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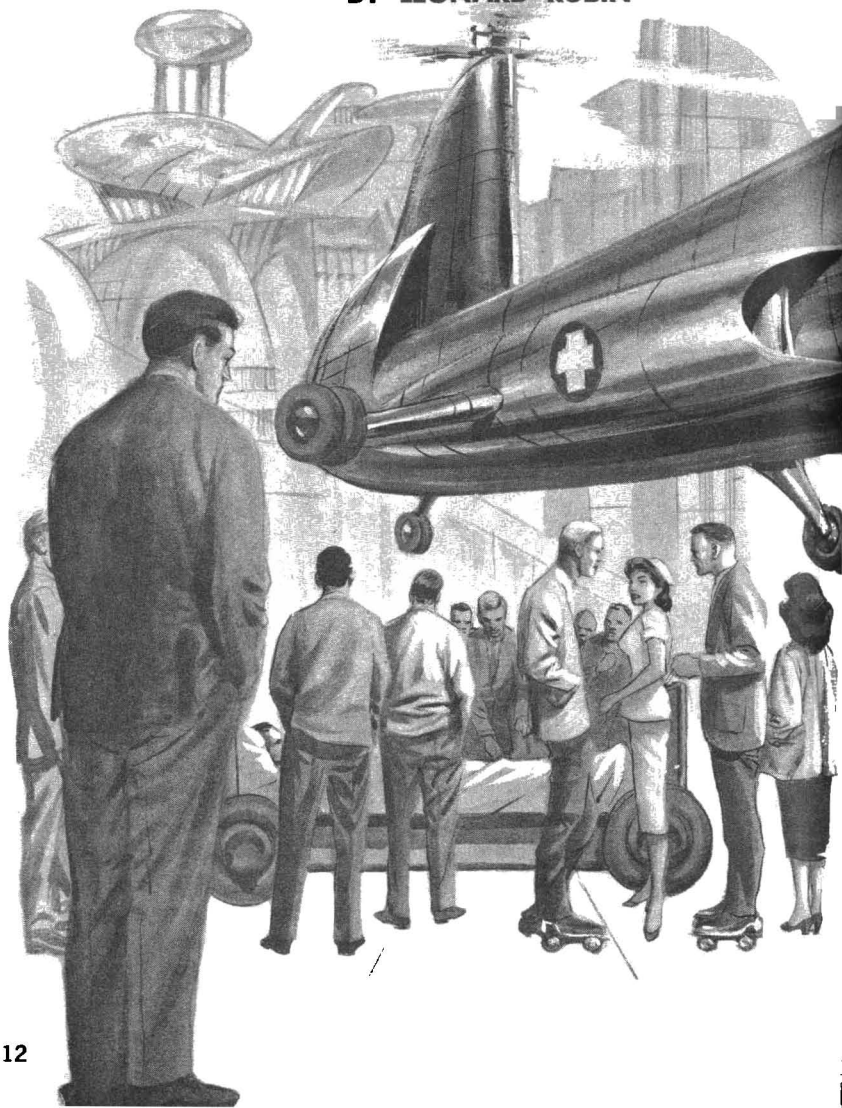
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don't look now

BY LEONARD RUBIN





Illustrated by WOOD

“**Y**OU'RE not allowed in the ambulance,” Miss Knox said. They were both typical advertising men, down to the motor-skates strapped beneath their shoes. Their faces were so utterly undistinctive as to seem fuzzy. Each carried a large flat briefcase with a coil antenna sticking out.

The Royalty Party wasn't what you would imagine — it stood for a great deal, but there was as much it wanted no part of!

"Watch it!" the attendant growled, and they skated aside with a whirl.

Big Carl came driving up the ramp, ducked his head to enter, and brought the bed to a stop in the belly of the ambulance. Miss Knox pressed the button and the door closed in the admen's faces.

When Mr. Barger was lowered from the hovering ambulance, his swollen, tearful eyes were sun-blind. Square hands clenched over and over with pain. Above the rotors' *rackety-rackety-rack*, Miss Knox shouted soothing things. She didn't wait for an answer. He was the worst case of laryngitis she had ever known — the only case, really, in her professional experience. Abolished diseases always came back virulently.

She and the bed sank between white hospital walls and landed in the room with a bump. The waiting attendant walked around the platform, folding the safety gates. He unhooked the four support cables, each vanishing out of his grasp like spaghetti slurped from a plate.

Just as the ceiling closed overhead, cutting off sight and sound of the whirlybird against the sun, Brooks, the radiologist, came in through the door, shepherding an entire class of medical students. Then two nurses seemed to clear an inoffensive path through the chemically tainted air of the cor-

ridor — and after them came Dr. Gesner, the greatest throat man in the country. Miss Knox knew him from his portrait in the Mushroom.

Brooks winked her an "At ease!" with a shaggy eyebrow and followed the fat man through the crowd. Dr. Gesner went to the bed and sat down. He was Barger's weight, with the same sort of elephantine bones, but he was almost two feet shorter. He stared at the nose and cheeks protruding from the bedclothes, and opened a fat black bag.

A BELL rang three times in the corridor. Five internes scurried into the room and stopped still, watching Dr. Gesner as though he were a golden calf. On each side of the doorway stood a student nurse at attention.

Mr. Barger stopped twitching and opened one eye wide. His chin lifted, and his other chins came out from under the sheet's folded edge.

One of Dr. Gesner's hands felt through the black bag. It emerged dragging a mutape by one wire. Brooks leaned forward and took out the rest of the apparatus. Shaking the hair off his forehead, he plugged into the bedside computer relay and placed the rubber-rimmed cup against the patient's skull, just over the Broca convolution.

Mr. Barger remained staring at the doctor through a gray film. The mutape chattered rapidly. Miss Knox craned her neck, deciphering the punched tape as it unrolled from the recorder in Brooks' hands. Sweat popped out on Mr. Barger's forehead.

"Help me, damn it," read Mr. Barger's tape. "I know you. You abolished laryngitis; why should it come to me now? I have a right to stop misuse of my work and to be free from pain — my patent is vital — free from pain. I want to be free . . ." His face turned pink in a new contortion and the hands folded over.

"Yes," Dr. Gesner said as the chatter stopped. "I know it hurts." He smiled gently in the middle of his face. He was writing on an index card, but his main effort was devoted to getting up from the bed with the help of two internes. "It will hurt this badly for twenty-four hours. Then the injection will have the upper hand." He turned to Brooks. "Please pass the tape around, Doctor. If any students haven't seen the X-rays yet, they're in my file."

Mr. Barger's face grayed a little; the sweat had turned to patches of crust against his skin. Dipping cotton in alcohol, Miss Knox bathed his forehead.

"That's all," said Dr. Gesner, handing her the card as the students began to vanish.

She stalked after him. "No examination, Doctor?" she asked, ignoring Brooks' horrified expression.

"Unnecessary, Nurse." He backed away from her and the door slid open. "I've already seen the X-rays and charts you phoned from the ambulance. And the patient cannot open his mouth. His intravenous menu is all here . . ."

