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Front cover by Arnold Kohn, and based on
the novel "Slaves of the Crystal Brain"

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Suddenly the strain reached the breaking point, and screams tore from his throat

If this Be Utopia . . .

By Kris Neville

**The State, trying to fashion a world
in which mankind need not fear the future,
created Utopia — where everyone was afraid!**

“ ‘**L**O, SUE.”
He shuffled papers
without looking up.
“You’re late.”

He had half seen her, out of the corner of his eye, when she came into the office.

She didn’t answer; he looked up, annoyed.

The room was empty.

It took a full minute for him to steady himself after that. Even after his mind was calm, his heart still fluttered wildly. He stared at the desk top. He remembered, quite clearly now that he thought of it, that Sue *had* come in. But at her regular time. He had sent her over to Johnson with the production figures on the Calton case; she would be gone all morning. And yet, it seemed that, just a moment ago, she—

He shrugged and hazarded a laugh that didn’t quite come off.

His left eye was twitching again. A distressing nervous tic he had first noticed three months ago. It was getting worse.

Nerves.

And now—hallucinations

His morning was shot.

He looked at his watch; he looked at the unread reports, some left over

from yesterday. He wanted to scream.

HE WALKED into Wilson’s Bar and sat down. Alcohol relaxed him, and when he was relaxed, the tic went away.

No sooner had he adjusted his bulk to the stool than he knew that he had made a mistake. The bartender was eyeing him with obvious disapproval. He should have gone somewhere else. Too late now. Nothing to do but brazen it out.

He flipped the card across the bar.

The bartender took it, inspected it closely, turned it over, read the stamp on the reverse side. “This is a new one.”

“Yes, yes, of course. Issued yesterday.”

The bartender laid the card down and glared across the bar. “Mr. Morrison, I don’t want to seem nosey, but—You came in here yesterday. You drank. You got your last punch. Now, you come in with a new card. How come? That ain’t right, and you know it ain’t. *I* couldn’t get a new card, not for anything.”

Mr. Morrison cleared his throat; he was afraid his left eye was going to start twitching again. “I—I got it from Department A. I’ve been overworking

lately. My duties are quite heavy."

The bartender glanced at the wall clock; it was still an hour until lunch. "Humph," he said emphatically. "I overwork. I don't get no over-rations. Not for liquor or anything. Especially not for liquor. And I don't get off no hour before dinner."

Mr. Morrison wasn't accustomed to that tone of voice; under other circumstances, he would have taken the man's number and lodged a Class 11a complaint immediately. That he did not now was due solely to the fact that the new card wasn't really authorized by Department A, and the publicity involved in an appearance at a job transfer hearing would look bad on his master record.

He tried to outstare the bartender and felt his left eye twitch. "There are worse jobs than this," he threatened. And the bartender's eyes wavered. "A rye-high," Mr. Morrison ordered crisply.

The bartender reached out for the card, punched it. "Yes, sir."

Mr. Morrison nodded to himself. Mentally he filed away a reminder to do something about this man; just what, he would figure out later.

The drink came. He gulped it, picked up his ration card and stalked out.

He would have to be careful, in the future, never to drink up over one card at any one place...

That damn tic. Symptomatic. He was worried, definitely worried. Maybe they would call him before a review board; maybe they would recondition him; maybe they would say he was losing his grip—

And transfer him!

Mr. Morrison went cold at the thought.

A job like this—Consultant for Production Management of Eastern District—wasn't easy to get. It repre-

sented the labor of years; years of—

And to lose it just because of that damn tic!

He needed a drink. Bad.

BY THREE o'clock Mr. Morrison was pleasantly drunk. He sat on a bar stool with his tenth rye-high before him.

He told himself that, in another couple of hours, he would have to leave. The white-collars would be coming around to sit huddled over their drinks, nursing them along. Then at six-thirty the bartenders would chase them out, and they would trudge home to their uninspired meals. Then the workers would arrive; rough, uncouth, rowdy people.

Mr. Morrison shuddered.

He decided it was a shame—a very great shame and a public disgrace—to give the workers a liquor ration. But to give them an *equal* ration (not that men of ability and position couldn't subvert the law) was really carrying things a little beyond all reason.

The person on the stool next to him was leaning over.

"You're getting drunk," the person said. "You're getting *drunk*. You got enough rations to get *drunk*!"

