

# FANTASTIC

NOVEMBER

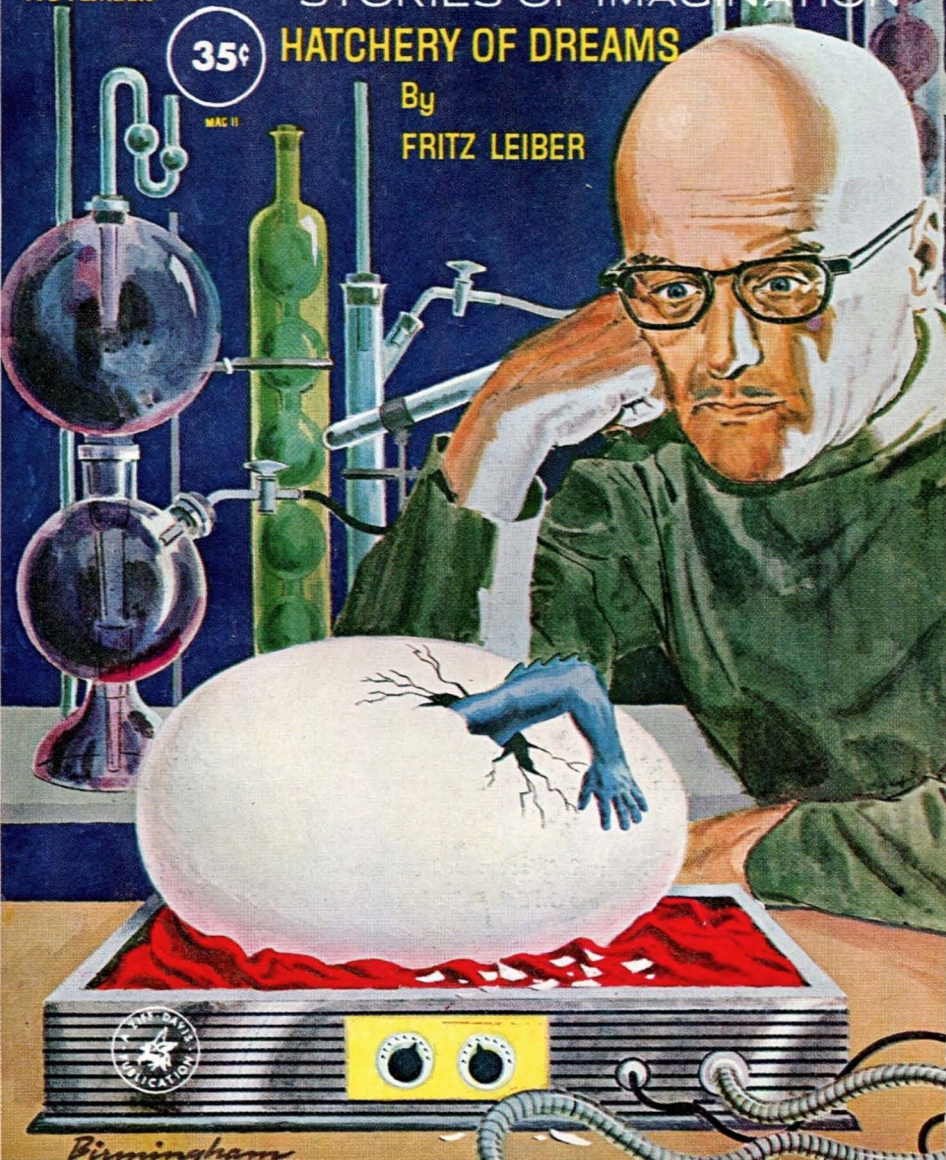
STORIES OF IMAGINATION

35¢

HATCHERY OF DREAMS

MAC II

By  
FRITZ LEIBER



Birmingham

# FANTASTIC

STORIES OF IMAGINATION

NOVEMBER 1961

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## NOVELLA

### SPECIAL EFFECT

by *J. F. Bone* ..... 22

## SHORT STORIES

### HATCHERY OF DREAMS

by *Fritz Leiber* ..... 8

### TO HEAVEN STANDING UP (Fantasy Classic)

by *Paul Ernst* ..... 85

### THE LIVING END

by *Henry Slesar* ..... 99

### ... BUT WHO KNOWS HUER, OR HUEN?

by *Rog Phillips* ..... 110

## FEATURES

ACCORDING TO YOU ..... 6

EDITORIAL ..... 7

COMING NEXT MONTH ..... 109

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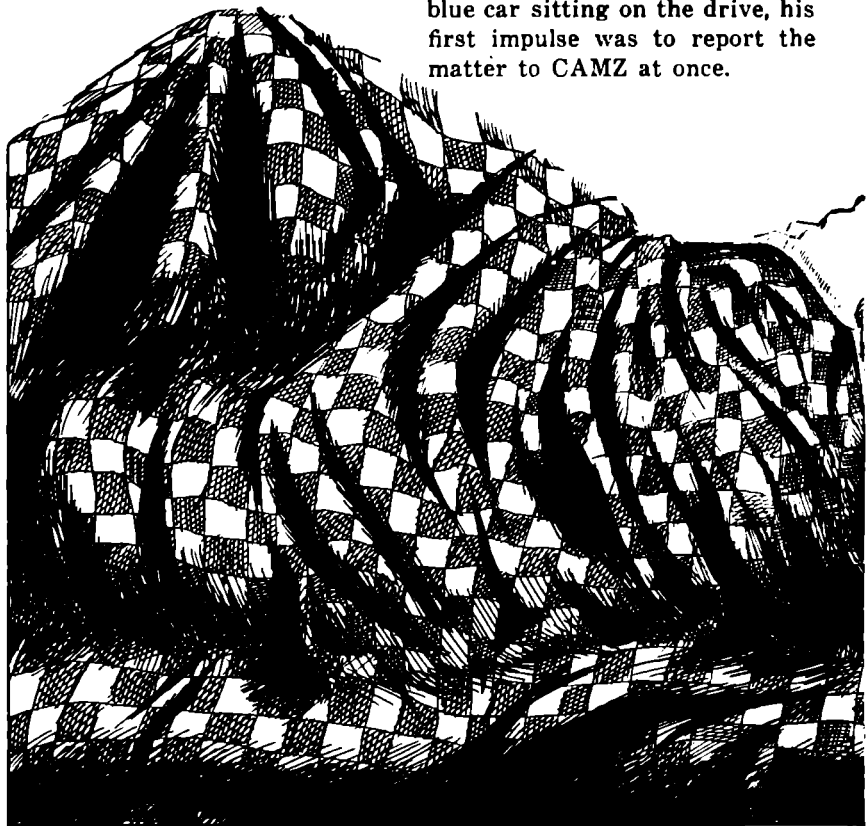
# Hatchery of Dreams

By FRITZ LEIBER

Illustrator ADKINS

WHEN Giles Wardwell woke up Saturday morning and Joan wasn't beside him in bed or anywhere in the house and there

was no message on the slate in the kitchen or any response when he banged on the door of her lab, and when a glance showed their blue car sitting on the drive, his first impulse was to report the matter to CAMZ at once.



*Giles Wardwell was a man not easily given to following the directions of a blue lizard. However, his wife was missing, the other wite —er, girls were cursed, and all in all there was no help for it.*

Grim old Mr. Copps himself had warned the whole CAMZ staff that all their lives and those of their loved ones were in slight but definite danger from America's enemies now that Copps, Ar-

buthnot, Mather, and Zim were doing public relations work for the Secondman Missiles Project. Mr. Zim, looking almost equally



a dour Puritan father despite his Turkish background, had filled them in with some excruciating first-hand details on Russian espionage methods.

Just before they'd gone to sleep last night Joan had asked Giles, "Do the Russians have hypnosis beams? I have the feeling someone's trying to get control of my mind." And he had replied in a joking way that made him sick to remember, "Only in science-fiction magazines," to her first remark and "Probably your mother-in-law, God help us," to her second.

Giles decided to put on his glasses and have a closer look around before calling CAMZ. He didn't find the red nightgown Joan had been wearing, but he did find the little penned note on the bedside table.

