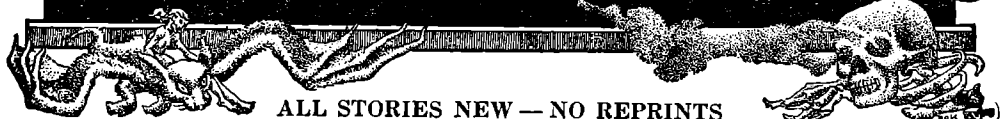


# Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

Cover by Matt Fox

**NOVELETTE**

**SHALLAJAI** . . . . . Arthur J. Burks 18  
*The greatest indictment of man is that animals, birds and snakes fear him. He even fears his own kind; often he fears himself. That was why they had come to the Sea of Glass.*

**SHORT STORIES**

**THE WEIRD TAILOR** . . . . . Robert Bloch 6  
*Only a connoisseur of horrors would have appreciated the tailor's window dummy.*

**THE RHYTHM OF THE RATS** . . . . . Eric Frank Russell 40  
*"Some day we shall deal with this horror as our forefathers dealt with the witch that bore him. . . ."*

**REBELS' REST** . . . . . Seabury Quinn 50  
*They said that ghosts walked in the cemetery after sunset. Ghosts of the men who lay in Rebels' Rest.*

**WOE WATER** . . . . . H. Russell Wakefield 55  
*Only ten anonymous letters that morning—the rush was over. But as one pointed out, Angela had always been afraid of water.*

**CORDONA'S SKULL** . . . . . Mary Elizabeth Counselman 62  
*There is a horrible sort of anonymity about a skull—yours, mine, anybody's.*

**THE CLOSING DOOR** . . . . . August Derleth 72  
*He had been warned to have the church clean by sundown—but still he couldn't help but be disconcerted in the dusk by the door which never could be propped open.*

**MRS. HAWK** . . . . . Margaret St. Clair 78  
*. . . Mrs. Hawk had much to offer a prospective husband—beauty and a prosperous pig farm.*

**FLY DOWN DEATH** . . . . . Cleve Cartmill 83  
*He had his faults; his mother admitted it when he was a child. And that was 500 years ago.*

**VERSE**

**THE CITY** . . . . . H. P. Lovecraft 48

**PATTERN** . . . . . Dorothy Quick 61

**WEIRDISMS** . . . . . Lee Brown Coye 77

**THE EYRIE** . . . . . 93

**WEIRD TALES CLUB** . . . . . 4

Published bi-monthly by Weird Tales, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y. Reentered as second-class matter January 26, 1940, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription rates: One year in the United States and possessions, \$1.50. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession.

Copyright, 1950, by Weird Tales. Copyright in Great Britain.  
 Title registered in U. S. Patent Office.



Heading by Vincent Napoli

# Fly Down Death

BY CLEVE CARTMILL

*The height of folly to immortalize  
a growing race until after the  
stars themselves are conquered.*

**D**AMON DE BREK had his faults. His mother admitted it when he was a child. But that was 500 years ago, and even then she didn't know

what his greatest fault would be: he could not die.

He looked across the shaded room at Wilma, and thought of the seven women he had married. Each had grown old, two had become senile, one had been a traffic victim, one had been killed in the fury of World War V—and all had died.

Now he was about to commit matrimony for the eighth time, and it would be the same story all over again. Wilma, now in her plump thirties, would age—and die. But he would stay as he was, as he had stayed for 470 years, an apparent youngster.

He would have to change his name again, contrive a new set of birth credentials, and move to a new community. He felt suddenly nauseated.

"I want to die with you," he said.

Her dark eyes widened. "Of all things," she said.

He smiled wryly. "I don't know why I said that." He paused, frowned. "I do know. I don't want to live in a world that has no Wilma. I guess that's it."

She got out of her chair, crossed to him. She put a slim hand on his auburn hair. "Thanks," she said. "Thanks very much."

