

FANTASTIC

SEPTEMBER

STORIES OF IMAGINATION

New Worlds
by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

PLANE JANE
by Robert F. Young

35¢

MAC 9



A TIFE DAVIS PUBLICATION

Birmingham

FANTASTIC

STORIES OF IMAGINATION

SEPTEMBER 1962

Volume 11 Number 9

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF

ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY

William B. Ziff, Chairman of the Board
(1946-1953)

William Ziff, President

W. Bradford Briggs, Executive Vice
President

Hershel B. Sarbin, Vice President and
General Manager

M. T. Birmingham, Jr., Vice President
and Treasurer

Robert P. Breeding, Circulation Di-
rector

Charles Housman, Financial Vice
President

Stanley R. Greenfield, Vice President

Editorial Director
NORMAN M. LOBSENZ

Editor
CELE GOLDSMITH

Ziff-Davis Publishing Company
Editorial and Executive Offices
One Park Avenue
New York 16, New York
ORegon 9-7200
Advertising Manager,
Martin Gluckman

Midwestern and Circulation Office
434 South Wabash Avenue
Chicago 5, Illinois
WAbash 2-4911

Western Office
9025 Wilshire Boulevard
Beverly Hills, California
CRestview 4-0265

NOVELETS

- PLANE JANE
By Robert F. Young 8
- NEW WORLDS (Fantasy Classic)
By Erle Stanley Gardner .. 66

SHORT STORIES

- OPEN WITH CARE
By Boyd Correll 45
- APRIL IN PARIS
By Ursula K. LeGuin 54
- JUNIOR PARTNER
By Ron Goulart 115

FEATURES

- ACCORDING TO YOU 6
- EDITORIAL 7
- COMING NEXT MONTH 44
- FANTASY BOOKS 125

Cover: LLOYD BIRMINGHAM

Illustrating *Plane Jane*

SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE: All subscription correspondence should be addressed to FANTASTIC, Circulation Department, 434 South Wabash Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. Please allow at least six weeks for change of address. Include your old address, as well as new—enclosing if possible an address label from a recent issue.

EDITORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS must be accompanied by return postage and will be handled with reasonable care; however publisher assumes no responsibility for return or safety of art work, photographs or manuscripts.



Copyright © 1962 by Ziff-Davis Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

Haunted by a past that seems to be slipping away and a present of meaningless shadows, Adam Francis wonders if he's real. And if he is, why this persistent feeling that he's seeing everything as an outsider who doesn't belong?

BY three-dimensional standards, the room was grotesque. To the man sitting in it, however, it was not in the least grotesque. It was a four-dimensional room and he was a four-dimensional man, and he saw it in the same way a three-dimensional man sees a three-dimen-

his hobby was miniature-painting. On the desk before him lay the sheet of paper on which he had just finished drawing the diagram of the micro-macro transdimensional projector which he had been working on for the past four months and which he had finally completed

PLANE JANE

By **ROBERT F. YOUNG**

Illustrator **SUMMERS**

sional room. "Flatness" is a relative term, its conformation wholly dependent upon the interpretation of the viewer, and despite their dimensional difference the two parallel universes that multi-dimensional space gave birth to are sisters under the skin.

The man's name was Francis Adam. He was an engineer, and

that afternoon. He had stayed late at the plant in order to expedite the preparation of the patent application, and he was very tired. The specification would have to wait till tomorrow.

Presently he straightened up and filled a cup from a small electric coffee pot. He drank the coffee black, then, after lighting a



cigarette, he leaned forward and began checking the diagram. Almost instantly he gave a sigh of exasperation. The mistake he had detected was a minor one in itself, but it threw the entire figure off. He would have to do the whole thing over again.

Suddenly a knock sounded on the door. He frowned. Other than himself and the night watchman, there was no one else at the plant, and he had given the night watchman strict orders not to disturb him. He went over to the door and depressed the one-way transparency button. His frown faded and an expression compounded of pleasure and puzzlement supplanted it when he saw the brown-haired girl with the heart-shaped face standing in the adjoining machine-shop. Deactivating the personal reactive pattern that made the room impregnable to anyone other than himself, he opened the door. "Why Barbara, I thought you'd gone home," he said. And then, forgetting company regulations in his eagerness to please her, "Come on in."