"Dear Giles (it read), I'm taking a vacation from our marriage, maybe for a month, maybe forever. In case it's the latter I'll let you know. You know I don't fit in. Anyhow, I can't stick your stodgy conformity—or your mother's!—any longer. Maybe being with other humans will give me perspective. You can be respectable to the hilt and tell people I'm visiting Mable in Wisconsin, but that's not where I'm going. Good luck. Joan."

When Giles Wardwell had read that, Russia was a name in the geography books, CAMZ were ec-

centric wheels, and an old fear of his had become an active torment: the knowledge that he was fifteen years older than Joan and a proper Bostonian, and that being bald as an egg from thirty-five on was not at all the same thing as being romantically shaven-headed like Yul Brynner.

HE'D been afraid once or twice before that Joan was unhappy, though that was by no means his deepest fear about her. He'd known she couldn't stand his mother, though they only saw the old lady two or three times a week. He'd thought Joan was restless lately, in spite of her bridge and cosmetics hobbies. And certainly she didn't exactly fit in—she had no real friends he knew of in the Boston area except for the three amusing but socially off-trail women who made up her bridge foursome.

He wondered where she could have gone. Mr. and Mrs. Bishop—Joan's parents—were both dead and there were no uncles, aunts, or close cousins. Mable was just a college roommate, rarely mentioned. Joan did have a little money in an account of her own.

While he was thinking these things, Giles' feet had been carrying him, still in his dull olive pullover pyjamas, on another circuit of the house and now brought him up short at the door

to Joan's lab. He hesitated—he'd always sensed (though Joan had never told him in so many words) that she didn't like him to barge into her perfume distillery and he had made a point of never offending, and besides the place was associated in his mind with his deepest fear about her.

Then he opened the door and went in.

His first impression was of gloom—the shades were tightly drawn—and an unnatural heat.

The small flasks and jars, the electric mixer for cold cream, and the elaborate distilling set-ups all seemed to be in their usual places.

He switched on the overhead light.

Then he saw it: a silver-sided platform with heavy cables leading from it and resting on it on its side a huge white egg almost exactly the size of his own head—in fact, his instant fantastic thought was that it was a horrid tableau set up to ridicule his baldness.

He went up to it. The heat was coming from the platform, all right—the humpy soft reddish fabric on which the egg rested was almost too hot to touch. And there seemed to be a faint vibration in the stuff, barely perceptible to the fingertips.

The egg looked astonishingly genuine. Minute pores dimpled its surface.

But it was far too large for an ostrich egg or any other Giles could conceive. And it was being kept at a far higher temperature, he was quite sure, than that used for any normal hatching. He started to turn the heat down, then wondered if he could figure out how, then decided not to try. He put his ear near the shell but couldn't hear anything moving inside.

Beside the platform was a deep cardboard box big enough to have held the egg. It was silvered on the outside, half full of cotton wool, and silver ribbons were strewn around.

Giles recognized the box. Joan had brought it back from her last Bridge Wednesday, explaining it contained a china atrocity she'd won but never wanted to look at again and which she intended to give Giles' mother for her birthday.

Vastly confused, Giles clamped onto one valid-seeming train of thought with just two cars: one—no woman with a fabulous egg hatching in her laboratory would willingly go away for a day, let alone a month or forever, no matter how much she loathed her husband; two—if anyone knew anything about Joan or the egg, it would be one or more of her three bridge partners: Mary Nurse, Margo Cory, and Alice Something-or-other — Greene? No, Redd!

**T**HIRTY minutes later Giles had hurriedly dressed, sketchily shaved, swallowed a cup of coffee with a tablespoon of the powdered in it, and was piloting the blue, sedately chromeless car from the Wardwell home "back of Back Bay," as he liked to describe it, to Margo Cory's improbable address on Prince Street in Boston's crooked, crowded North End.

None of the three women had been in the phone books and Joan didn't keep an address book Giles could find. Margo Cory's address had only turned up on an empty envelope that had slipped down behind Joan's desk.