"Yes, Doctor."

Three bells sounded in the corridor. "Calling Dr. Gesner. Emergency. Please come to the telephone. Emergency. Calling Dr. Gesner . . ."

He rolled his eyes at the index card in her hand. "You yourself are to take the shots prescribed for you, to prevent your catching or carrying the disease. In that bed, but for the grace of God . . ." He was crying softly.

"Doctor!" said Brooks, and the internes and nurses gasped.

"After all," said Dr. Gesner, "I *did* abolish laryngitis."

MISS Knox walked back up the drive and struck a cigarette on one of the stone lions. It glowed in the dark, but the river breeze blew it out before she could draw. She snorted in annoyance.

Miss Erwin looked up sharply. "Is there *anywhere* where you can still buy matches?" asked Miss Knox.

"Not in New York City. Why?"

"We used to just try again when a cigarette didn't light. Now we have to throw it away."

"Of course," said Miss Erwin. "That's how they train us to be right the first time."

"Ridiculous. That's how they sell more cigarettes."

"Why, *Miss Knox!* You sound like *Royalty!*"

Miss Knox laughed. "I'm not ready to join the British Commonwealth yet. No fooling, Hilda, you see the Silvertongue cigarette factory across the river?"

Miss Erwin twisted white-gloved hands in the dark. "Why, no . . . mmm, smell that spray." An ocean-breathing tugboat passed, its complicated silhouette blocking the view. "No-oooooo," the whistle blew.

"Just wait till that tug is gone. There, Miss Erwin. Do you see the Silvertongue factory? Just before the Williamsburg Bridge."

"Is it the one with the new radio — the radio-thing on top?"

"Radiocompressor. Yes."

"They used to put *names* on those factories. All lit up."

"Well, ladies — ladies," said a gravel voice beyond the entrance lights. "How is life in the Toadstool?"

"Boney!" said Miss Knox.

"The what?" asked Miss Erwin.

"That's what Dr. Brooks called it. Now you tell me what he meant — he wouldn't say. Toadstool."

"Come into the light, Boney — you frighten us," said Miss Erwin.

The man appeared, smiling, and climbed the first stone step. Resting his elbows on the lion and his chin in his hand, he looked down on them sideways.

"Not *another* new suit," said Miss Knox.

It was an archaic double-breasted suit in good condition. Where the jacket hiked up in back, a wide expanse of extra trouser seat had been folded over and tucked beneath the belt.

"Hundred-fifty-dollar suit," he said.

"With or without the bottle?" asked Miss Knox.

"What bottle?"

"The one that bangs on your ribs when the breeze blows."

"Now listen here, lady . . ." He came down the step.

"Boney, I'm only kidding. You know that."

"Kidding. *Kidding*. And here I was giving you inside information. *Inside* information."

"What information?"

Bringing his drawn face so close that they could smell the wine, he gave both women a look of scorn. Then he backed away and leaned his padded shoulder against the lion.

"Boney, she's sorry," said Miss Erwin.

"I am not," said Miss Knox.

HE glowered at her and walked away into the dark, his spider legs dissolving sooner than expected. Then he marched back.

"Sorry," he said. "Ha. I won't tell you. I'm going to tell it to the Director himself."

"Forget it, Boney. He'd throw you out again. You'd better just tell us."

His skeleton hand stretched toward the water. "You see that radio presser?"

"You mean the new radiocompressor on the Silvertongue factory?"

"Radiocompressor. All right. Do you ladies know what it does?"

"Anything," Miss Knox said. "Our patient, Mr. Barger, builds them. He told us all about it the moment he came. In Greek."

"Not — not *all* about it. *I* know all about it. I had a big deal going — my Armenian partner and me, we were buying up neckties to sell in the hospital..."

"*What* do you know? And will you *stop* blowing in my face?"

He glowered.

"I'm sorry, Boney."

"Radiocompressors can do things — any things — without touching. Like rolling cigarettes or chopping up tobacco. The radio waves are so small they — push things." He pushed the air with his left hand. "Not just go through them." He wiggled the brittle fingers of his right.

"Everyone knows that," said Miss Knox. "What you mean is that the supra-short wave has an intense direct effect on matter. It was in all the papers."

"Oh, is that so? Is *that* so? Well, you listen to me. *This* isn't in all the papers."

"All right, go on." Miss Knox struck a cigarette, which blew out. She threw it down and succeeded in lighting another.

"You can fool people, also, with the same radio waves," said Boney.

"You mean hide behind the door with a wave compressor and push chairs around? Like that?"

"Don't be silly. Nothing like *that*. Dr. Brooks told me today, when I was sweeping his *private* lab in the Toadstool, he told me they make one kind where if you put it on a table, say, no one can see what else is there. You could put — a cat on the table, and anyone would think it was just a table with a radio presser. Until the cat jumped off. Then you could see it."

"Can it jump off?" asked Miss Knox.

"Can it jump off? Did you ever see a cat that couldn't jump? And that's not all—"

"Quite a trick," she said.

"No trick. You could rule the world with that, ladies. Think about it. Rule the world. Got a cigarette? After all, I always get you coffee."

She handed him one.

Miss Erwin stared across the river. "I hope it isn't a new kind of bomb," she said.

Boney pulled out a stick match and struck it on the stone lion. Cupping his hands around the flame, he lit up and walked away.

"**B**UT, Dr. Brooks, when you tell Boney things like that," said Miss Knox, "he believes them, and he quotes you like mad. Don't you care about your reputation at all?"

"My dear woman," Dr. Brooks replied, "I've been interested in many things in my years, but getting my portrait in the Mushroom has never been one of them—"

Mr. Barger's legs spasmed suddenly and shot straight out, jerking the covers from his fat-layered neck. But the pink shut eyelids hadn't quivered.

"— and, anyway, Boney is right," Dr. Brooks finished. "Why do you think the Royalties want government control of the whole invention?"

Miss Knox was tucking the covers around his warm, sticky jowls. "But he said you said—"

"I said she said we said." Brooks grabbed her chin between his thumb and forefinger. "Did you know that machine on the Silvertongue roof could get at us inside our own homes?"

She shook her head, swinging his arm from side to side.

"If you know nothing about it, girlie, let me explain." He squeezed her chin tighter. "You saw those two men from the Christian E. Lodge Corporation — Silvertongue, that is — who came this afternoon to see Barger? The ones on motor-skates?"

"They shouldn't allow those buzzing things in the hospital. They make more noise than a whirly-bird." She backed away, tugging at the white-coated arm until her chin was released. "I mean I saw them yesterday. They tried to get in the bird. I don't know why they visit him — he can't say a word. Doesn't he have a family?"

"No, but the Silvertongue men love him like a brother. Barger designed their radiocompressor — the one in all the newspapers. Here, you can see it from the window if you—"

"I know, Dr. Brooks."

"Do you know what that machine can really do, girlie?"

"When I was your age—" Miss Knox began.