He rose and looked into her upturned face. "There's something I have to do. I don't know how long it will take, but I'll be back. Will you wait?"

Characteristically, she didn't ask questions. Her eyes were untroubled, her brow serene. "I'll wait."

He went out to his runabout and got it into the air without thinking of the mechanical operations he performed. He flattened cut at the civilian level automatically and fixed his thoughts on his task.

Somewhere in the world, somewhere, was Dr. H. J. Clarke.

The doctor, too, must have lived under a variety of names, must have married a variety of women, must also have grown tired of living.

Damon remembered their only meeting. He had been 128 years old, and puzzled. His first two wives had died, he was using his third pseudonym. James, Gracken? Which was it? He couldn't remember.

But he remembered the doctor seeking him out. "Perhaps," he said, "I did wrong. Perhaps one shouldn't interfere with the life process. I did it only on you. And myself, of course. I was playing God, and I have come to apologize."

Damon looked at the doctor, white-haired but vigorous, seeming to be in his forties, and listened with astonishment to the tale of two centuries. Dr. Clarke had been at Concord, and the shot heard round the world had been fired at him. He had discovered the stimulant, which replaced body tissues as fast as they were used, in 1791. He had proved to his own satisfaction, in 1950, that one injection would make a man immortal, barring accident, and had given the baby Damon de Brek the treatment.

"But why?" Damon asked in despair.

"Curiosity," Dr. Clarke answered. "And I say again, I'm sorry."

But now what, he asked himself as scat-

tered evening lights began to glow beneath him. Did one place an advertisement blindly and hope to attract the attention of the man wisest of all in the ways of anonymity? Dr. Clarke had forgotten more than he, Damon, would ever know, and like himself was probably uninterested in public communication.

A man who had lived more than seven centuries had seen the pattern of human events repeat itself over and over again. He had seen democracies devolve into dictatorships, and vice versa. He had observed the repetitious nature of events, differing only in the extent of scientific progress. He would want no part of history, dodging as he must the cold brightness of publicity which would result from exposure.

Such a man, who had read everything, would have no interest in reading. Such a man, like himself, who had heard and seen everything, would have no interest in looking at screens. Such a man, like himself, who must devoutly wish he could die would not be concerned with the paltry efforts of the living. How, then, could he be found?

Music? It offered possibilities. Not a symphony, not a concerto, not a suite or sonata, for the doctor might not be a classical devotee. But whatever he was, even if a music hater, he could not escape a popular song, a hit tune. That ubiquitous blight of civilization was always in everybody's ears. It was inescapable.

HE BROUGHT his plane down on his own building and descended to his apartment in thoughtful silence. He flipped the switch that converted one wall of his bedroom into a mirror and stared hard at his perpetually youthful features.

"Get cold," he said, and the idea was born.

He decided on a harp, for that was the instrument with which he was most familiar. Also, it would give the song that feeling of holy desire for death which he wanted to achieve.

He uncovered the harp and began to doodle. He let his fingers stray idly over the strings until a fugitive, haunting phrase was born. He built his melody about this,

and let the words form themselves in his mind.

His was not a commercial voice, but he didn't sing the words, he whispered them. They told his own tale, a man unable to die who had found true love. If only he could "*Get Cold*" when his loved one did, he could live—and die—happily.

He made a wire recording and went to bed.

**J** RANDOLPH CALLAN, the producer, received Damon after an understandable wait, and listened to the song. His mouth, a thin, prim line above his square chin, showed nothing. His dark, alert eyes under white bushy brows, held no expression. When the song was ended, he pushed three buttons.

Two girls and a man came in. "Listen to this," Callan said, and played the song again.

Damon hardly noticed their reactions. He knew what they would be. Tears would sting the eyes when that haunting phrase came up, with the words, "Death, the sweet couch beholding." A gulp would come with "At last, at last, get cold."

Seven minutes later he had made the agreement, in an hour he had signed. He went to see Wilma.

"I didn't ask you," he said. "But it's under your name. I didn't want to use my own."