Giles never liked visiting the North End and he didn't want to think about the egg because it was, to put it mildly, impossible. He spent the drive totting up how stodgily conformist he could be accused of being. He was at least par for the Boston course, he decided. For instance, he had recently given up chess and concentrated on bird-watching because Mr. Mather had pointed out that too many Slavic and Baltic types played chess. "Semites too, of course," Mather had finished primly. "I think we must look on it as purely a Russian game."

Could his Sunday bird-watching have anything to do with the egg? More fantastic ridicule? Giles doubted if he had ever

trained his binoculars on a bird that had an egg much bigger than a gumdrop.

Margo Cory's address turned out to be a brand-new narrow tall glass-walled apartment building. As he went up to the twelfth floor in the newfangled glass-backed elevator, the Old North Church became visible across the roofs and then the green square of Copps Hill Burying Ground over toward the Inner Harbor.

Margo Cory's apartment was furnished in pale Swedish modern that went oddly with the dark tone in the glass. Margo herself wore bare feet, a gray linen robe and her short hair was tousled like a boy's. It gave Giles a pang to see how young she was, remembering Joan was no older. He must seem an old fogey to them all, he told himself.

He thought she was carrying hugged to her chest a motionless pale tan kitten, then he saw it had overbuilt shoulders, canine teeth like great daggers, and forepaws that suggested hands.

Margo noted his gaze and giggled. "Kitty's just a Steiff toy, made of plush," she said. "Did you know teddy bears were Steiff toys named after Teddy Roosevelt? This one's a kind of saber-tooth tiger. Here, look."

She thrust it briefly toward him. With the same movement the top of her robe fell apart,

showing she was not at all boyish in that area and dressed solely for showering. She seemed unconscious of the exposure.

"No, I haven't seen Joan since Wednesday," she told Giles. She swung nervously toward the view-wall with a flash of legs. "Why don't you come over here beside me," she said with an odd chuckle, "and enjoy my view?"

Another time Giles might have been tempted, proper Bostonian or no. Now he said, "Miss Cory, I *am* looking for my wife."

She faced him. "You really are worried about Joan, aren't you?"

"Of course!" He grimaced at her and rapidly waved his fingers together at chest level. She scowled back at him and at last pulled her robe tight around her.

"I'm an exhibitionist, Mr. Wardwell, *and* a nymphomaniac," she announced defiantly. "It's a very rare combination."

"Really, Miss Cory, you don't have to tell me these things," he countered.

"I certainly do," she retorted. "If I tell them I don't have to do them. Think what I'm sparing you. But if I can't do them I have to tell them."

He might have reacted stuffily to this frankness. Instead he felt something open inside himself that he had kept carefully closed all day in spite of the egg and other shocks.

"Miss Cory," he said, "do you

think my wife dabbles in witchcraft?"

"*Dabbles?*" the girl yelled. "Why, what a weird question. There's no such thing as witchcraft."

"I know," Giles said, pouring it off his chest, "but she has this lab where she concocts things, and I've heard her mutter gibberish that might be incantations and spells, and she has a lonely bitter attitude toward life, and then she could be descended from the first witch hanged at Salem in 1692—even if Bridget Bishop isn't known to have had children. And then we've got the tradition of witchcraft all around us here in New England and Boston and especially right here in the North End." He gestured at the smoky window. "Why right over there in Copps Hill the Mathers are buried who did so much to fight it and—"

"Excuse me, Mr. Wardwell, but I can't listen to you any longer," the girl interrupted. "I'm a bit psychotic, as I've told you, some days more than others, and today is one of the real bad ones—I'd fall apart if it weren't for Kitty here." She clutched the plush sabertooth to her. "I'll give you Alice Redd's address—maybe she can tell you something about Joan."

She called brightly after him down the corridor, incidentally letting her robe fall open again,



"Remember, Mr. Wardwell, there's no such thing as witchcraft!"

**A**LICE REDD lived in a dignified old apartment on Louisburg Square back across the Common and she seemed in other ways the antithesis of Margo Cory—a china-delicate young woman with pale reddish hair and wearing a robe of thick brocaded white silk that was conspicuously buttoned from neck to hem.