"You are. I just *look* young. That machine can cure and shred tobacco with supra-short waves on a polished magnesium bowl, just the way the papers say, but they have cheaper ways to process their tobacco. They really use the machine for guided tours of the factory. Public relations."

"You mean float visitors through the air?"

"No. You'd need the power of ten maritime atomic piles in series just to lift Dr. Gesner to the height of—"

"Very funny!"

"— his own square root. What they can do with that machine is to disguise an object — say the incoming leaf tobacco. They can make it look firm, golden, and so forth. The girls at the sorting tables, wherever the guided tour happens to be, will all look like Norma Norden. They'll be dressed as angels and work in heaven. Then the V.I.P.s can tour the girls' homes and dormitories, and instead of a dirty slum, they'll see — they'll see *mushrooms*, if they like."

"How is it done?"

"Only Barger Electronics really knows," said Dr. Brooks, "and the Christian E. Lodge engineers. It's something to do with compressing the wave length to approximate that of light, so that images are canceled out. This leaves a clear field for subliminal techniques. If there are subvisual images projected on the walls, for instance, that's what the observers will see inside the room."

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed Miss Knox.

"The only other thing I know is that it has to be done with intersecting spheres. The machine has two portable secondary transmitters — or projectors, or whatever they call them — each emitting

in all directions to form a wave-sphere. Where the two spheres overlap, you get your possible interference with light."

"Frankly, I just don't understand it."

"Any radio waves go out in all directions to form spheres." His voice had become a mutter. "You know that."

"No, I didn't."

HE gave a false sigh. "Well, take an ordinary weak phone transmitter very high up in a whirlybird. That's the simplest case. You know what sound a whirlybird makes, don't you?"

"Of course," said Miss Knox.

"What?" Dr. Brooks challenged, moving at her. "How does it sound?"

"Oh, clatter-clatter chug-chug," she said, moving back.

"No. Listen closely and you'll hear any whirlybird — especially hospital ambulances — go *rackety-rackety-rack groundhog, rackety-rack groundhog!* — a reminder to people that they belong on the ground, one may assume. Picture a microphone attached outside the bird and wired to your transmitter. The radio waves go out in all directions through the air. Suppose your air is all of the same density, and so forth — then all the waves peter out at a constant radius and form a perfect sphere going *rackety-rackety-rack ground-hog!*

"Now compressed waves travel a certain number of feet — theoretically, the number of foot-pounds of work the power input could perform modified by a constant value called 'e' — and at that point they revert to ordinary radio waves. This forms a sphere of compressed or supra-short waves. Do you understand that?"

"No," said Miss Knox.

"Well, anyway, where two spheres overlap, you get the Barger effect. And they can vary or limit the effect in interesting ways. Just move one or both projectors so that the waves intersect each other in different phases—"

"That's a fascinating way to back me into a corner of the room, Dr. Brooks. Now will you please let me look at my patient?"

Mr. Barger's body convulsed and twitched, and the disordered bedclothes exposed the pink, swollen layers of his throat. Only the face slept. Miss Knox reduced the feed on the water envelope, and with her palm brushed drops of moisture from the burning, out-of-focus pink skin. The drops were sticky and warm. She wiped her hands on a piece of cotton and started to prepare the blood transfusion.

"Before you get out of here," she said to Dr. Brooks, "let me thank you."

"For the information? You'll only forget it."

"No, for the crack about my age."

Slumping his eyebrows, he went to the door and stepped through almost before it could slide open.

"Wait!" she commanded in a stage whisper.

He appeared, the door sliding back harmlessly against his shoulder before it changed direction.

"What's so terrible?" she asked.

"You talk as though that radio-compressor on the Silvertongue roof were going to destroy the American home, at the very least."

"They don't just have to transmit within the factory," he said. "Suppose they wanted you arrested. Say they didn't like brunettes. Well, first they get some dame to call police and say she's going to do a strip in front of the Psychiatric Pavilion wall. Then they go across First Avenue and set up a subliminal movie sequence of some stripper in action and focus it on the wall from their car. They set up two portable wave projectors and adjust their phasing to achieve the Barger effect in that one place. Then they wait for you to pass that spot on your way to church. Very little power is required; the actual radiocompression takes place across the river."

Brooks raised his pants from the knees and minced across the room, exposing curly hair above his fallen argylls. His white coat

twitched from side to side. "Now here you come. A man watching the street from the broken stool at the Green Gables twists one of his cufflinks, or maybe he just whistles. This starts the projectors and you become invisible, or very blurry, while the subliminal film gives the cops what they want. Then the whole thing shuts off and the cops can see you again. You're hustled off to jail and they keep you there — along with other enemies — by making a similar visual 'fix' on the results in some polling place and putting in their own judge!"

"Oh, they'll probably just use it for advertising."

"Sure," said Brooks. "How would you like it if you were watching television with your roommate, and all of a sudden she turned into a giant pack of Silvertongue cigarettes?"

WATER dripped on her palm, leaving a red stain. A ringing, ringing, and the whir of motor-skates receded down the corridor. It rang and rang, her hand sticky and warm against her cheek. It rang.

The telephone. Trying to recapture something she had known, she let groping fingers stretch toward the instrument. They descended, clenched, lifted. The ringing stopped.

She forced her eyes open far

enough to see her white arm return. Hunching up around her pillow with the receiver, she croaked, "Hello."

"Miss Knox?" A high voice. "Boney — it's Boney—"

"You have a nerve, Boney, to wake me up at this hour."

"This isn't Boney — it's Hilda Erwin. I'm on emergency duty and they've brought in Boney. His throat is cut—"

"No! Is he alive?"

"Yes, yes. But he may never speak again. He lay there in the street for hours and hours. Dr. Gesner's internes are here—"

"Oh, not being able to talk would be worse for him than dying. I'll come! I'll be right there!" Miss Knox dropped the receiver and swung out of bed, feeling in the darkness for her robe. She pulled it on and opened the door, and found her slippers in the faint yellow light from the hallway.

As she ran, knotting the belt of her robe, she looked up and down the ancient residential corridors for a motorbed. She stumbled against a rotten wood molding. She pressed the elevator button and turned, her loose hair swinging heavily, to face the flat eye of a clock. It was five-fifteen.

Overhead, the floor indicator creaked around its dial — seven, six, five, four — and the doors opened. There was a motorbed on the elevator.

She stepped inside and pressed the button for seven, the lowest floor with a bridge to the Mushroom. The doors shut and the car moved upward. Tripping over the torn linoleum, she managed to fall backward onto the bed's driving seat. She swung her legs around and turned on the switch.

As the doors opened, she drove out with a jolt and entered the sparkling newness of a tubular bridge which rose through the night across First Avenue. The Mushroom towered overhead, its spiral corridors glowing. Night traffic vibrated beneath her as she crossed — a crowd of trucks was baying north along the hidden cobblestones, following traffic lights which jumped from red to green, one after another, like an electronic rabbit. The trucks passed out of sight under their own diesel cloud and another pack approached in a higher key . . .

