murder in the brains of owls and weasels.

And something more—a faint and wind-blown hatred, an alien scream of terror.

It flicked across his brain and stopped him in his tracks, then sent him running, plunging up the hillside, not as a man might run in darkness, but as a robot runs, seeing in the dark and with the strength of metal that has no gasping lungs or panting breath.

Hatred—and there could be one hatred only that could be like that.

The sense grew deeper and sharper as he went up the path in leaping strides and his mind moaned with the fear that sat upon it—the fear of what he'd find.

He plunged around a clump of bushes and skidded to a halt.

The man was walking forward, with his hands clenched at his side and on the grass lay the broken bow. The wolf's gray body lay half in the moonlight, half in shadow and backing away from it was a shadowy thing that was half-light, half-shadow, almost seen but never surely, like a phantom creature that moves within one's dream.

"Peter!" cried Jenkins, but the words were soundless in his mouth.

For he sensed the frenzy in the brain of the half-seen creature, a frenzy of cowering terror that cut through the hatred of the man who walked forward toward the drooling, spitting blob of shadow. Cowering terror and frantic necessity—a necessity of finding, of remembering.

The man was almost on it, walking straight and upright—a man with puny body and ridiculous fists—and courage. Courage, thought Jenkins, courage to take on hell itself. Courage to go down into the pit and rip up the quaking flagstones and shout a lurid, obscene jest at the keeper of the damned.

Then the creature had it—had the thing it had been groping for, knew the thing to do. Jenkins sensed the flood of relief that flashed across its being, heard the thing, part word, part symbol, part thought, that it performed. Like a piece of mumbo-jumbo, like a spoken charm, like an incantation, but not entirely that. A mental exercise, a thought that took command of the body—that must be nearer to the truth.

For it worked.

The creature vanished. Vanished and was gone—gone out of the world.

There was no sign of it, no single vibration of its being. As if it had never been.

And the thing it had said, the thing that it had thought? It went like this. Like this—

Jenkins jerked himself up short. It was printed on his brain and he knew it, knew the word and thought and the right inflection—but he



must not use it, he must forget about it, he must keep it hidden.

For it had worked on the cobbly. And it would work on him. He knew that it would work.

The man had swung around and now he stood limp, hands dangling at his side, staring at Jenkins.

His lips moved in the white blur of his face. "You . . . you—"

"I am Jenkins," Jenkins told him. "This is my new body."

"There was something here," said Peter.

"It was a cobbly," said Jenkins. "Joshua told me one had gotten through."

"It killed Lupus," said Peter.

Jenkins nodded. "Yes, it killed Lupus. And it killed many others. It was the thing that has been killing."

"And I killed it," said Peter. "I

killed it . . . or drove it away . . . or something."

"You frightened it away," said Jenkins. "You were stronger than it was. It was afraid of you. You frightened it back to the world it came from."

"I could have killed it," Peter boasted, "but the cord broke—"

"Next time," said Jenkins, quietly, "you must make stronger cords. I will show you how it's done. And a steel tip for your arrow—"

"For my what?"

"For your arrow. The throwing stick is an arrow. The stick and cord you throw it with is called a bow. All together, it's called a bow and arrow."

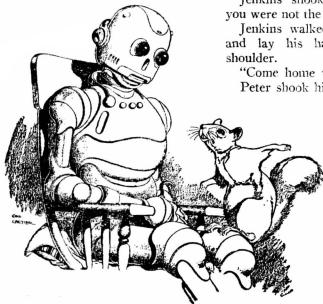
Peter's shoulders sagged. "It was done before, then. I was not the first?"

Jenkins shook his head. "No, you were not the first."

Jenkins walked across the grass and lay his hand upon Peter's shoulder.

"Come home with me, Peter."

Peter shook his head. "No. I'll



sit here with Lupus until the morning comes. And then I'll call in his friends and we will bury him."

He lifted his head to look into Jenkins' face. "Lupus was a friend of mine. A great friend, Jenkins."

"I know he must have been," said Jenkins. "But I'll be seeing you?"

"Oh, yes," said Peter. "I'm coming to the picnic. The Webster picnic. It's in a week or so."