She spoiled the effect somewhat by moaning immediately, "Come in quickly, Mr. Wardwell, so I can collapse again. Ooh, what a fuzzy black head I've got inside, this morning. I know I shouldn't mix barbiturates with alcohol, but there must be more to it than that."

She pointed vaguely at a chair and let herself down onto a spindle-legged couch, to the head of which was hanging by one paw a small dark brown stiff monkey made of what Giles decided must be the finest basket weave—the texture suggested tiny scales.

Alice Redd reached out feebly and put a finger in the other paw. "Pongo's such a help on mornings like this," she told Giles. "I don't know what I'd do without him. He keeps off the black megrims and things. He's supposed to come from Hong Kong or maybe Malaya.

"Yes, Mr. Wardwell, I do so much enjoy the bridge with Joan and the other girls. Do you know, we're hoping eventually to get together three tables, so there'd be twelve of us, and have duplicate tournaments. Then we'd need a man to be tournament director, a woman would be much too flighty. Has Joan said anything to you—? Ooh, my head!

"No, I haven't seen Joan since Wednesday. Mary Nurse might be able to tell you something, I'll give you her address, though she's been laid up with 'flu the last two days. There seems to be something wrong with all of us, doesn't there? Oooh!

"No, I don't think Joan was unhappy, Mr. Wardwell. I'll tell you one thing, though—she didn't like those CAMZ people you work for, she thought they were too restrictive and inquiring and dictatorial. Certainly we have to worry about the Russians, but Joan says those CAMZ people enjoy worrying, they must bathe in black megrims. I know they're fine old Boston men, most of them, but didn't Mr. Arbuthnot work for Senator McCarthy and isn't Mr. Mather descended from the witchhunting Mathers—Cotton, Increase, and— Oooh! Pongo, come here, comfort Mother."

"Speaking of witches, Miss Redd," Giles said on impulse, "I've just had an amusing thought. You know how each

witch is supposed to have a familiar?—a little animal given her by Satan to protect her and help her work magic? Well, if old Cotton Mather could have been with me this morning and seen Mary Cory with Kitty and you with Pongo—”

“Ha-ha-ha, very funny. And Mary Nurse with Pounce. He’d have called them poppets, because they aren’t alive, but he’d have claimed they came alive when people’s backs were turned — Oooh! Pongo, make it stop!

“But Mr. Wardwell, if you were seriously thinking about witchcraft, surely you’d have asked Joan herself— No, I can see you’re the Boston type who never asks crucial questions until it’s much too late or something— Oooh!”

“I wonder,” Giles said softly, “in what *form* Satan would give familiars to witches? Not in a brown paper bag, surely, or just hand them over by the scruff of the neck—you’d think there’d be a little more ceremony to it.”

“Ha-ha-ha— Oooh! Mr. Wardwell, I’m sorry, but Pongo and I are going to have to curl up and go to sleep, it’s the only way we’ll ever get through this. But first I’ll write you Mary Nurse’s address.”

GILES didn’t look at it until he was outside, standing beside the black iron pickets fence-

ing the private park that occupied Louisburg Square. It turned out to be on Salem Street and he shrank from going back into the North End, so he drove home, relieved to find the house wasn’t burning down, and sat watching the egg and thinking a great variety of mad disturbing thoughts.

He reread Joan’s note several times. As far as he could tell, it was her handwriting or a good imitation, but he noticed now that there were three expressions in it which she detested: “In case,” “Anyhow,” and “humans” for “human beings.” If someone had wanted to convince him that Joan had run away and keep him from making inquiries, they might have concocted a note like this.

Once he got a tack hammer and poised it above the egg . . . and after a few seconds carried the hammer back to the kitchen.

And once he thought he heard something stir inside the egg. He bent his ear to it until his cheek was burning hot, but heard nothing more.

After three hours of that he drove back to the North End. He passed the CAMZ headquarters in the new building in Sewall Court, recalling that it was named for Judge Sam Sewall, who had presided over the Salem witch trials. He passed the Paul Revere house with its strange

nail-studded door exactly like that in the house of the hanged Salem witch Rebecca Nurse.

Nurse.