Mr. Morrison knew it was time to leave. He got up from the stool and moved, on unsteady legs, to the door.

He hailed a cab, fumbled for his transportation card—the blue one—found it. Mr. Morrison got in the cab, wondering why people like Mr. Morrison didn't get just one card—good for everything.

"SUE, I'll want you for dictation most of the day."

"Yes, Mr. Morrison."

He studied his thumb nail. "I'm afraid I'm a little behind on my paper work. You see, yesterday I—I had to

see a man." Mr. Morrison realized that it sounded pretty lame.

"Yes, sir. When I came back from Mr. Johnson's office you were gone. So I said to myself, 'Now Sue,' I said, 'what would Mr. Morrison want you to do?' so I took out the Miner's file—you remember, you told me to check it for that missing report on June production when I had time—and I—"

Her voice, Mr. Morrison realized for the first time, was thin and altogether unpleasant.

"Very good, Sue," he interrupted.

"Yes, sir, but I—"

"Never mind, Sue. Another time."

"Yes, Mr. Morrison."

Mr. Morrison elevated his eyes; he focused them to her left. He didn't want to look directly at her. "We really must get on with the dictation."

She crossed the room to her chair before the steno; she sat down, looking crisp and efficient.

All at once, Mr. Morrison didn't know where to start. There was so much to be done. In desperation, he snatched the top report and began to read it savagely.

The hangover, it filled his stomach with butterflies, and he couldn't concentrate on the words. His mind was vacant.

He cleared his throat—that usually helped. He fixed his eyes determinedly on the heading.

"Inter-departmental memo. To Jacoby."

The keys clicked harshly on the steno.

"It has been brought to my attention that report—uh—" His eyes skipped frantically, searching for the file number. . . . Ah, there it was, right where it should be. . . "uh—your file—You better put that in parentheses. Sue—your file 739.82— No, on second thought, don't put any parentheses."

He felt his hands growing moist.

Should there be parentheses?' He shook himself. Tried to tell himself that it didn't matter.

But it did. Mistakes (even little mistakes) count against you on the efficiency files. You can't be too careful.

He cleared his throat the second time.

There it was: the tic again.

He winced. Had Sue noticed?

He sprang out of the chair and turned his back on her. He resumed dictation.

"Report number so-and-so, dealing with decreased efficiency in Factory Seven."

Factory Seven?

Oh, God! He remembered, now. He was supposed to inspect it. This afternoon. At two.

The reports would have to wait.

No. The reports *couldn't* wait. He was already behind schedule. Too far behind.

"What? What did you say, Sue?"

"I said I wish you wouldn't face the wall like that, Mr. Morrison. It makes it sound like your mouth is all full of mush. It makes it awful hard to copy you."

"Oh. . . . Of course."

If he turned around, she would be sure to notice the tic.

He glanced down. His hand was shaking.

"Sue. Will you run out and—uh—get me some tobacco."

"Yes, sir. May I have your card?"

He didn't turn around.

"Use an official ration form," he snapped irritably.

Silence a moment. Then: "Certainly, Mr. Morrison."

He heard her heels clip-clop sharply on the bare floor; he heard the door close.

He turned around.

He was weak.

He sank into his chair and tried to

relax his taut muscles.

His efficiency rating was down, and he knew it. That meant they would be calling him in, any day now, for a check up. He twisted his mouth bitterly. How could they expect a man to—?

It was the pressure, he decided. The eternal pressure. The eternal fear of losing a point on your job rating index and getting a transfer. The certain knowledge that you are being watched, your every mistake noted down on the balance sheet. The insecurity.

Even an iron man couldn't stand it.

Mr. Morrison looked at the reports and sighed.

There would be another twenty years of it. God! twenty years. And even then— He wondered if he could believe the State propaganda about the new retirement program. In twenty years, when he was ready, maybe by then... But twenty more years of it, God! Twenty more years.

He checked his thoughts; lately he had a tendency to let them wool-gather. That was bad; it interfered with his work.

He looked over at the production chart on the wall; followed its downward swoop with his eyes. Off a point and a half, this month.

He envied the men in Distribution. Distribution was functioning smoothly, as usual. When there was anything to distribute.

Production lousy. Men weren't working like they used to, before the New State.

The new incentive plan.... hmmm. It was getting some consideration in Central Planning. He disapproved of it. No sense in pampering the workers. *Keep after them*, he told himself. *No slackers*.