"So it is," said Jenkins, speaking very slowly, thinking as he spoke. "So it is. And I will see you then."

He turned around and walked slowly up the hill.

Peter sat down beside the dead wolf, waiting for the dawn. Once or twice, he lifted his hand to brush at his cheeks.

They sat in a semicircle facing Jenkins and listened to him closely.

"Now, you must pay attention," Jenkins said. "That is most important. You must pay attention and you must think real hard and you must hang very tightly to the things you have—to the lunch baskets and the bows and arrows and the other things."

One of the girls giggled. "Is this a new game, Jenkins?"

"Yes," said Jenkins, "sort of. I guess that is what it is—a new game. And an exciting one. A most exciting one."

Someone said: "Jenkins always thinks up a new game for the Webster picnic."

"And now," said Jenkins, "you must pay attention. You must look

at me and try to figure out the thing I'm thinking—"

"It's a guessing game," shrieked the giggling girl. "I love guessing games."

Jenkins made his mouth into a smile. "You're right," he said. "That's exactly what it is—a guessing game. And now if you will pay attention and look at me—"

"I want to try out these bows and arrows," said one of the men. "After this is over, we can try them out, can't we, Jenkins?"

"Yes," said Jenkins patiently, "after this is over you can try them out."

He closed his eyes and made his brain reach out for each of them, ticking them off individually, sensing the thrilled expectancy of the minds that yearned toward his, felt the little probing fingers of thought that were dabbing at his brain.

"Harder," Jenkins thought. "Harder! Harder!"

A quiver went across his mind and he brushed it away. Not hypnotism—nor yet telepathy, but the best that he could do. A drawing together, a huddling together of minds—and it was all a game.

Slowly, carefully, he brought out the hidden symbol—the words, the thought and the inflection. Easily he slid them into his brain, one by one, like one would speak to a child, trying to teach it the exact tone, the way to hold its lips, the way to move its tongue.

He let them lay there for a moment, felt the other minds touching them, felt the fingers dabbing at them. And then he thought them

aloud—thought them as the cobbly had thought them.

And nothing happened. Absolutely nothing. No click within his brain. No feeling of falling. No vertigo. No sensation at all.

So he had failed. So it was over. So the game was done.

He opened his eyes and the hillside was the same. The sun still shone and the sky was robin's egg.

He sat stiffly, silently and felt them looking at him.

Everything was the same as it had been before.

Except—There was a daisy where the clump of Oswego tea had bloomed redly before. There was a pasture rose beside him and there had been none when he had closed his eyes.

"Is that all there's to it?" asked the giggly girl, plainly disappointed.

"That is all," said Jenkins.

"Now we can try out the bows and arrows?" asked one of the youths.

"Yes," said Jenkins, "but be careful. Don't point them at one another. They are dangerous. Peter will show you how."

"We'll unpack the lunch," said one of the women. "Did you bring a basket, Jenkins?"

"Yes," said Jenkins. "Esther has it. She held it when we played the game."

"That's nice," said the woman. "You surprise us every year with the things you bring."

And you'll be surprised this year, Jenkins told himself. You'll be

surprised at packages of seeds, all very neatly labeled.

For we'll need seeds, he thought to himself. Seeds to plant new gardens and to start new fields—to raise food once again. And we'll need bows and arrows to bring in some meat. And spears and hooks for fish.

Now other little things that were different began to show themselves. The way a tree leaned at the edge of the field. And a new kink in the river far below.

Jenkins sat quietly in the sun, listening to the shouts of the men and boys, trying out the bows and arrows, hearing the chatter of the women as they spread the cloth and unpacked the lunches.

I'll have to tell them soon, he told himself. I'll have to warn them to go easy on the food—not to gobble it up all at one sitting. For we will need that food to tide us over the first day or two, until we can find roots to dig and fish to catch and fruit to pick.

Yes, pretty soon I'll have to call them in and break the news to them. Tell them they're on their own. Tell them why. Tell them to go ahead and do anything they want to. For this is a brand-new world.

Warn them about the cobbles.

Although that's the least important. Man has a way with him—a very vicious way. A way of dealing with anything that stands in his path.

Jenkins sighed.

Lord help the cobbles, he said.