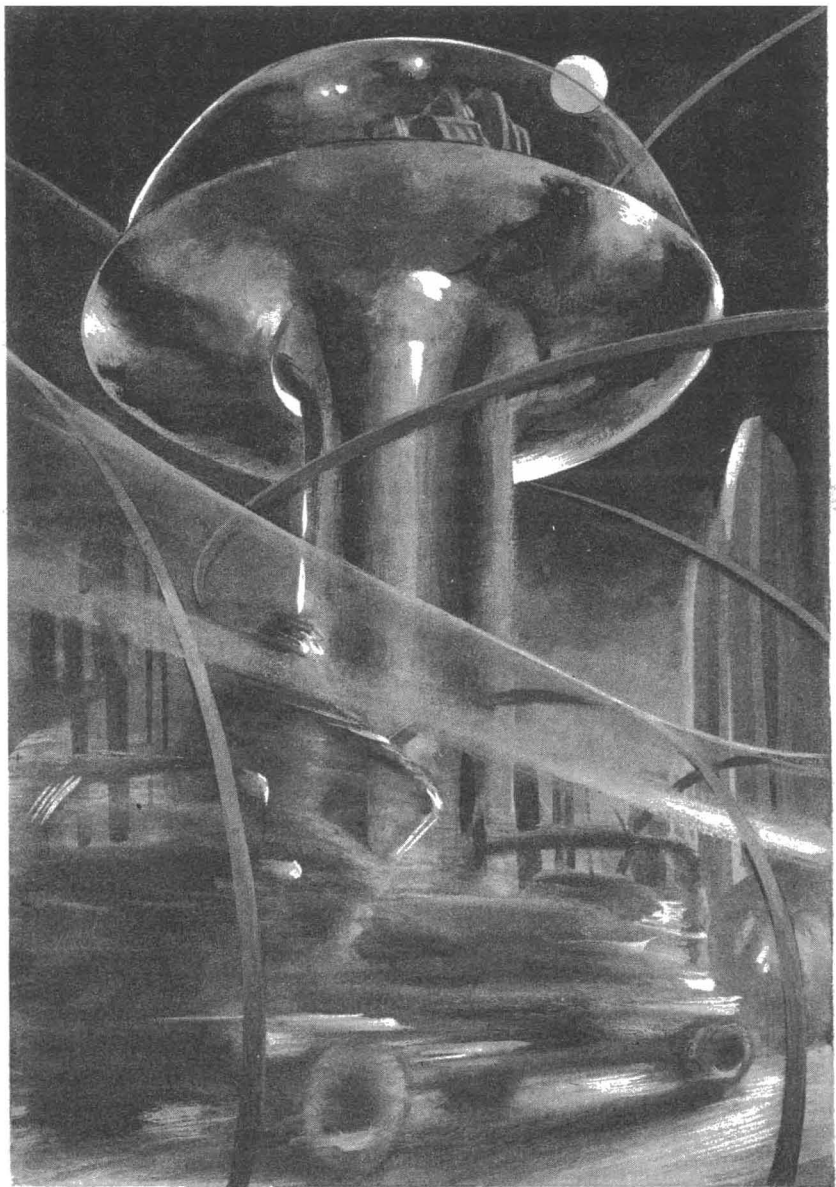
Then a lurch as towing cables grated and took hold in the curve of the many-windowed corridor. Whining under glass, the motorbed veered off in a rising circle around the stem of the Mushroom. Around and around again, faster, while room numbers flashed red one by one on the silver doors, over the river, over the roof garden of the Administration wing, over the river, over the garden, around and around and out, out — far out over a city of dark crum-

bling toys and up and up over the rim . . .

SHE approached the great transparent dome of the Mushroom looking ahead into the sky, as though enemies in immense distance were triangulating upon her. An echo of voices rolled out. Far across the marble floor, one of the emergency rooms had its lights on. The door opened and a tiny figure in a motorchair sped out and along the wall, followed by a line of running dolls in white. Some of them clustered around the man in the chair, waving their arms. Thinning like a comet's tail, the procession vanished down the south escalator. The door of the room slid shut.

She hurtled across beneath the stars and drove straight at the room, applying brakes sharply with a tightening in her stomach as the door began to open. Her long hair swept forward against her cheeks and shoulders. She jarred to a stop inside and rose, refocusing her senses on the enclosed white space.

The bedside table held a pot of paper geraniums. Something lay beneath the covers like lumber on edge, the angles of knees projecting sideways. Out of the sheets stuck part of a thin white drain-pipe neck and a face like a broken roof shingle, over which the weeping Miss Erwin cast her shadow.



Brooks sat hunched over the stool, fingers buried in his hair. His lab coat was twisted awry; a bare knee protruded between two buttons.

"What happened?" asked Miss Knox.

"He's all right," Miss Erwin sobbed at her. "Delinquents—vandals — they cut his throat by the river, right in front of the hospital. The mutape says — he didn't — see their faces."

"Don't worry about him," said a low muttered voice. "He's been conscious. The doctors say he'll speak, in time." Dr. Brooks had raised his head and was trying to cover himself with the lab coat.

"River rats," Miss Knox snapped, peering at Boney's wasted face. "What do you mean, in time?"

"Two or three weeks. An expert job of quick surgery, really."

"No! No!" Miss Erwin broke into a fit of sobbing and blindly rearranged the flowers.

"Do you mean to say?—"

"Some medical students on a horror spree. Damned age of — what did that Washington press secretary say? — 'atomic hyper-specialization'! That means young brains growing in channels until they explode through the wall. You remember the physicist who killed his colleagues when the English won the Nobel Prize."

"It can't be," said Miss Knox. She watched the hurt man grimace

somewhere along his razor edge of nightmare.

"It's the only likelihood. Well, we can't do anything for him now, and you look a little beat. Come on, I'll buy you coffee from the vending machine on the Administration roof."

Dr. Brooks stood up, lifted Miss Knox gently beneath the arms and sat her on the motorbed, then swung a hairy shin over the driving seat. They rolled through the doorway.

"Who was that big shot in the motorchair?" Miss Knox asked. "Dr. Gesner?"

Dawn had just begun to spread. They crossed within a widening circle of mushroom-shaped arches containing portraits which drew farther away until they resembled portal guards, and then converged again in full austerity on the opposite side of the great dome.

"Director himself — they can't reach Gesner anyplace," Brooks said.

THEY started to descend inward from the Mushroom's edge. Numbers flashed by as they spiraled down faster along the self-steering guide rail. Over the river, over the garden. Over the river . . .

She leaned back against the pillows. "What was himself doing in the hospital at this hour?" she asked.

"As a matter of fact" — his shadow crossed her face as he moved the deceleration lever—"he was with me."

"With you?"

"I was listening to the newscasts in bed. He came to see me because, as resident radiologist, I'm the only person who knows anything at all about electronics. While we listened, his assistant with the high voice called him on my phone and told him about Boney."