He didn't tell her that he was afraid somebody might look up the record on himself, which existed in various places. He watched, with somber satisfaction, the glow in her dear dark eyes, the smile, the puzzlement.

"But—" she said.

"Please," he said. "Indulge me."

"Of course."

**I**T WAS two weeks before the doctor got in touch with Wilma, and then only indirectly.

Damon was there when three polite young men, dressed in sober business cloth, arrived and requested a private interview with her. They showed credentials which said they were agents of the International

Bureau of Investigation, and were quite firm, though still polite, about Damon going elsewhere. He went outside, in the patio.

He was recalled almost immediately. The trio's spokesman wasted no time on preliminaries. "Damon de Brek?"

"Yes," Damon said easily. "I expected you sooner."

This got a flicker of surprise. "You expected us?"

"I expected somebody. Not necessarily you."

"I—see," said the young man in a tone which indicated he did not see at all. "Very well. We have orders to bring you unharmed, but by force if necessary, to headquarters."

"I'm ready. Will you allow me a few moments in privacy with my fiancée?"

"Of course." The young man turned to Wilma. "Sorry to intrude. Thank you for your courtesy."

Wilma inclined her head, her expression one of fear and puzzlement. The men withdrew, to wait in their official aircar for Damon.

"What does it mean, Damon?" Wilma asked anxiously.

He took her face in his hands. "Happiness for us," he said gently. "Don't worry, I'll be back soon."

"But all those names," she said. "They read me a list of six or eight names and asked me if I knew any one of them. If I had thought it was going to get you in trouble—"

"Not trouble," he interrupted. "Just the opposite. I'll have to go now. I'll explain when I get back. Will you return my runabout to my place, please?"

He kissed her and went outside. The doctor, he reflected, must have kept in touch with his various lives. "All those names" must have been a list of his successive identities.

The young men took him to IBI headquarters, landed on the roof, and escorted him to the Bureau chief, who was, of course, Dr. Clarke.

Damon was shocked by the doctor's appearance. The man *looked* old. Not that his skin hung in folds, nor did his hands

show the liver-spots of age. It was apparent to Damon, as it would not have been to anybody else, in the doctor's eyes and posture.

The eyes, alert and gray behind corrective lenses, held an awareness of mortality, as do the eyes of all men who are born to die. The posture was that of all mortal men; indicating a spiritual eye looking over the shoulder at the gradual approach of the grim phantom.

"Sit down!" Dr. Clarke snapped. "And don't talk."

Damon obeyed, surprised. If long life imparted anything to a person, it was patience. He well remembered the quiet patience of the doctor nearly 400 years before. But this man before him had none of that. He was quick and sharp, with the restlessness of those who see an end.

"I heard the song," Dr. Clarke said. "I knew it was yours. You can forget it."

"Forget what?"

"Quiet! You can forget your desire to die, unless you kill yourself or a mountain falls on you. I won't give you the antidote."

"You found one?"

"I ordered you to be silent! I'll have you gagged if you interrupt again. Of course, I found an antidote. Can't you see that I've aged, that I'm dying? I've done it deliberately, for the same reason you want it. I found *the* woman. And to forestall your next question, I'll tell you why I didn't make her immortal. I couldn't. She has a cell-destroying disease that had gone too far to be checked, when I discovered it. Now you may ask your next question, though I know what it will be. It's *why*."

"Exactly," Damon replied. "Why won't you let me die?"

"Because I'm disgusted. Not only with you, but with me. What have you done with your life? One moment."

The doctor stamped from his desk to a wall panel, where he made certain motions and sounds. This slid aside to reveal a series of cabinets. He took a thick folder from one of these and returned to his desk.

"This is my personal, secret file on you. I've assembled it myself. It has several

gaps, but it represents the negligible contributions you have made to the common good."