She stepped into the room. He saw the bludgeon pistol then, with its ugly muzzle pointing toward the center of his forehead. Disbelief stunned him, and he raised his eyes incredulously to hers. He rejected what he saw in them instantly. Just as the pistol coughed, he jerked his head.

Then he saw the blinding lights, and a moment later, blackness came.

The date was the eighth of June, nineteen hundred and sixty-two.

I

THE people passing in and out of the big office building were shadows. The people on the sidewalk were shadows too, and so were the cabs and cars and buses moving up and down the street. *Even as I am a shadow*, thought Adam Francis grimly, pushing his way through the big revolving door.

The office he wanted was on the sixth floor, and the lettering on its door read, *J. A. Morrow, Psychoanalyst. Please come in.* The outer-office was empty, but presently the inner-office door opened, and a girl stepped out. She was wearing a chic blue suit that brought out the blueness of her eyes and the trueness of her shape. Her hair was shoulder-length, and the hue of molten gold, and her complexion brought to mind the richness of Guernsey cream. And yet she was not beautiful. "Mr. Francis?"

Adam nodded. "I have an appointment with Dr. Morrow."

"This way, please."

He followed her into a pleasantly appointed room. The girl

sat down behind a mahogany desk. "Sit down, Mr. Francis. I need a few basic items of information before we begin."

Adam sagged into an armchair. "I—I thought you were your secretary," he said. "I had no idea that Dr. Morrow was a woman."

"The friend who recommended me should have told you." She opened a small notebook. "Shall we start with your age?"

"Twenty-nine," Adam said.

"What kind of work do you do?"

"I'm a draftsman."

"Place of employment?"

"I'm unemployed at the moment. But I've plenty of money, so there's no need for you to worry about your fee."

"I'm not worried about my fee . . . Where were you employed last?"

"At Mephisto Products, Incorporated. I quit them last week." He leaned forward confidentially. "The people whom I was forced to work with were so un-co-operative that efficiency was impossible. It reached a point where I was forced to leave."

Her blue eyes lifted from the notebook. "Indeed? And did these fellow-workers of yours persecute you in any way?"

"You could call it that, I suppose." Abruptly he lay back in the chair. "I'd rather not talk about it."

"Very well. Where do you live, Mr. Francis?"

"I have a room at the North-side Hotel."

"Are you married?"

"Most certainly not!"

Again, her blue eyes lifted from the notebook. This time they seemed to stab into his mind. But all she said was, "Place of birth?"

"Greenview, New York."

"Schooling?"

"Greenview Elementary School, Greenview High School, and Gaynor University."

SHE finished making the entries in her notebook, and stood up. She seemed puzzled about something. "Very well, Mr. Francis. You may lie on the couch if you think it will help you to relax, or you may stay where you are."

"I'll try the couch."

She drew up a footstool and sat down beside him. "And now, please begin."

"I'm a shadow," Adam said.

"Just you yourself?"

"No—everyone. Everything. It's an impression I get every time I look at someone or something. Every time I look in a mirror. A feeling of unreality."

"How long have you had this attitude?"

"Ever since I quit my job. It's more of a growing conviction than an attitude, though. At first

it was only a vague suspicion, but now it's reached a point where my past seems to be slipping away . . . disintegrating." He shuddered. "I'm—I'm afraid I'm losing my mind."

"That's very much to be doubted, Mr. Francis. Reality is a personal reaction to phenomena, and whenever an individual's reaction deviates from the reaction of the majority, there's generally a sound reason behind it. He may be unaware of what the reason is, but that doesn't make his acting upon it any the less reasonable, or him any less of a reasonable being. However, the word 'shadow' tells me very little. Exactly in what sense do you mean it?"

Adam thought for a moment. Then, "I mean it in the sense that people and objects seem somehow meaningless, not so much in themselves but in their relationship to me. It's as though I was an outsider and didn't belong . . . and all the while my past seems less and less real."