Salem Street was noisy with pushcarts and the evening air seemed to carry as much Italian as English.

Mary Nurse's address was a dreary walk-up over a fish store with windows smeary-tracked by live snails and tiny climbing squid. He remembered Joan telling him Mary Nurse was an artist keen on local color.

But she'd made some changes. Her door at the end of the corridor wasn't like the others, but unpainted oak studded with rows of nail-heads.

In answer to his knock a deep voice called to him to come in.

The room was stuffy and crowded, easels elbowing chairs and bookcases—studio and living room combined.

And bedroom. The light of two thick candles showed Mary Nurse lying on a wide studio couch under a quilt of diamond patches. She was a big girl—five foot ten, he'd judged—but now she lay like a log, looking really sick, pale, her thick black hair streaming across the pillow.

But her deep voice was steady enough. "I've been expecting you, Giles Wardwell. Margo Cory dropped in this afternoon."

"I'm sorry about your 'flu,'" Giles said.

"This isn't 'flu," Mary Nurse said with a deep unhumorous chuckle. "Someone's put a curse on me. On all of us, I'd say. What are you looking around for?"

"Pounce," Giles admitted.

Again the big blonde chuckled. She beckoned to Giles and lifted the quilt a little. Giles looked—and almost jumped out of the room.

Crouched on the sheet beside her, just under her arm, was a jet-black spider with a body big as a flattened grapefruit and furry black legs that would have spanned a platter. Around the body were wedges of bright green, while two ruby-red eyes glared up at him.

It couldn't be real, Giles told himself. It must be—

"Black velvet." For a third time Mary Nurse chuckled. She dropped the quilt. "Just the same, I'd probably be dead without Pounce. You've surely noticed by now how neurotically dependent we are on our little . . . toys. That's why Joan's in trouble—she doesn't have one . . . yet."

Giles was staring at the top of a bookcase back in the shadows. It seemed to have an egg on it as big as that in Joan's lab.

"Surely you've noticed other things about us too," Mary Nurse was saying.

"Your door, your name," Giles said, edging between an easel

and a chair toward the bookcase.

"All our names are witch names. Even your name, Giles Wardwell. Samuel Wardwell was one of the five wizards hung in Salem. Giles Cory was pressed to death with rocks on his chest for refusing to testify."

Giles saw that the egg was an empty shell, cracked across and with a huge hole in one side. "What's that?" he asked sharply.

"That's the shell of a spider—I mean, dinosaur . . ." Mary Nurse broke off and looked at him burningly. "I don't think we need to fence any longer, Giles Wardwell. You've found Joan's egg? Unbroken?"

"Yes. Yes."

"Then if you love your wife, be there when it hatches. I think there's time. I'd go but I'm too cursed to move. I'd send the Black Man, but we haven't one. Joan's only hope and safety are in the egg. Follow the signs. Call it Grizzle. Don't ask questions. Hurry!"

"I will."

"The Horned God go with you, Giles Wardwell."

**T**HE lab seemed hotter than before when Giles got back to it, but that may have been because he was sweating. At first the egg seemed intact, then he saw there was a tiny triple crack radiating from a point near the top. As he watched, one of the branches

lengthened abruptly by the width of a finger. There was a faint scratching and rustling inside.

He settled down to watch, gripping his knees with shaking hands. The heat alone was making him feel faint. He stripped off his coat and shirt, noting without much surprise that he was still wearing his pyjama top under the latter.

The cracks lengthened. Others appeared. Suddenly bits of shell flew and a tiny blue arm with a jagged crest on it like a lizard's shot out, groped around wildly, and then jerked in.

Trembling, Giles moved around the egg, trying to peer in but staying at arm's length.

Two tiny blue hands were methodically breaking away small fragments of shell, enlarging the hole. He couldn't see more of the creature, it was too dark inside.

The room began to swim. Giles dragged at the collar of his pyjamas, then staggered to the window and heaved it up, sucked in three breaths of cool air. The room steadied. He saw that the hole in the egg was now big as a spread hand.

He was halfway back to it when something blue shot out, scurried in a circle across the floor three times, too fast to be seen definitely, and dove out the open window.