**H**E REMOVED a single sheet from the file and scanned it.

"You were president of the Western Federation of Nations two hundred years ago. You held that position until the planetary amalgamation. That came about through no fault of yours, I might add. You have published two volumes of imaginary mathematics, of dubious value. Can you name anything else you have done in the common interest?"

"No-o," Damon admitted.

"Exactly. Yours has been a career of hiding. You've risen to mediocrity in a number of trades and professions, abandoning each with each change of identity. You're nothing but an immortal dilettante. And I say the same thing of myself. That's another reason why I am dying."

Dr. Clarke fell quiet, but his contempt was almost audible in the still room. His eyes were filled with it, and his mouth curled. His strong hands were tense on Damon's dossier. Damon remained in silent thought.

"If the existence of any individual can be justified at all," Dr. Clarke said presently, "it is only to the degree that he strives for the advancement of the race. I pride myself on one achievement in that respect—you."

Damon uttered a short, explosive laugh. "You've just denounced me as being worthless."

"And truly denounced. What I mean is that you will be a living monument to my ability to have immortalized the race. If I had so chosen, all men could have lived forever in perfect health. It will remain a secret, but *you* will know. That's a source of pride to me."

Damon frowned at the doctor. "Ego-mania," he said.

Dr. Clarke shrugged. "In a sense, I created you. I am the only man in history who has created an immortal. I am going to my cremation with the knowledge that I have left my mark. And I have no fear that you will destroy yourself without my coopera-

tion. You'd have done it before this, if you were suicidal."

Damon sighed, his mind darting in and around the doctor's various statements, seeking some weak spot where he could drive a wedge of argument. Dr. Clarke put into words Damon's own despairing summation.

"True, I have become the active head of this organization. I held this position once before, under a different identity. That in itself is an achievement, but after all, I am merely the director of a spy ring. Still, this puts me in an invulnerable position as far as you are concerned. I can see that you are determined to obtain the formula for the antidote. But you're helpless. You can't threaten me with violence or torture, for I have the means of preventing you—a staff of strong young men, instantly available. You can't threaten me with exposure, because I am dying. You can't threaten me with death, because even if you should kill me before I could summon help, you'd defeat your own purpose. You'd still be immortal, and I alone know how to give you a normal death."

This, Damon reflected, was the sad and bitter truth. Better that he get out of here to where he could think in private. He had to reach a decision about himself—and Wilma.

Dr. Clarke forestalled any such action.

"Dismiss any idea of leaving this building until after my death."

Damon stared. "I'm a prisoner? On what charge?"

"Any charge I choose, or none. You will simply disappear." Dr. Clarke smiled grimly. "You've done it before."

"But why?" Damon demanded.

"Because you've learned too much about practical psychology. You might—just might—discover some weak spot in my position, some way to force the secret from me. If you're helpless under lock and key, you can't translate any such discovery into action. And I won't see you again. I'll leave orders to release you when I'm dead."

"But that might be twenty years or more!"

"And what is that to a man who has lived centuries?"

"And . . . my fiancée?"

Dr. Clarke shrugged. "There will be others."

"You've gone mad!"

DR. CLARKE'S eyes were cold, dispassionate. "Argument gets us nowhere." He touched a button, and two strong men came in. "You know what to do," Dr. Clarke said. "He is to have every possible care, and absolutely no opportunity to kill himself."

The two men advanced on Damon. He promptly knocked one down, kicked the other in the groin, and turned on Dr. Clarke.

"I'm going out of here," he said quietly. He strode to the door which opened to admit four more men. It closed behind them and they stood, bunched, with their backs against it.

"He is not to be harmed," Dr. Clarke warned.

Damon sized up the situation. The two behind him would be back in action any moment, and the quartette at the door blocked the only exit. He must get his back to a wall and try to break through when they advanced.

He darted to the wall and waited, muscles tense and poised, his thoughts marching in calm array. The first two were up now, one white with pain, the other shaking grogginess from his head. They moved on him, a slow step at a time, and two others moved in from the other flank. The remaining two stood as they were, guarding the door.