"What do you do days?" Dr. Morrow asked abruptly.

"Why—why, I sit in my hotel room mostly."

"And nights—do you go out?"

"No. There's nowhere I care to go."

"Aren't you interested in girls?"

"Girls!" he said with sudden vehemence. "No, I'm not inter-

ested in them! They're shadows too."

"Would you say I was a shadow?"

"Yes, I would say it!"

"Do you have any recurrent dreams, Mr. Francis?"

He shifted on the couch. "One."

"Tell me about it."

I'M sitting in a room at a table or a workbench that runs the entire length of one of the walls. It's a large room filled with machines—a machine shop of some kind. I know this, even though I am facing the wall and cannot see what is behind me. Before me on the workbench or table lies a blueprint for part of a unit, but I have no idea of what the unit is. Someone is sitting beside me, someone I know very well, but someone I can't for the life of me recall. In the dream I try to turn my head in order to see who it is, but my head will turn only just so far, and try as I will I can't turn it far enough to permit me to see who is sitting beside me. I keep trying and trying, and finally the mental effort wakes me up."

"And you have no idea who this person is?"

"Not the slightest."

"We'll let the dream go for now, Mr. Francis," she said. "I have a hunch that it will resolve itself, once the factors that oc-

casioned it are unearthed. Our primary concern now is your 'shadow-complex'—your conviction that nothing and no one is completely real. I think that the best way to cope with this will be by concentrating on your own reality first. If you can convince yourself that you are real, you will be less inclined to doubt the reality of the people and objects surrounding you."

Adam sat up on the couch. "I'll be glad to try."

"Good. I recommend that you begin revisiting the places that played an important part in your past, and re-examine their backgrounds. If in each case you will make an effort to establish your past reality, your waning belief in your present reality should be strengthened, and eventually it should be strengthened to a point where you can no longer think of yourself—or, by extension, anyone or anything else—as a 'shadow'. Provided, of course," she amended, with an enigmatic smile, "your 'shadow-complex' doesn't turn out to be founded on fact. It will be best if you begin with Mephisto Products, Incorporated. Go there and look around. Talk with the people you used to work with, if you can. All right?"

Adam nodded. "I'll try."

"Let's see, this is Thursday the fourteenth. Suppose I put you down for two-thirty Monday aft-

ernoon? That should give you plenty of time to revisit the Mephisto Products plant . . . and to react to it." After making the entry, she jotted down a set of numerals on a slip of paper, folded it and handed it to him. "This is my phone number. If you should happen to want to see me before Monday, please don't hesitate to call."

II

ARRIVING at his hotel, he did not go directly upstairs, but stopped in the bar first. It was here that he had run across the man who had recommended Dr. Morrow to him. Well no, not actually recommended her to *him* exactly. As a matter of fact, Adam had eavesdropped on a conversation the man had had with the bartender in which the former had praised Dr. Morrow to the skies. The man was not present today, however, and Adam was disappointed. Now that he had met Dr. Morrow, he wanted to know more about her. What her first name was, for instance. Was it "Joan"? he wondered. Or "Jessica"? Maybe it was just plain "Jane".

He put off visiting Mephisto Products, Incorporated till the following afternoon. The plant was located several miles outside the city limits and stood in a green valley that was otherwise

given over to truck farms. After he got off the bus he had to walk two miles along a new blacktop road. He remembered the road vaguely, but he couldn't remember ever walking along it before. He couldn't remember riding the bus out from the city before either, for that matter. How *had* he commuted then?

He passed a big red-oak and noticed a gray hardtop parked beneath the low-hanging foliage, but he saw no sign of the driver. Five minutes later he reached the plant gate. The buildings beyond the wire-mesh fence were new, but there was an odd aspect about them. They were out of line, and looked as though they had settled. There was an air of desuetude about the place, and the tall handsome stacks that should have been emitting some manner of miasma were emitting nothing at all. A short distance within the fence two workmen were detaching an object of some kind from the hook of an overhead traveling crane. There was something strangely familiar about them.