Giles grabbed up his coat and went out the front door and looked around in the dark. He couldn't see anything on the lawn or drive. He walked around the front of his car and froze.

A stocky jewel-blue lizard was crouched down on the hood of his car exactly as if it were a moderately ornate radiator ornament. It seemed to grip into the blue-painted metal with its hind claws and left forepaw or arm. The right arm, extended beside its hideously crested face, was pointed straight ahead.

"Grizzle!" Giles ejaculated.

The blue creature shivered and stretched its arm still further forward.

Giles climbed in and started the car, his eyes on Grizzle. As he neared the street, the forward-pointing arm swung abruptly to the right. Giles obeyed, his heart pounding.

Follow the signs!

**T**HEY were near the Common when Giles began to guess where they were going. As they neared Sewall Court, Grizzle raised its forward-pointing arm as if to say, "Go slow," and then suddenly pointed downward as if for "Stop."

Fred, the CAMZ garageman, came up to the window. He was looking at the hood. Then, "Take her for you, Mr. Wardwell?" They traded places. As Giles was

walking away, "Mr. Wardwell!" Fred called excitedly. Giles turned back. "I'd have sworn," Fred said from behind the wheel, "that you'd put a blue radiator ornament on your car, a sort of wild dinosaur. But now it's gone."

Giles said, a bit stuffily, "Blue? Wild? Now, Fred, would anyone be apt to do a thing like that to his car, in Boston?"

Inside the lobby Grizzle was playing unseen around the feet of George, the night guard and elevator-man. Giles kept his eyes away from the familiar.

"Fifth floor, Mr. Wardwell?" George volunteered. "All our big ones are up there." He stared at Giles' pyjama top under his coat. "They sure pulled you out of bed in a hurry, Mr. Wardwell. Must be something real emergency, though I haven't taken up any army men."

Giles maintained a dignified mysterious silence.

On the fifth floor the drapes were drawn tight behind the heavy glass wall of the main office. A little light shone through the drapes toward one end, not much. As the elevator door closed, Giles headed down the hall toward the office he shared, but there was a tug at his trouser leg. Grizzle led him to Mr. Arbuthnot's office, which was next to the end of the main office away from the light.

Arbuthnot's office was empty and dark, but the door from it to the main office was open. Giles walked to it and stopped.

Mr. Copps, Mr. Arbuthnot, Mr. Mather, and Mr. Zim were all standing toward the other end of the main office, looking very serious and dignified and business-like in their dark suits, except that Mr. Zim was holding a small golden wand and wearing a tall conical black hat covered with golden stars and moons, and Mr. Arbuthnot was cradling in his arms a submachinegun.

And Joan was there, facing Giles' end of the office, the single light glaring full in her face. She was sitting up straight and defiant-faced on a stool with her arms stretched out straight to either side of her by thin white ropes anchored to filing cabinets.

She was wearing her red nightgown. A bit of Giles' mind jumped back to 1692 Salem, where Bridget Bishop had worn "a red paragon bodice" before her grim sober judges.

JOAN flirted her black hair away from her eyes with a shake of her head and said loudly, "But this is ridiculous, I keep telling you. My husband has never told me a word about the Second Missiles Project. I have no Communist connections. Presumably I was cleared by the F.B.I. at the same time Giles

was. The rest is nonsense—or insanity."

"Must I take you over that ground again?" Mr. Mather said in his soft voice that was so clear and far-carrying. "Mrs. Wardwell, America has older and more formidable enemies than Communism. Unfortunately, the F.B.I. does not clear for witchcraft. But CAMZ, which embodies the finest traditions of Old New England, does. And somehow advertising is more sensitive to the occult than is the military." He tapped a sheaf of papers in his hand. "Confess yourself a witch, Joan Wardwell, tell where and how you bound yourself to Satan, detail for us your spells and magics, above all name the other witches of your coven—or you will force us to prove these facts upon your body! Mr. Copps, is the needle ready?"

"You can't make me testify against myself," Joan countered. "I plead the Fifth Amendment!"

"Our Massachusetts never ratified it," Mr. Mather told her. "Remember what happened to Giles Cory, Mr. Copps?"