Not a word was spoken. It was like a ballet, lacking only music, the dancers closing in graceful adagio on the poised and watchful quarry. They moved in a semi-circle, closing the gaps as they drew nearer, blocking him in front and on either side.

Damon suddenly fainted to one side, and with a blurring change of direction plunged at the first two, the weakest point of the attacking formation. His fists moved with the speed of striking snakes and the force of clubs, and he was through. He leaped for the door.

The guards were as quick and agile as he,

but they were under disadvantages. They were not to harm him, and he had the jump on them.

He reached the door ten paces ahead of his nearest pursuer, slugged one guard with a lightning jab and seized the other. He hoisted him high, with smooth-flowing motion, and hurled him horizontally at the mass of his would-be captors. He jerked at the door, and was through.

He ran headlong into a dozen or more reinforcements, no doubt summoned by Dr. Clarke, and was overpowered gently but thoroughly. There was no formality of facing him with Dr. Clarke; he was led to a remote part of the building, to an air-conditioned, comfortably furnished apartment.

They took everything from him, in polite silence, and left him naked behind a strong locked door. He glared at it in frustration.

"Mr. de Brek," a voice said, and he jerked his eyes toward a screened communicator high on a wall. "You will find clothing, if you desire any, in the linen closet. The recreation room is stocked with everything possible for exercise and entertainment. The library holds a wide range of reading matter, from ancient to modern. Food will be prepared as and when you wish, delivered by a service elevator which opens into the wall of the dining alcove.

When you want to play competitive games, there are Plastoids, specially constructed, to act as your opponents. Your apartment will be cleaned by Plastoids. As you know, these have no metal parts and are virtually indestructible. Even if you could immobilize and dismantle one, you would find nothing which could be made dangerous to your welfare. If you should endanger your health by any such childish action as a hunger strike, you will be hospitalized and force-fed. There is no metal of any kind in your apartment, so don't bother to search. You will have no direct contact with any human being as long as you are healthy, and, as has been said, self-induced illness will not improve your lot. The wall switch, at eye level directly below this speaker, will enable you to send requests to our Service Director. That is all."

Damon went to the wall and threw the switch.

"Yes?" the same voice answered.

"Will you send me up a portable cutting torch?"

A short pause ensued. Then, "That is Item Twelve on our restricted list, Mr. de Brek. Sorry."

Damon opened the switch. Not even a sense of humor in the joint, he thought bitterly.

HE PASSED the first week in earnest and futile consideration of his situation. There was indeed no metal available. The lights were gas-filled plastic tubes, their contacts buried in the wall. All else was smooth and rounded plastic, even the bathroom fixtures. The clothes were shining Plastene, with detachable and rounded fastenings. He couldn't cut his throat even if he had wanted to, and attack against that constantly guarded door was idiocy.

If he had been on vacation, he reflected wryly, he couldn't have chosen a more comfortable place. The food was delicious and plentiful, delivered shortly after his order in the tiny service elevator. The door of this was locked electronically unless the elevator were in direct alignment with it, so he had no access to the shaft itself as an avenue of escape.

But escape to what? He could possibly evade capture by the IBI, though that was doubtful, but it would mean that he would be hunted by the thousands of trained hunters for the next hundred years or so. No, if he escaped, he must escape to freedom—and Wilma.

This meant that he must find some means of forcing Dr. Clarke to turn over the death-giving formula. No reason, then, to hold Damon de Brek in prison.

But the doctor seemed invulnerable, as he had so succinctly pointed out. Still, there must be a weak spot.

Plastoids, admitted by guards who did not enter the room, cleaned the apartment. They rapped notice of completion on the door and trooped out with their buckets and brooms. One night, Damon requested a chess opponent, and one of the glistening,

featureless creatures defeated him two games out of three in a three-hour session.

But he spent most of his time in the library, hoping he might get an idea from the array of books, printed and recorded. He found one he had never seen before, an old-fashioned volume printed before he was born. He had not finished the preface of "*If Man LIVE*" before he knew its author was Dr. Clarke, writing under a pseudonym.