"How did he react?"

Brooks swung his tiller bar and they veered onto the roof of the Administration wing, the door behind them cutting off all light from inside the Mushroom. They were in a formal garden filled with scent, and surrounded by distant hedges. The few remaining stars were surprised naked, floating above a monstrous concrete bird-bath.

"Like a bureaucrat," he muttered as they rolled to a stop. "First he requisitioned flowers. He's probably in here somewhere now, plotting revenge against the Commissary clerk who issued the knife they found near Boney. I know he'd love to see you rushing in your bathrobe to other people's emergencies."

"Disgusting. And they call him the Father of the Mushroom. Big shot."

"Why?" he asked. "After all, he

is a bureaucrat. How did you yourself react — like a woman, no?"

He helped her down. They walked within a double row of mountain laurels to the coffee machine.

"I'd forgotten all about the bathrobe," she said. "Black for me."

"One day soon," he muttered, "they'll build him a mushroom he'll never see the end of. Sandwich? Anything?"

"No." She took the warm plastic cup and sipped. It was bad coffee. Far below, a snort of traffic echoed down First Avenue. "I've only been here once before. I'm a bit lower-echelon for the Administrative roof."

"Who isn't?"

She looked past the white-on-red Emergency Exit sign to a wrought-iron gate in the hedge facing the river. "Look, the Silver-tongue factory is all lit up. Every single window on the top floor."

"I should think so. You mean you don't *know*?"

"Know what?"

"My heavens, the fate of man's grasp on reality is being decided tonight! Congress was still in special session at five A.M. — still is, as far as I know."

"Session over what? Don't tell me the bombs have started."

"Visual interference by radio wave compression. Yesterday the Royalty called an immediate special session. There is at present *no*

law to prevent the Christian E. Lodge Corporation from buying the right to tamper with light waves in the home, for advertising purposes or — God knows what other kinds of control.”

“I didn’t know. I was on duty with Mr. Barger and then no one told me.”

“Barger was against it,” said Dr. Brooks. “He sold them the device with a set of conditions on its use, but now they’re buying the patent outright.”

“But — don’t they have to wait for him? Barger Electronics is his company.”

“No. He’s chairman of the board, but any three or more directors can sell the patent. Once it’s sold, there will be nothing Congress can do.”

“Why?” asked Miss Knox, staring out over the water. Some of the Silvertongue windows had winked out. The others vanished together, leaving only a pale vertical row to mark the fire stairs.

Three bells sounded.

“Your attention please!” — a piping male voice.

Brooks said, “I’ll bet it’s the Director himself.”

“In a moment,” shrilled the voice, “we will tune in the broadcast direct from Washington so that all personnel can hear history in the making. After the congressional vote, Dr. Hamilton, our director, will honor us with a few

words here in the hospital, which he will repeat later for the benefit of the day shift.”

There was a ringing tone, growling in volume like the approach of motorskates.

“I told you,” Brooks shouted over the noise. “His family has stock in Silvertongue.”

“. . . been informed that a purchase has been completed of full rights to the Barger Radiocompressor. I warn you that this device will be used indiscriminately against the public interest.” The voice was strong but unsteady. “Barger engineers have been withdrawn. There are no controls—”

“Too late,” said Brooks. “That’s Thorpe of Louisiana.”

“Bear with me now. I do not doubt that visual interference is already being used to disrupt this session of Congress. Do you understand? I have a blinding headache, brought about externally, I am quite certain. I can no longer read the notes in front of me. If what I say is still sense, I insist I want a vote, immediate vote, to make this thing illegal — illegal, and let the New York City police or the Militia or the Army — the Army . . .”

IN sudden silence, she clung to Brooks’ sleeve.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” said the piping voice from within the hospital, “the House of Represent-

tatives is still far from approaching a vote. We will tune in debate on the Senate floor, being broadcast by another network."

"... alleged that Patent Number 90,732,440B has something to do with national safety. I assure you, gentlemen — ladies and gentlemen — that American business ethics will prevent such dangerous use of technology now as in the past, and that any weapons application will be confined strictly to that sphere where weapons are themselves a safety factor — the sphere of national defense against foreign aggressors.

"It has further been alleged that there is some connection between Patent Number 90,732,440B and the hospitalization of Mr. William Barger of Barger Electronics Company, Incorporated, who is currently afflicted with"—the Senator breathed a chuckle — "laryngitis.

"It has even been supposed by certain Senators that the non-fatal stabbing of Nathan Bonaparte, a part-time employee . . ."

Silence.

"Ladies and gentlemen," the voice from within the hospital said, "we will tune in again when the matter is brought to a vote. And now — Dr. Hamilton."

A long pause filled with buzzing.

"People," said the Director, and the buzzing ended. "There is no war. Let me repeat: there is no

atomic war going on." He paused.

"Now there has been a lot of fuss over a steel tower on a factory across the river. I want to make it clear that no advertising gimmicks will change our job here. All hospitals — public, like ours, or even our esteemed allies, the private hospitals — are bound by medical and staff ethics to pay no official attention to the world of advertising.

"I am especially amazed by rumors that Nat Bonaparte, or 'Boney,' who does clean-up work here from time to time, was silenced because he 'knew something' about this wonderful advertising gimmick. Nothing can be sillier. It just happens that the fellow left my office shortly before he must have been wounded by delinquents from the nearby slums. He was giving me 'inside information,' as he called it, about light-ray guns, and mechanical hypnotism, and plots against the patients. These, apparently, are the things which Boney 'knew,' and he has been talking endlessly about them since I first came into office, and presumably before."

Brooks struck two cigarettes against his pack and handed one to Miss Knox. Their first puff obscured his puzzled frown.

"This *fuss* I am talking about," continued the Director, "has been taken as grounds for wild infringement of any and all regulations by

personnel of this hospital. I want it made perfectly clear that motorbeds not in official use should be stored in the proper supply rooms, according to the chart in the Commissary office. We are setting up a daily check-in system—”

“Let’s get out of here,” said Miss Knox.

“— to prevent further misuse of this equipment.”

“Get on the bed,” said Dr. Brooks. “If they saw you go up to Boney, we can’t leave it here.”

“Furthermore, any private or unauthorized use of this or other hospital equipment may be punished by immediate dismissal—”

Miss Knox took a step toward the motorbed. “I’d like to look in on Mr. Barger.”

“—with *particular* application to the young woman who used a motorbed tonight to visit a sick friend.”

Miss Knox stood feet apart, hands on hips. “The dirty son of a bitch,” she said.

MISS Erwin came running across the Mushroom, white pumps clacketing half off her feet. “Oh!” she said, and stopped, panting. “Has the world really been taken over by admen?”

Brooks stopped the motorbed. “Just America,” he said, “and only a few admen.” He helped Miss Knox down and they all walked toward the emergency rooms.

“Boney is fine, Dr. Brooks,” said Miss Erwin. “He just went back to sleep. But Mr. Barger is not feeling well.”

“Is Mr. Barger awake?”