There he went. He had to gather up his thoughts again. He cursed inwardly.

His eyes drifted back to the papers

on his desk. He wondered if he could duck out before Sue got back; get a couple of quick ones before time to inspect Number Seven.

No. He *had* to keep at it. Once you get behind—

Absently he took out his pipe and loaded it. He lit it and let it go out. His left eye was still jerking.

THE FACTORY was a riot of noise.

It didn't help his throbbing head. He nodded absently in answer to the foreman's question and walked on to the next machine.

The female operator took her foot off the pedal and looked up. She was sweating.

Mr. Morrison reached over and picked up one of the helical coils and examined the knots. He turned the coil over in his hand.

It was hot in here.

He put the coil back in the rack and turned to the female.

"How do you like your job?" He had to half shout to make his voice carry above the pounding of the machines.

Her eyes were dull. Her lips half formed a word, and then she thought better of it. "It's my assignment. It's what I'm best fitted for," she said.

Mr. Morrison nodded. "A good answer."

He moved on.

At the next machine, the operator wiped damp hair back out of her face and looked up. Mr. Morrison studied her features. Well moulded.

Her lips drew together in a tight, thin line.

Mr. Morrison felt his face getting red. The female thought he had winked at her. And she didn't like it.

She was mad. Boiling mad. He could see that.

She said something that was lost in the roar.

Mr. Morrison knew that he should move on. He could see trouble coming if he stayed. An argument.

"How do you like your job?" he asked.

"I hate every damn minute of it, you fat leech!" she screamed above the roar of the machines.

Mr. Morrison winced.

"Now, now," he placated "After all, the assignment—"

She sputtered something else.

Mr. Morrison turned to the foreman.

"A discipline case!" the foreman shrieked above the noise.

Mr. Morrison eyed the female and nodded gravely.

She was coming around the machine, fast. She placed herself squarely in front of him.

"I work, see! Ten hours a day! Hard, see! And then some fat, ugly slob comes around to leer at me! Some fat slob that's got an office, comes around to wink at me—"

He felt very ineffectual. He wanted to explain that he couldn't help the tic; that it was involuntary.

"Here, here, really—you aren't being quite. "

"How do I like my job?" he asks. "That's a laugh! 'How do I like my job?' he says. Listen, mister," she reached out and hooked a greasy hand in his lapel, "you can take this job and—"

LATER, in the foreman's office, Mr. Morrison was once again master of the situation. He leaned back in the comfortable chair and clasped his hands together.

"How many discipline cases do you have, like that poor female?" he asked.

The foreman stood up and crossed to the steel filing cabinet. "I have the certified list here." He rummaged among papers and finally came up

with a crisp, new sheet. He carried it over to Mr. Morrison.

Mr. Morrison read it. "Seven. I see." He ran his finger down the list. "Hummmmm. What about that man—uh, I believe—uh—number 314? Why isn't he on this?"

The foreman looked up. "Oh. Him. He's a good worker. Today was just his bad day. After all, the machine could have fouled up on anyone."

"But he *deliberately* jammed it with that coil!"

The foreman shook his head. "It just seemed that way. When the guide lane broke, it twisted the coil out of his hand. It was the effect you saw, not the cause."

Mr. Morrison pursed his lips white-ly. "You must realize that 'a bad day' is no excuse. If we permitted that sort of thing, you know, pretty soon every Tom, Dick and Harry—" He let his voice trail away significantly. He took out his pen and unscrewed the cap.

"But, sir: He's no discipline problem!"

Mr. Morrison fitted the cap over the end of his pen. The point touched paper. "Maybe so, maybe not. That's my job. He will serve as an example to the rest. After all, we must consider the Whole."

He wrote "314" on the paper.

"I'll get these approved for reassignment. I'll fix it so you can appear at the transfer hearing by proxy under the 'due cause from direct overseer' section."

He continued to talk, half to himself. "There are some vacancies in the Eastern Fields, and I received a requisition for three men and a woman, this morning, to report at the deep mines in the North."

He looked up.

"You may alert these eight people for transfer." He extended the pen. "Now, if you'll just sign right here,

we'll have all this unpleasant business over and done with."

MR. MORRISON was glad to be home. He took off his clothes and showered; he made a conscious process of washing the grime of the factory off his body. When he had toweled dry, he slipped into his lounging robe and went into the front room.