He read it eagerly, hoping to find some fact that could be turned to his own advantage. Certain phrases stuck in his mind: ". . . continued existence would not necessarily bring wisdom to the individual. Many would merely grow older, cluttering their memories with unused knowledge." "It would be the height of folly to immortalize a growing race until after the stars themselves are conquered. Mankind must have room to expand, and if the secret of immortality is ever discovered, it must not be revealed until horizons are limitless."

On the Wandering Jew theme, granting that such a man ever existed: ". . . disappearing every forty years or so, for mortal men would kill the immortal, out of jealousy, fear, awe, and other emotions. And Love? how he must have longed for death with this or that mate, or that she could be immortal too: How wretched, oh miserable wretch!"

The doctor, young in his immortality at the time of writing, devoted two whole chapters to the discussion of Power.

"It would depend on the man," he summed up. "He could remain merely inconspicuous, if he were unambitious and selfish. But still without revealing his immortality, he could rule the race; through dictators of his own choosing, guiding them to his own selfish ends, or through benevolent directors, leading mankind down a glorious road of noble destiny that might reach even to the far glittering stars. Perhaps such a man may rise some day. Perhaps . . ."

Damon tossed the book aside. He knew all these things, many of them through experience. One fact alone was new: that Dr. Clarke had intended baby Damon de Brek

to be that leader down that "glorious road of noble destiny" to the stars. All the rest was familiar fare. All the rest—But wait!

He reopened to the Wandering Jew section, read it swiftly and narrowed his eyes in thought. He had found the doctor's point of vulnerability. He had motive, now, to escape.

HE PUT his mind to work on that problem, and answerless days and nights crept past. He played chess again with a Plastoid, but his mind was not on the game. He was roundly defeated, and even before the departing Plastoid reached the door his eyes were closed in thought.

He couldn't rush the door on the rare occasions when it opened briefly. An overwhelming number of guards were present at such times. And yet the door was the only way out. He must be able to walk through it unchallenged, and that was impossible.

Or was it? The glimmering of an idea, having to do with the long-ago period when he was a clothes designer, sparkled faintly in his mind. He went to the clothes closet and examined the gleaming array of Plastene. It had the shimmer of the Plastoids. If he draped it properly about himself and secured it with the fasteners, he might possibly pass as one.

But he had the patience of centuries, and caution learned over the years. He spent two days examining the problem and planning his split-second schedule if he should win to freedom. He spent hours experimenting before the mirror, trying to conceal certain necessary roughness in the surface of his garment from the casual eye.

He achieved what he thought was a masterpiece of head covering and featureless mask. The pinpoint eyeholes were almost invisible even to him. But the legs and armpits gave him trouble.

However, he was finally satisfied, if a bit dubiously, and requested a chess player late on the third night. The colloidal automaton played with its usual conditioned brilliance, and Damon was checkmated two games straight. As the third game approached its inevitable end, Damon went



into the next room as the nerveless Plastoid considered a move. He returned with two stout belts and lashed its ankles together. Then he shoe-horned into his costume and went to the door.

This was the moment of crisis, but he had considered it well. The corridor was dimly-lighted, and the six guards were expecting a Plastoid. He had practiced the mechanical, though somehow fluid, gait.

He rapped. The door opened. He shuffled through, turned along the hallway and forced himself to move at the deliberate speed of a Plastoid. He made it to the first turn without incident and rapidly approached the critical point of escape from the building, the guarded exit. He felt certain that one guard only would be posted at this time of night. He had personal business with that gentleman, for he knew that this building's Plastoids would not be allowed to leave it.

The guard was there, and watched Damon's approach with increasing suspicion. "Halt!" was the command at ten paces, but the guard made no move toward his blaster. Plastoids were conditioned never to harm human beings. Damon continued to advance steadily.