Above the gate, a big sign said, MEPHISTO PRODUCTS, INC. The gate was open, but there was a plant guard standing before it. No, not a plant guard—a state trooper. He looked Adam over with a professional eye. "Hello," Adam said politely. "Okay if I go in?"

"I'm not standing here for my health, Mac."

Beyond the gate, two patrol cars were parked in front of the nearest building. Lounging near the entrance was another trooper. Adam frowned. "Is something wrong?" he asked the first trooper.

"Looks like it, doesn't it. What'd you want to go in for?"

"I used to work here," Adam said. "I thought I'd—" The sudden interest in the trooper's eyes made him pause. "What's wrong with that?"

The trooper turned toward the gate. "Mort," he called, "tell the lieutenant to come out here. Somebody just showed up that I think he'd like to talk to." He faced Adam again. "How long did you work for this outfit, Mac?"

"Five years. I—"

The trooper was staring at him. "Five *years!* Why, the place hasn't even been here five days!"

Looking past the man's head, Adam saw a third trooper emerge from the nearest building and start walking toward the gate. The trooper who had summoned him fell in behind. Adam swallowed. Glancing at the two workmen standing beneath the traveling crane, he saw that neither of them had moved one iota since he had first noticed them. The strange sense of familiarity that he had experienced earlier returned with a vengeance, adding

surrealistic overtones to the inexplicable situation he had blundered into. "I—I think I'll be on my way," he said, taking a tentative step backward and then bolting off across the fields. The bullets which the troopers fired over his head served to accelerate rather than to slow his footsteps, and when he looked back a little while later and saw that the lieutenant and several other troopers were giving pursuit, he upped his speed yet another notch. A man standing on a nearby hill with a pair of binoculars raised to his eyes gave him a momentary scare; then he realized that the man could be nothing more than an innocent bystander—a bird watcher, probably—and plunged boldly by.

AFTER scaring a killdeer half out of its wits, he entered a small woods. Halfway through it, he veered to the left, slid down into a small gully and followed a dry creekbed out onto a wide meadow. The banks were lower here, but by stooping as he ran, he was able to keep his head and shoulders beneath the level of the meadow. Presently the gully approached a group of farm buildings closely enough to enable him to dodge behind a big barn. He gained entry by means of a loose plank, climbed a wooden ladder into a dusty haymow and collapsed gasping into the hay.

He lay there for a long while, asking himself over and over why he had run away, each time receiving no reply.

Suddenly the barn door slid open, and a man clad in blue coveralls came in. From his prone position in the haymow, Adam had a good view, of the front section of the building's interior, and he watched the man walk over to a big workbench, pick up a large C-clamp, and start back toward the door. Before the man reached it, however, a trooper appeared in the opening, and stepped inside. "See anything of a tall brown-haired joker in a dark-blue suit?" he asked the coveralled man.

The coveralled man shook his head. "What you want him for?"

"Resisting arrest. But we want him for something else too. He used to work for the Mephisto outfit—or claims he did."

The coveralled man stiffened. "Worked for them! Then maybe he knows why they built their plant here."

"Even more important, maybe he knows how they built it without anybody seeing them do it. Well, keep an eye out."

"You bet I will. I ain't got no use for anybody connected with an outfit mean enough to ruin five acres of good cabbage-land for no other reason than to set up a phony plant with a bunch of dummy workers in it."

"How come you people waited so long before notifying the authorities?"

"Old John Driscoll—that's the owner of the property—didn't come back from Florida this spring, and left the land lie idle, so when we saw this plant built on it we figured he'd sold out. Of course we wondered how it could have gone up so fast and without anybody noticing, but we didn't really suspect anything was wrong till the kids got inside and come home and started telling crazy stories about it being filled with people that didn't move or breathe, and that looked exactly alike. We acted then, though, let me tell you. The nerve of someone pulling a stunt like that! I'd like to get my hands on whoever it was!"

"So should we," said the trooper. He glanced around the barn. "Any chance that the man we're looking for could have sneaked in here?"

"I don't see how. I've been in the yard all afternoon. Damned automatic pump's been acting up."