It was a pretty room; tastefully done. The last occupant—poor fellow—had been very cultured; in addition, he had had a way of wrangling extra requisitions through Distributions.

Take this phono, now. Properly speaking, you should find one like it only in an A2 job-rated house. Mr. Morrison was lucky.

All at once his mood changed.

He stood up and began to pace the room.

It was a small room. Funny he'd never noticed before just how small it really was. So small that it oppressed him.

And it wasn't a very pretty room, either. No, it was a cramped, stultifying rabbit warren.

And he wasn't really lucky

He was unlucky.

It was the workers who were lucky. They always had the best of it. You never saw one of them with a nervous tic. Not that their homes were like this—couldn't expect it, of course—but after they put in their ten or twelve hours a day, they were through. Free.

Men like Mr. Morrison weren't. *Their* work day didn't end at the office. When they left there, they brought their jobs home with them. To worry over.

Mr. Morrison looked down at his shiny black shoes.

Nervous strain.

He might as well face it. Too much responsibility. Too much pressure.

He should see a doctor. He was afraid to. A doctor would have to report it if there was anything wrong. And then it would go on his index. They would put it down in ink and never erase it. It would always be there.

Still. They would find him out sooner or later. The signs were all there. He knew them as well as the next man. Decreased efficiency. Irritability. Procrastination. Excessive concern over petty details. Fear. Day dreaming.

It was bad. He was cracking up. The tic in his left eye. The hallucination yesterday morning. The argument with Keller last week.

That damn tic; having it was worse than working twelve hours straight, every day, in the pits. Anybody that saw it could tell you were on your way down.

He let his thoughts drift in self pity.

He had crossed the room and threw himself on the sofa. He fidgeted.

Had he done everything all right, today? At least he had caught up on the reports. At least he had done that much.

He reviewed the day.

There was the case of 314. He was sorry about that, now. Too late, of course. Nothing could be done about it.

Not that he minded making an example, now and then. It was necessary. And far more satisfactory than all the "incentive plans" in the world. But that sort of thing could be over done.

Mr. Morrison was not too sure that he hadn't been over doing it. The last three months.

Maybe it was another symptom of nervous strain. A tendency to be less than lenient with the faults in others, realizing, subconsciously, your own. A sort of self punishment.

Mr. Morrison did not care to pur-

sue that line of reasoning any further.

Mr. Morrison settled back on the decorative pillow.

He wasn't going to be able to sleep again tonight!

Mr. Morrison wanted to scream. He couldn't explain it. He just wanted to scream.

He screamed.

MR. MORRISON was very conscious of the hammering of his heart; and equally aware that there was nothing he could do about it.

Sure he was nervous. Even a little frightened. But who wouldn't be? He tried to pacify himself by repeating the old bromide, "A hundred years from now it won't make the least difference," and, as always, he failed.

He felt like a little boy waiting for the doctor.

Mr. Haskins had come in fifteen minutes ago, stalked through the room without even looking at him, and entered his office. He should be finished reading the sheaf of reports any minute now.

The chair on which Mr. Morrison sat was uncomfortable. He fumbled out his pipe.

Mr. Haskins was the board review officer for cases involving A and B rated personnel. He took transcripts of transfer hearings and rendered the decisions. A very competent man. Used to be a practicing psychiatrist, Mr. Morrison understood.

It hadn't been too bad, the hearing. Not nearly as bad as he had expected. Everyone had been very kindly and sympathetic, intent only on getting the facts and getting them straight.

Mr. Morrison wouldn't be overly surprised if he got a six months recovery leave. He would like that. Perhaps he could get a priority to Hawaii. Spend four months in the sun; no worries at all. Come back relaxed.

Of course that was up to Mr. Haskins. Whatever his disposition, it would be final—but it was difficult to see how it could be anything more severe than a transfer to class C rating. That, at the very worst. Which wouldn't be too bad. Less responsibility.

Mr. Morrison lit his pipe. He smiled wanly at the empty room.

He centered his attention on the uncurtained window. Outside, it was spring. Mr. Morrison liked spring. He liked to hear the birds chirping and to feel the faint, warm wind on his face. Mr. Morrison wondered how spring in Hawaii felt.

The door opened.

"Come in, please, Mr. Morrison."