Giles surged forward, then stopped. Four men and a submachinegun! His hands turned icy cold. Then something hot stroked his cheek, his face turned as cold as if a mask of ice had been slipped over it, and he almost shrieked.

Grizzle had climbed the front

of his suit, was clinging to his left lapel as a sailor might to a sail, and had just finished licking his cheek with his long black tongue.

Mr. Arbuthnot turned and stared straight at the door of his office, leveling the gun. Giles froze, hoping the gloom would hide him though afraid his white hands and face were bound to stand out. But after a searching glance, Arbuthnot turned back toward Joan.

Mr. Mather was saying, "Joan Bishop Wardwell, consider well the helplessness of your situation. Your poor foolish husband, deceived by the note you wrote at our hypnotic dictation when we summoned you, believes you have deserted him. Your sister witches, who and wherever they may be, are held in check by Mr. Zim's helpful little spells. Confess yourself, redeem your wickedness, salvage what you can of the good American girl who yielded to the blandishments of Satan."

"I won't!" Joan cried ringingly. "Compared to your brand of Americanism, witchcraft is the soul of decency."

"The needle!"

Grizzle, still clinging to Giles with hind claws and one forepaw, tweaked Giles' arm painfully with the other, then pointed commandingly at Arbuthnot.

Follow the signs!

GOING behind Joan, Mr. Copps ripped her nightgown down the back and poised something that was glittering, long, and terribly slim.

Giles walked out into the main office, raising his right hand and pointing straight at Mr. Arbuthnot—though he almost dropped it when he saw that his hand was no longer flesh-colored but dead black.

Arbuthnot froze in mid-whirl. His flesh turned a faint gray. The submachinegun thudded on the thick-piled carpet.

The finger with which Giles had pointed at him was flesh-colored again and the rest of his hand was no longer dead black but charcoal gray.

Successively, copying Grizzle's gestures, Giles pointed his second finger, ring finger, and thumb at Mr. Zim, Mr. Copps, and Mr. Mather.

With each pointing, the man indicated froze and faintly grayed, while Giles' flesh lightened by stages until at the end he was no darker than they were.

For once in his life Giles Wardwell was seething with anger.

"You persecuting, smug, self-satisfied, hypocritical fiends!" he shouted. "You're worse than the Russians with your brainwashing. Now listen to me—you're going to forget this witchhunting obsession forever, I command

it! *Silentium, silentium, mutus, mutus, mutus.* I'm letting you off easy—if you'd actually injured my wife, I'd make you really suffer. But believe me, after this you're never going to browbeat me, any of you. And I'm going to start playing chess again and seeing my mother as often as I please!"

He stopped because Joan was laughing delightedly.

"Darling, they can't hear you," she called to him happily. "The Black Man's spell works a lot faster than barbiturates. For hours at least they'll be dead asleep. Now cut me loose and let's get out of here. I think your charm's certain to work, but to make sure we'll take Mr. Mather's papers and Mr. Zim's wand and cap and Mr. Arbuthnot's submachinegun and drop them in the Charles. You've got your little finger to put the night guard asleep and your left hand for emergencies. Is that Grizzle? He's a dear!"

A HALF hour later they were driving slowly home through Back Bay. Joan sat close to Giles,

her head resting on his shoulder. Grizzle was curled on Joan's shoulder, holding her ripped red nightgown together with his hind claws. The car's heater flooded them with pleasant warmth.

"Giles," Joan said sleepily, "there's one more question I want to ask you. When you visited Margo and Alice and Mary today, did you find them . . . attractive?"

"Rather," he admitted. "I must say they're very weird women, but then it looks as if I'm going to have to get used to a great many extremely strange things. Pounce, for instance. Yes, to tell the truth I found all three girls quite attractive."

Joan nodded without opening her eyes. "I was afraid of that," she said. "You see, as Black Man of our little coven you will have certain duties and privileges. Oh well, I suppose I'll simply have to accept it."

Then, with a sleepy chuckle, she added, "But don't you forget, Giles Wardwell, now and forever, that I'm your First Witch."

**THE END**