The two men went outside, and the door slid back into place. A large drop of sweat separated itself from Adam's forehead and splashed into the hay. His reality was turning out to have holes in it a yard wide.

Five acres wide.

DESCENDING the ladder, he found a knothole in the sliding door, and peered out into the yard. A short distance away, the coveralled man was clamping a length of pipe onto a sturdy sawhorse. As Adam watched, another man appeared—a big beefy man with a wart on the side of his nose. He was wearing an olive-drab hiking outfit, and there was a pair of binoculars suspended from his fat neck. Adam recognized him as the bird watcher he had seen on the hill.

Simultaneously he had a notion that he had known the man before, on another world, under a different set of circumstances. The notion was so ridiculous that he kicked it out of his mind.

The bird watcher talked with the coveralled man for a while, and throughout the conversation he kept glancing in this direction and that, as though fearful lest a rare bird would fly by without his seeing it. Presently he departed from the scene along the same route by which he had entered it.

Adam returned to the haymow and stayed there till nightfall, then he slipped out of the barn and made his way across the starlit fields to the outskirts of the city. He entered a phone booth that stood in front of a closed-for-the-night service station and dialed Dr. Morrow's number. Would she still be in her

office? He wondered. The chances were a hundred to one against it.

"Dr. Morrow speaking."

The reassuring warmth of her voice put his doubts to rout. "This is Adam Francis—may I see you right away?"

He was prepared for any number of objections, but none of them materialized. All she said was, "Very well, Mr. Francis, I'll be waiting for you."

* * *

ARE you all right, Mr. Francis? she asked anxiously when she saw the condition of his clothing. "You look as though you've had a bad time."

"Sure, I'm all right."

He tried to tell her everything at once, but she stopped him and led him into the next room. A pot of coffee sat upon a little hot plate on her desk. She filled two cups and handed one to him. "Now, Mr. Francis," she said, sitting down behind her desk, "please begin."

Feeling calmer, he sat back in one of the armchairs and came through with a reasonably coherent account of his adventure. Her composure deserted her when he came to the part about the trooper at the gate, but she regained it quickly. Nevertheless, he knew that she had been surprised. "Well, that much is behind you at least," she said

when he had finished. "I'm sorry to have had to expose you to such an unpleasant experience, but it was unavoidable."

He was put out. "Then you knew what I'd run into all along!"

"Except for your run-in with the law. I didn't know that the plant had been brought to their attention yet." She sighed. "Now it's only a matter of time before they'll tie you in with the hoo-mun—" She left the unfinished word hanging in midair. "Did you see anyone else besides the people you told me about?" she asked.

"Just a bird watcher." He told her about the fat man.

A frown marred the marble smoothness of her forehead. "Well let's hope it was birds he was watching," she said. "He could very well have been watching you—although I don't see how they could have caught on so soon. No, I'm sure they couldn't have," she went on, the frown fading. "They don't even know what to look for. I think we're safe on that score for now."

"How about throwing a little light on whatever it is you're talking about?"

She smiled. "I wish I could, but more information at this point would only confuse you further. You'll just have to trust me, Mr. Francis." Then, "Do you have a car?"

He started to nod his head. Then he started to shake it. "I—I don't know," he said presently.

"We'll use mine then."

"Where are we going?"

"Deeper into your past."

Outside, it had begun to rain, and phalanx after phalanx of raindrops were driving against the window. "And you're going with me?" Adam asked incredulously.

"Yes. There may be complications. What did you do before you went to work for Mephisto Products, Incorporated, Mr. Francis?"

"I—I attended a university," Adam said. "Gaynor University. It's about—about three hundred miles south of here."

"Good. We'll leave for there at once. Go back to your hotel, change your clothes, pack your things and check out. I'll pick you up an hour from now."

III

THEY drove all night, alternating at the wheel. They caught several newscasts before midnight, but while one of them described "the mystery-man" who had showed up at "the mystery-plant" that afternoon, the description was of so general a nature that no one, save perhaps the trooper who had supplied it, could have applied it specifically to Adam. No, there was nothing

to worry about, Dr. Morrow told him, visibly relieved. "Yet," she added.