“Oh, no, Doctor, but he was moaning. A sort of breath-moan, with his eyes still shut. Dr. Feld took a mutape and said he wasn’t getting regular delirium patterns at all.”

“Has Dr. Gesner been here?”

“We’ve tried and tried to reach him, but he left no word with his office or at home. His nurses are terribly worried about him, and his wife — oh, Miss Knox, do you suppose he drinks?” Miss Erwin’s forehead grew a splotch of pink. “Oh, I’m sorry, Doctor! I’m terribly upset.”

“Go home, Hilda,” said Miss Knox. “I can handle things — I go on in less than an hour, anyway. Let’s foul up Hamilton’s schedule.”

“Oh, Miss Knox!”

“Just one more thing — before you go to bed, get a uniform from my room and give it to Miss Kelly, to bring with her when she comes up for day shift. If my door is open, close it.”

“Here’s a key.” Dr. Brooks said. “Give it to one of the attendants in the dining room. If no one’s eating breakfast yet, leave it with Old Man Mackey. Say that I want some linens and a suit — any suit — brought up for me

when the shift changes. Not before."

"What color socks, Doctor?"

"Any color."

"Thanks so much," said Miss Erwin, backing toward the escalator.

Brooks muttered, "The Mushroom doesn't suit her looks."

"She's too young," said Miss Knox. "What's-his-name who designed it — you know, the one who did the museums — was ninety-four."

"He's still designing," said Brooks.

"Can I do anything for you? Preferably against regulations." She watched him lock the door and close the viewplate, and rummage in the manila folder at the foot of the bed.

"I don't know what's wrong with these people," Dr. Brooks muttered.

"What is it?" she asked over his shoulder.

"They've gotten their tapes crossed! That idiot Feld must have had this in his machine when he came. It's some accident victim's tape — one hundred per cent un verbalized pain, and the victim was *wide awake* when he made it. It might be Boney's tape. This man here has been in coma since this — since yesterday morning, thank heaven."

"Poor Boney," said Miss Knox, adjusting Mr. Barger's covers and her own loose hair. As though in

answer, Mr. Barger stirred feebly, raising his arm.

"Honey, there isn't much we can do," said Dr. Brooks.

"You're right." She glanced down and plucked at the bathrobe around her smooth lace-bordered throat. "Can't save the world in my old nightgown."

He took her by the shoulders and bent his head toward the palpitating muscle in her throat.

Leaning back against the edge of the bed, she held him at arm's length. She wet her lips and said, "Did I tell you I'm supposed to wear glasses?"

He sprawled forward into her embrace. Her dark mane tumbled thickly over Mr. Barger. They twisted and pulled each other down to the floor, freeing loose strands of hair from the blanket's electricity.

SHE opened her eyes and saw a flat briefcase with a coil antenna sticking out.

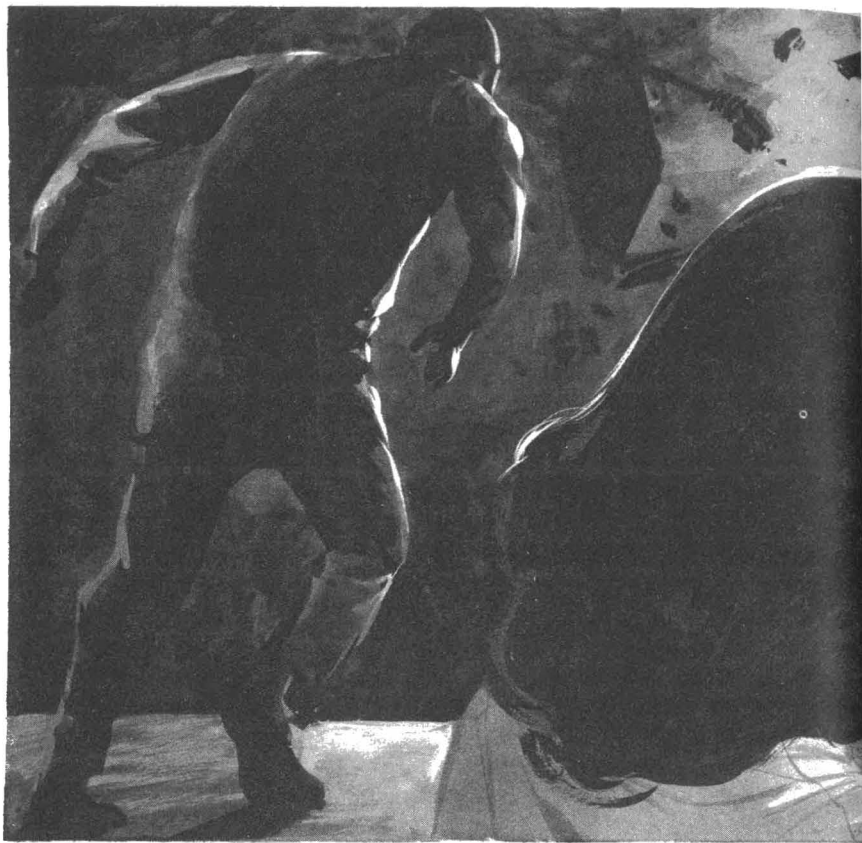
"What's the matter?" whispered Dr. Brooks.

"On the bottom of the bed!"

He pressed his cheek to the floor and examined the under-carriage of Mr. Barger's motorbed.

"Projector!" He reached in and tugged at the object, bracing his other hand against the driveshaft. "Help me, quick!"

She grasped smooth leather and pulled, her nails making scars, as



he slid under the bed and hammered with his fist. "It's hooked on the other way," she said. He pulled, and the briefcase fell heavily to the floor.

Dr. Brooks rolled to his feet, kicking the object into the light, and yanked at its buckles and straps. "My bag is somewhere near

the chair. Get the mutape on him, fast!"

She found his black satchel on the floor, plugged into the computer outlet and spread the apparatus over Mr. Barger's bed. She made a trembling fist around the Broca cup, and watched the dormant pink cheeks and eyelids



as she lowered the cup toward his skull.

The rubber rim thudded against empty air, pleating like a horse's muzzle as she pushed. The sleeping Barger face remained a picture glowing out of reach inches beneath her straining fist, behind a smell of blood. A hand from under

the covers grasped her wrist . . .

She struggled. Dr. Brooks, at the telephone, contorted his face and heaved the briefcase against the wall. It shattered into coils and smashed tubes and pieces of electronic chassis like a shower of silver Christmas ornaments, and a moan from the bed faded away.

Brooks shouted and hung up the phone. The mutape was chattering violently. He unlocked the door, flung himself to the bed and took the recorder between his hands. The grasp on her wrist relaxed, and she leaned over to decipher the punched tape as it unrolled from the machine. Its dot patterns were un verbalized bloody agony, cleanly formulated in computer language.

"He'll verbalize," Brooks said. "Just don't look at him — thank God they've found Gesner."