"Oh, Lord," the guard muttered. "Another one gone haywire." The guard stepped directly in front of Damon and uttered the sure-fire command: "In the name of humanity, stop!"

**D**AMON laid a long, looping right on the man's chin, caught him as he crumpled, and dragged him into the cubicle where personnel comings and goings were recorded. He stripped off the uniform, bound and gagged the unconscious guard, and emerged within seconds. He went to the roof, commandeered an official air car, and headed for his own apartment. Seconds were precious now, for the alarm might be given at any moment.

And the face of the guard he had slugged appeared on his screen just as he drifted to his own roof.

"All patrols attention! The special prisoner has escaped. He has an official car, and is wearing a guard's uniform. He will prob-

ably get rid of both of these. The Director is on his way to headquarters to—"

Damon jumped into his own car and took off. He dared not chance a change of clothes; they would expect him to do just that, and he might not even now get out of sight before a patrol arrived. He allowed himself a slight smile at the thought of where he was going. Nobody would look for him at the Director's home.

He was admitted by Mrs. Clarke, a serene, graying woman of great beauty. Damon was struck by her great blue eyes, which seemed lighted from within by a calm, spiritual glow. She took in Damon's uniform without comment or change of expression, and invited him inside in a voice full of rich music. He got to the point at once.

"Your husband wishes you to join him if you can. It is a matter of utmost importance and secrecy. That's why he sent a guard instead of calling you."

"Certainly," she said. "I'll be ready at once."

She asked no questions then, nor after they had taken off for a hiding-place Damon had used on several occasions when he had reason to disappear. This was a perfectly camouflaged dwelling high on a nearby mountain, deep in a park-like forest. A spring gurgled there, and he had imported every modern convenience.

He brought his runabout down in a steep curve that intersected electronic devices that opened what appeared to be the face of a slope. He drifted through the opening into a vaulted, well-lighted chamber, and helped his passenger to the soft floor covered with sparkling Malanite.

Mrs. Clarke looked around with interest at the flowing curves, the tapestries, the artfully hung paintings.

"How perfectly beautiful," she said in her perfectly musical voice. "I wonder who designed it?"

"Will you please come into the main building?"

He led her through a voice-operated panel, tuned to his basic pitch, into the apartment, and she gasped at its quiet splendor. She fingered the soft, glowing

fabric of an inclined chair and sank into its curved embrace.

"I didn't know there was such furniture as this," she murmured.

"There isn't. I designed and made these furnishings in my spare time."

She considered this statement in thoughtful silence. She raised her eyes to his presently. "Then you are not an IBI guard?"

"No."

"I—see. My husband did not send you?"

"No. I kidnapped you."

"But why?"

"Your husband has something I want."

"He won't be blackmailed."

"I believe he will."

A short silence ensued while she appeared to be in deep thought. Then, "And if he refuses?"

"I'll have to kill you," Damon said softly. "I'm sorry."

"He'll refuse, and if you were my age you'd know that. You're young enough to think that death is something awful. I'm old enough to know that it doesn't matter, and so is my husband. You're using adolescent thinking."

"I'm afraid," Damon said, "you don't know some important things about your husband. And I do. But I must get to work. Will you give me the data on his private, closed channel? I can reach him through public relay stations, but I know he will want this kept in the very strictest secrecy."

"Very well," she said after a thoughtful pause, and gave him the information.

"Thank you," Damon said. "Before I go into my laboratory, I'd like to mention that it's useless to try to escape. The exits and entrances here are tuned to me alone. I wouldn't like you to tire yourself."

"Even if I am about to die?" she asked wryly.

"Even if you are about to die."

HE WENT into his laboratory, tuned his transmitter to the Director's private channel, and presently the doctor's face filled Damon's screen.

The doctor caught his breath when he

recognized Damon. "How could you call on this channel?" he demanded.

"Your wife gave me the dope. I've kidnapped her, and I am prepared to go as far as necessary to get the formula for the antidote."

"You wouldn't . . . kill her?"