Dawn found them winding through a series of wooded hills. Adam kept an eye peeled for familiar land marks, but failed to spot a single one. And yet he knew which turns to make, and the names of all the towns in the vicinity of the university. "I don't understand it," he said. "I must have passed this way dozens of times, and yet nothing seems familiar."

Dr. Morrow was driving. "I wouldn't worry about it, Mr. Francis," she said.

"I can't help it. It was the same way with the Mephisto Products plant. I knew where it was all right, but I had no recollection of ever actually being there. I could remember the road, but I couldn't remember walking or driving along it."

"And the buildings—did you remember them?"

"Not—not exactly. They were different, somehow. They—they seemed to be out of line. Now why should that be?"

"I'd say that the builder was in such a hurry that he forgot to dr—to lay the footings. Shall we stop some place for breakfast?"

They chose a combination roadside diner and service station. Adam insisted on paying for the meal and the gas. "You'll regret your prodigality when you

get my bill," she said, laughing. She drove around the gray hard-top that was parked by the next pump, and pulled back onto the highway.

"If you can clear up the mystery of what happened to my past, I don't care how much you charge me. Right now, though, there's another mystery I'd like cleared up. What does 'J' stand for?"

"Jane," she said. "What else?"

"That's funny—I had a hunch it would be just plain Jane."

She gave a slight start. "Did you?" And then, "Oh, you mean 'plain'."

"That's what I said—'plain'. 'Jane's' a nice name—I like it," he went on. "I hope you like 'Adam' as well."

"'Adam's' a swell name," she said. "Which turn should I take?"

They had come to a cross-roads. "The right one, I think."

"We'll try it."

THE road led into hills that grew more thickly wooded by the minute. Houses became more and more scattered, finally disappeared altogether. "What an odd location for a university," Jane said.

"There it is now," said Adam, pointing. "You can see it through the trees if you look hard enough."

The trees grew right up to its

very doors and windows, and the winding blacktop road into which Jane presently turned had more of the aspect of an anfractuons tunnel than it did a road. In common with the blacktop job that gave access to Mephisto Products, Incorporated, it showed no signs of wear and tear. The university itself consisted of exactly one building—a big red-brick affair with a vaulted entrance. The structure was slightly awry, and a jagged crack blemished its otherwise handsome façade.

"No footings again," Jane said, stopping the car. "Our builder was in a hurry all right." She opened the door and got out. "Coming, Adam?"

He joined her reluctantly. Far from evoking a sense of nostalgia, the sight of his alma mater gave rise to a feeling of uneasiness. "Do you think we should go inside?" he asked nervously.

"Well of course we should. It's bound to be discovered sooner or later, and we may never get another chance."

He followed her up a short flight of steps. Seen at close-range, the building had a blurred appearance: some of its bricks blended in with adjacent bricks, and there was a general absence of sharp edges and clearly demarcated lines. Inscribed on a white plaque above the vaulted



entrance were the words GAYNOR UNIVERSITY.

One of the two adjoining doors was open. He preceded Jane into a long corridor that was unlighted save for the morning brightness streaming in behind them. In the gloom ahead he saw a man approaching, and he touched Jane's arm. Together they waited for him to come up.

They waited and they waited. The man did not move. He appeared to be frozen in the midst of a long stride. His right arm hung on a slight forward angle, and his left slanted slightly to the rear. Both were immobile.

Suddenly Jane gasped. "Why of course!" she said, and hurried down the corridor.

Adam followed. Something about the man terrified him. Coming up to him, he saw why.

The man was himself.

Well no, not really himself, but a homunculus created in his own image. Somehow, that was even worse, and for a moment his senses swarmed. "It's all right, Adam," Jane said. "There's nothing to be afraid of."

HE looked at the homunculus more closely. It was a replica of himself all right, just as the two workmen at the Mephisto Products plant had been, he realized now, but the features were slightly blurred. So was the entire figure, for that matter, and the dark-blue suit that clothed it

seemed less of a garment than it did a part of the body itself. The brown hair did not ring quite true either, and reaching out and touching it, he discovered that it was a single unit, and as hard as a rock. The suit was equally as hard, he found, exploring farther, and so were the arms and legs.