Mr. Morrison sprang erect. He looked around for a place to tap out the pipe dottle, saw none, dropped the pipe into his side pocket. Automatically he adjusted the knot of his tie and squared his shoulders. But his step was almost reluctant.

The receptionist stepped aside to let him enter and closed the door after him.

MR. HASKINS was seated behind a huge oak desk. He looked up. "Ah," he said. "Come here."

Mr. Morrison advanced across the carpet and stopped before the desk.

Mr. Haskins didn't offer him a chair. That was a good sign; the interview would be short; just long enough to clear up a few minor points.

For a long moment Mr. Haskins studied him in silence, pursing and unpursing his lips, speculatively. Mr. Morrison squirmed.

"Morrison, uh?" Mr. Haskins grunted.

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Haskins looked down at his desk.

"Your number 37-533-338?"

"Yes, sir."

"This your case, then."

Mr. Haskins built a pyramid with his hands by putting the finger tips together, palms facing each other. He was wearing a pair of loose, white gloves. He looked down at his hands, relaxed them, and let them drop below the level of the desk top, out of Mr. Morrison's range of vision.

"Understand you created quite a disturbance last week. Screaming in your apartment."

Mr. Morrison turned red and stammered out a weak, "Yes, sir."

"What made you do it?" His voice was like a whip lash.

Mr. Morrison flinched. He made movements with his hands, expressive of his confusion and embarrassment. "I—that is, sir, you see—overwork and—"

"Speak up, man! Can't you speak sentences?"

"No, sir. . . . I mean, yes, sir. . . . I mean, it's overwork. I'm not quite myself."

He winked at Mr. Haskins.

That made him want to turn and run.

Mr. Haskins threw back his head, narrowed his eyes and snorted. He got up, walked deliberately across the room, and then whirled around. He stood planted firmly there, legs apart, hands behind his back, neck thrust forward, staring fixedly at Mr. Morrison.

"I'm going to ask questions. Expect concise answers. . . . Now, how long ago did you first notice the. . . ."

IT WAS over. He had never spent a more terrible hour and a half in his life. Mr. Hawkins had been like a big, enraged bull. Thank God it was over.

Mr. Morrison was clammy with dried sweat.

He tried to steel his shattered

nerves. He had been too optimistic all along. This might even result in a transfer down to a class D. Back to his old job, filing clerk in Maintenance. . . . But he could stand that. He'd been class D before. He was still young, fairly young. And in another ten years or so he would work his way back up to B1 again. . . . If Mr. Hawkins didn't static check his records—"not recommended for future promotion".

If that damn pipe hadn't burned a hole in his pants, and if that damn tic hadn't—May as well forget it.

Mr. Morrison wanted to go home and go to bed, try to sleep, drown the whole ordeal in sleep.

But Mr. Haskins had told him to wait out here. He'd been waiting nearly half an hour.

Finally a Security man entered the room from the street door. He eyed Mr. Morrison queerly for a moment and then crossed to Mr. Haskins' private door and went in.

Within two minutes he was back, carrying a typewritten slip. He consulted it.

"You Morrison?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Morrison felt a tightness around his heart and a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. The skin over his back bone crawled.

"You're to come with me."

Mr. Morrison stood up. He was numb. He rubbed the palms of his hands on his pants. He gulped. "Could you—tell me why?"

The Security man's eyes clouded briefly. With pity?

"No," he said. "They'll tell you at Central."

Shock. It hit him like a hammer between the eyes. The room swayed before him. His knees were weak.

He felt the Security man's hand under his elbow, steadying him, forc-

ing him, gently, toward the door.

He couldn't believe it. He *wouldn't* believe it. He felt sick at the stomach.

Good God—

He had been declared of no further value to the State or to himself.

That slip was an euthanasia authorization!

MR. HASKINS opened the top desk drawer and took out his bottle. He poured himself a stiff shot, drank it at one gulp. He put the bottle back.

Too bad. About that chap. Morrison.

He leaned back and tried to relax.

He looked at the desk clock. It would be all over by now. Too late

to do anything about it.

It worried him, though.

Not that he minded making an example out of somebody, now and then. Kept the rest on their toes.

But maybe he had been over doing it lately.

Maybe it was another symptom of nervous strain. A tendency to be less than lenient with the faults of others, seeing them, subconsciously, in yourself. A sort of masochism by extension.

He looked down at his gloved hand. He could feel the muscles leading to his right thumb. They were jerking spasmodically.