"Yes."

"What good would it do you?" the doctor asked angrily. "After I refuse to give you the formula, you'd have not helped yourself one iota. You'd still be what you are. And I *will* find you, eventually."

"I don't think you will refuse," Damon answered. "I think I have found your one vulnerable spot. Which is more important, your wife and the rest of your life, or leaving a meaningless monument to your dying ego?"

"I—don't know," Dr. Clarke said slowly.

"You've already sacrificed immortality for her. Are you going to make that sacrifice a joke for stubborn pride?"

"If I should give you the information you want, what would you do next?"

"Return your wife to her home."

"You'd walk into the arms of my agents?"

"Not a bit of it," Damon said. "You'd have no reason to hold me, once I had the formula."

"There's the matter of kidnapping," Dr. Clarke pointed out. "Punishable by death."

"Oh, no. You'll have to promise to drop the charge, and you can do it. Nobody but you, your wife and I know about this, and we can keep it secret."

"Suppose I give you false data, and arrest you again. You wouldn't escape a second time."

"If you were considering that, Doctor, you'd have done it before now. I'll accept your word of honor, but you'll have to give it to me. Another thing, Doctor. Perhaps you're trying to have my transmitter located. At the first alarm, and I have protective devices here, I'll break this off and do what I must."

"Let me appeal to you once more, Damon," Dr. Clarke said earnestly. "Did you read my book?"

"Yes."

"Doesn't the possibility stir you?"

"As much as it did you. But I resent the inevitability of the thing. I have no choice. I have the same horror of living forever that normal people have of dying."

"I see. Very well. I have a certain sympathy for you, naturally. And I . . . love my wife, Damon"

"I understand, Doctor."

"And I don't want to see you again, Damon. I would find that distasteful. I won't even go home to meet my wife. She can call me. I give you my word of honor that your conditions will be met, and that the information I am about to divulge is true. You will promise that no harm will come to my wife."

"I promise."

DR. CLARKE gave him the formula, and Damon returned Mrs. Clarke. She didn't bother to be polite on the return trip. Her voice did not reflect animosity or contempt, but the words themselves were razor-edged.

"Persons who show the cowardice you have shown aren't grown up, whoever you are," she said. "A man who goes out to fight for what he wants—good or bad—is at least a *man*. A blackmailer is a child crying for the moon. I hope I never see you again, and I shall remember your actions with shame."

Damon didn't answer. He went home and to bed.

The next morning he remained a long time in silent thought. Then he cleaned himself up and went directly to IBI headquarters and asked to see the Director. He may have been recognized, but no one spoke to him.

Dr. Clarke's aging face hardened with anger when Damon was ushered into his private office.

"Wait until I speak my piece," Damon said. "I've thought a great deal since last night, and I admit that your wife is right. I wasn't grown up. My resentment against living was adolescent. I was kidding myself when I thought I wanted to grow old and

Damon shook hands and went out. There remained the problem of Wilma.

He drifted down for a landing on her building, and sat for a while in thought. He was beginning a new life, not another in a series of lives. As in everything else, he had also been a dilettante in matrimony.

He recalled a phrase from Dr. Clarke's book: ". . . that glorious road . . . that might reach even to the far glittering stars. Perhaps such a man may rise some day. Perhaps . . ."

Damon activated his machine and took off.

---

die. Now that I have the choice, I'm going on living and carry out the program suggested in your book. But you're going to die, Doctor, and I think the secret of my immortality should be preserved. Will you give it to me?"

"Never," Dr. Clarke said firmly. "You're not mature enough to have such responsibility. But I found it. So can you, eventually, after you have conquered space and provided living room for an expanding race of immortals."

"Yes, I see your point. And I can do it. Barring accident, I have forever."

"The stars first, Damon."

"Yes, the stars first. Good-bye, Doctor."

"One thing, Damon. Mature slowly. There is so much to learn, in embarking on the greatest program of all time, but you have all time in which to learn."