A red, bloated forehead above eyes fixed on her own through lenses of gray fluid as it writhed and pressed up against the Broca cup in her fist. She covered her face, and between her fingers the sleeping Barger face still lay on its pillow.

DR. BROOKS screwed his own features into a wink, and she turned away to watch the unrolling tape still chattering between his hands: "England is the only hope. We must go through immediately before direct control and defenses build against us — morphine, why did you not give me morphine? Pain is intolerable."

"Analgesics nullify the Gesner shots," Brooks said.

"Morphine," chattered the tape, "worth it, worth it, cure me when we have left for England. And hurry, they want me alive, and as

soon as they control the police..."

Turning under Dr. Brooks' twisted glance as he took the Broca cup, she went to the sink and scrubbed her hands. She found the hypodermic and phial in the black satchel and measured two cc of clear tincture of morphine, and turned back to the arm which grasped Dr. Brooks' wrist, pressing the cup hard against a swollen red mass. She rolled up the sleeve of the hospital gown which led to a raised shoulder (she wouldn't look at the face) and hesitated — another needle was already stuck in the muscle, protruding just above the skin. She found the vein and pushed the plunger in, and withdrew her needle.

Dr. Brooks said, "Get that out of there."

She took tweezers from her bathrobe pocket and carefully removed an inch of broken hypodermic shaft. The blood spurted. She reached for cotton and alcohol.

Three bells rang in the corridor as the door slid open, and Miss Erwin came fluttering in.

"Don't look, Hilda!" warned Miss Knox.

"Calling the emergency rooms," said a piping voice. "Beware of patient William Barger who may attempt to escape. He may be armed..."

The mutape chattered.

"Here, take the cup," said Dr. Brooks. He picked up the bedside

chair and placed it on the foot of the bed. Climbing onto the swaying surface like a trained ape, he reached up and loosened the screws which held the light globe in place on the ceiling, and threw it to shatter on the floor. Miss Erwin stepped backward. Then she tiptoed toward the light and steadied the chair, and stared at the patient's face in fascination. Dr. Brooks was tugging at an object resembling a camera, attached by a spring clamp between the bulbs of the ceiling fixture.

"Hilda!" Miss Knox said.

"Oh, look at his face now!"

"Subliminal picture slide," said Dr. Brooks, dropping the object to the floor with a crash. "There goes his sweet sleeping face — an illusion filling in for reality *because there was nothing else for us to see.*"

Mr. Barger's face was blotched red and covered with shiny ooze. His throat was swollen as thick as his cheeks, with lumpy rolls of neck stretched taut like strands of pink beads above the bedsheet. His mouth was hidden beneath caked blood.

The mutape read, "You are running out of time."

Three bells in the corridor as the door slid open. "Calling Dr. Gesner," said a cool nurse's voice. "Emergency. Calling Dr. Feld. Emergency."

Five internes scurried in, sur-

rounding the figure on the bed. Behind them strode rawboned Dr. Feld in a red hunting jacket. A motorchair rolled after him and stopped in the doorway, and an assistant administrator stood up and piped, "Hold him! He may be armed!"

WITH the mutape chattering and Dr. Brooks bent close over the recorder, Miss Knox stood up and prepared her needle with penicillin from the black satchel.

"Don't kill him," the administrator whined.

Three bells in the corridor. "All personnel," said the nurse's voice. "Day shift, please take notice. Beware of a patient, armed, seeking to escape from the emergency floor. All hospital personnel. Beware of a patient . . ."

Big Carl kicked the motorchair out of the doorway, stepped through and handed Dr. Brooks a blue serge suit on a hanger. After him came a nurse carrying a white uniform and a paper bag. The room was filled with an echo of voices spreading across the Mushroom.

"Step back," said Dr. Feld, stumbling over an interne.

Two student nurses came to the doorway and stood on either side, one with her hand in the photocell beam to keep the door from closing. The noise grew.

"Calling Dr. Gesner," said the cool nurse's voice.

A group of internes shuffled inside, faces averted, moving sideways in the crowd around the bed. Two attendants came striding up and stood on either side of the door, next to the student nurses.

A class of medical students filed in and moved along the wall, the taller ones standing on tiptoe to see the patient. A bearded professor in tweeds followed, whispering, "Here he comes, here he comes."

After a pause, Dr. Gesner waddled through the doorway between his nurses. Three internes came after with white coats flying open, the middle one a Hindu in a blue sash, and then a messenger boy calling, "Telegram for Dr. Gesner!" Three bells rang in the corridor, and the door slid shut.

A path cleared before Dr. Gesner as he made his way to the bed. Helped to a sitting position, he opened the telegram which had been passed from interne to interne.

"You don't mind," he said, turning to the patient's bloody face. He read the message and threw it away. "The police have been holding me for two days. Here my lawyers have a nice case against City Hall, just when this England business comes up — so you're the man who's dangerous and armed! I'm sure Hamilton isn't responsible for that story."

Dr. Gesner had removed some of the cake with Miss Knox's tweezers and was prodding the lipless inflammation.

"Wash this off as gently as you can," said Dr. Gesner, and Miss Knox stepped forward. "And the antiseptic ointment in my bag — it has a purple label."

"I had to give him morphine," said Dr. Brooks.

"Ah — and some antibiotic?"

"Penicillin," said Miss Knox.

"Ah. Now tell me, where is this other man who was put out of commission by these—these throat specialists? I'd like to examine him."

THE mutape chattered suddenly and then stopped. Dr. Brooks bent and read out loud, "Get those two on motorskates! I know them. They appear blond with their projector fields turned on; otherwise they are both narrow-faced and dark."

Dr. Gesner smiled with just the middle of his face. "We caught them in the lobby on our way in. One of my lawyers is coming with us. His son plays right tackle — young lady!" He looked straight at Miss Knox. "I understand you've been talking about this business for days, along with our friend with the cut throat. You've been in danger — those two men were still in the building on your account, I'm sure. It's a very good

thing you weren't alone, you or Dr. Brooks. I take it you were both on night duty."

Dr. Brooks said, "If any of the nurses or Dr. Gesner's students don't know what this is all about, I'm sure he'll make an announcement when we're all on the way to England. You must have some idea of what's happened. If anyone doesn't want to come, of course—"

"Treason and insubordination!" piped a hidden voice. "Under the circumstances, Dr. Hamilton will have you jailed when he finds out what you're up to, Dr. Brooks."

Brooks stretched his arm between two students and pulled a switch on the wall. The ceiling began to open, sweeping bright sunshine down the wall and making metal buttons twinkle on Dr. Feld's jacket. The ceiling slid back on rollers with a rumbling sound, until nothing was overheard but the black dots of aircraft rising toward the sun. Nearby, a whirlybird took off with a *rackety-rackety-rackety-rack!*

"I phoned the Director," Dr. Brooks told the crowd. "He's not interfering. In fact, I'm pretty sure Dr. Hamilton will come."

"Dr. Feld," said Dr. Gesner, "will you show the adman out?"

"I'm not—"

There was the sound of a blow and the assistant administrator appeared, scrabbling for his motor-

chair, which was buried among the students. His spindle limbs flailed from one side to the other until he was propelled from the room at a run, screaming, and the messenger boy vanished after him. Three bells rang in the corridor as the door closed.

Dr. Gesner raised his hand and voices were stilled, the shuffle of feet ended and the mutape chattered alone in the sunshine. He leaned over and read the tape, and as he straightened his back, even the recorder stopped still. He heaved himself to his feet with the help of two internes.

"He says—" puffed Dr. Gesner—"he says this is no time for sadism."

"LAST ones up, girlie," said Dr. Brooks.

She sat on the bed and the mutape spoke to her noisily. Big Carl had hooked two cables in place, Dr. Brooks the other two, and the floor platform began to rise through the room toward the maw of the hovering whirlybird. She tucked the covers gently around her patient's distorted throat.

The chatter stopped. She read, "This is something the Royalty predicted for weeks ahead of time. I thought we could avoid it, but the Silvertongue people must have fed me the virus at our last luncheon meeting. Then when negotiations remained uncertain — thanks to Royalty sentiment on

my board — they came visiting while I slept and injected me with a larger dose and planted the projectors. I woke up in awful pain. You were there, young lady — I screamed, silently, with my features. I was unable to raise my head. You wiped blood from my cheeks with your palm and cleaned it on a piece of cotton. You thought it was under water. Your eyes turned away before your hand left the projector field — or else you could not see what you could not expect. While I looked on, you treated me like a sleeping baby and asked Dr. Brooks about radio . . .” The perforated tape had stopped feeding from the machine.

“His tape!” she cried.

“Don’t worry,” Dr. Brooks said. “We’re unplugged from the hospital system, but I reserved the only ambulance with its own computer circuit. It conveys limited ideas, but that’s better than nothing.”

Big Carl had erected the safety gates. “Look below,” he said.

She stood up and pressed her forehead to the latticework of the nearest gate. At first there was only a diamond-shaped patch of sky, with the Silvertongue factory in the bottom corner. Then, as the platforms swung on its cables, she saw the curved edge of the Mushroom, and the Administration roof swarming with figures on

motorskates. They circled among the squat mountain laurels, pointing upward. The ambulance walls settled around her suddenly blocking the view, and the belly of the vehicle rumbled shut. With a bump, the floor platform was deposited on its girders.

Dr. Brooks said, “We’re away — I’ll have the pilot phone the others!”

“Where’s the socket?” Miss Knox asked. “Mr. Barger and I were talking.”

Dr. Brooks plugged into an overhead beam and the mutape immediately began to chatter: “What is your first name, Miss Knox?”

“Della,” she said.

“Pete Brooks.”

“Carl,” the big man growled as he folded the gates.

“Call me Bill,” said Mr. Barger’s tape. Mr. Barger’s square hand motioned her closer beside him. “Della, do you know what we must do when we reach England? We must use the atom bomb first, before the admen have full control. Only then may we return to the America we know. The real America.”

“Do the English know?” asked Miss Knox.

“Of course,” she said. “They heard the broadcasts, and their scientists understood. They have supported our Royalty Party for years. I think I could increase the

range of my device and reach America before they reached England — but there is no time for that. The world must unite against invasion. Even the Russians know that there is no limit to the scope or methods of greedy marketing specialists”—the machine punched out a pattern of giggles and chuckles — “and I doubt if the Russians could ever invent a radiocompressor.”

“Are *all* the admen part of this?”

“Absolutely not, young lady! The very great majority has always followed a strict code of ethics that the very small minority has always subverted. Many ethical admen are in the birds now, on their way to England — knowing perfectly well that England is poor territory for emotional salesmanship.”

“But why a Royalty Party in a democracy?” Miss Knox asked.

“Royalty—” The tape showed amusement. “Not aristocracy. Royalty, as in share of and control over. Motto of the Royalty Party: ‘The inventor is worthy of his invention,’ meaning the right to say how his discovery shall or shall not be used — or not be used at all, if it can only be destructive—as well as sharing in the proceeds. Unreasonable attitudes are not possible; we have an Appeals Board that can overrule a pig-headed patentee. Radiocompres-

sors were intended for beautification of environment, not deception or thought control.”

“Why England?” she persisted.

“Pretty generally, the Royalty code is and has been standard procedure there. Like their constitution, it hasn’t had to be put in writing.”

“Aren’t there slums and unsightly monuments in England, too?”

“Of course. Why do you think they would like to have the invention? But it’s safe there; it won’t be subverted to thought control and sales engineering . . . Tell me, Della, is Dr. Gesner on this ambulance? I would like to meet him.”

Dr. Brooks had come back from the control room. He sat beside her on the bed. “Dr. Gesner went ahead with Dr. Hamilton,” he said, “because you’re healthier than either one of them. But, Mr. Barger — Bill — doesn’t light-wave interference need two overlapping projectors plus the subliminal image? We only found one.”

The recorder chattered: “I am sure the other is also somewhere in the bed. It is harmless by itself, and I am glad we have it — it will help me instruct a team of British physicists and engineers. But who is in the other compartment? I hate to play chess with the same people over and over.”

“I’m afraid he doesn’t play,” said Brooks. “I think it’s old Boney, who had his throat cut be-

cause your friends thought he might get you some help too soon."

The recorder punched out, "I would like to meet him," as Miss Knox jumped from the bed, pulling Dr. Brooks by the arm. The machine chattered again briefly and she stopped and read, "Do not neglect me altogether," and ran on. She opened the door to the other bed compartment.

Miss Erwin fell on her with a cuddly embrace, and then Dr. Brooks reached over her shoulder to shake Miss Erwin's hand. "How's the patient?" he asked.

Across the compartment, Boney's face expanded in a three-cornered smile.

"At least he slept," said Miss Erwin. "That poor Mr. Barger — all the time we thought he was in coma, he was wide awake!"

Miss Knox said, "Oh, my God!"

"I HEAR more jets!" wailed Miss Erwin's voice from the other room. "Why are they all flying home tonight, and we have to leave? Carl, are we — are we a quarter of the way to England?"

"No," Big Carl answered.

Miss Knox called through the doorway, "This one won't let me open the hatch!"

Hunched across the bed, his hair falling over his forehead, Dr. Brooks played chess with Mr. Barger. "Not in here," he said. "You can open the emergency hatch in back if you like night air. But don't expect to see the bombers — or anything but our own landing gear."

She slid past him and shut herself into the small rear compartment and turned out the light. She felt for the emergency lock and swung her weight backward as the damp black air screamed in and tugged at her face — the whirlybird showed its fat thigh with a *rackety-rackety-rack ground-hog!* Tears ran down her cheeks, distorting her first view of darkness.

Beyond the machine's ungainly silhouette she peered and saw flashes of yellow light on water — but nothing, nothing familiar. Thus, squinting desperately toward home, she noticed it, marking the horizon. A glowing mushroom. It must have been gigantic.

— LEONARD RUBIN