"It's made out of the same material as the building," Jane explained. "Paint."

He stared at her. "*Paint?*"

She nodded. "Let's look at the classrooms."

They stepped through the doorway nearest them, and into the room beyond. It was a good sized room, but the desks that filled it made it seem small. Behind each desk, a homunculus sat, and standing at the head of the "class" beside a big blackboard was another homunculus. The room's only illumination was provided by the morning sunlight streaming through its three windows. The windows fell considerably short of being perfect rectangles, and there was no glass in them.

Adam looked at the nearest "student". A feeling of anguish all but overcame him, then went away as abruptly as it had come into being. The "student" was a "girl". It had a heart-shaped face, hazel eyes and light-brown hair. On the front of its blue pullover was a big "G". Looking

around the room, he saw that fully half of the homunculi were "girls", each identical. The other half of the homunculi were "young men," also "wearing" a blue pullover with a big "G" on the front, and each a replica of himself.

Even the blue-suited "instructor" was a replica.

He leaned weakly against the wall. "I—I don't understand," he said. "Why are they all me? And that girl. For a second I could have sworn that I know her—know her very well."

Sadness touched Jane's face, and she looked away. "You do," she said. Then, "Shall we look at the other rooms?"

HE followed her back out into the corridor. The other rooms proved to be duplicates of the first, save for one, and that one differed in only two respects: there was a complex diagram of some kind on the blackboard, and the "instructor" was pointing toward it with a long pointer. "Well," Jane said, looking around the final room, "I think we've seen just about all there is to see. Shall we go?"

"The sooner the better," Adam said.

They started for the door—and stopped in their tracks. One of the two men who had edged into the room was about Adam's age and build, and as strikingly

handsome as he was vaguely familiar. The other man was big and beefy, and there was a wart on the side of his nose. Suddenly Adam remembered the gray hardtop that had been parked in front of Jane's Chevrolet at the service-station diner. It was the same gray hardtop that he had seen parked beneath the redoak on his way to the Mephisto Products plant.

The bird watcher hadn't been watching birds after all. He had been watching Adam. Somewhere along the line he had picked up a henchman. "I don't think I need to tell you why we're here," he said. "You can't be that far gone, even if they did have to call in a Plane Jane." And then, much less affably, "Hand it over, and make sure it's the real one this time!"

Adam ignored him. "This," he said to Jane, "is the man I was telling you about. I thought he was watching a killdeer, but instead he was watching me."

"And before that," Jane said, "he was watching the plant, waiting for you to show up." She confronted the bogus bird-watcher. "You could have got to him much sooner if you'd given some thought to the psychological implications of the word 'Mephisto'."

The man gave her an ugly look. "You," he said, "have an unusually long nose, even for a

Plane Jane." And then, "Take care of her, George."

"You bet, Uncle Charlie!" the other man said, whipping something out of his pocket and stepping forward. "I'll—"

Thwack! His head jerked sideways as Jane's upswinging purse caught him on the side of the face, and the switch-blade he had drawn fell to the floor. Jane stooped and snatched it up just as Adam's right fist found Uncle Charlie's chin. Uncle Charlie reeled into George, and the two of them staggered out into the hall and collided with the "striding" homunculus. All three figures went down.

Jane handed him the knife, slipped out of her shoes, and peeled off her stockings. Both George and Uncle Charlie were out cold, and using a stocking apiece, she had them trussed helplessly in a matter of seconds. Adam observed the proceedings with rather round eyes. Quite a number of questions occurred to him, but he voiced only one of them. "What have you got in your purse?" he asked as he accompanied her through the entrance. "An anvil?"

She laughed. "Not exactly. However, there are five pounds of shot sewn into the lining." She paused on the steps, as though a thought had just struck her. "I'll be right back." She re-entered the building.

The gray hardtop was parked at the foot of the steps, and while he was waiting for her he raised the hood, removed the distributor and threw it into the underbrush. He threw the switch-blade after it just as Jane came back through the entrance.

DRIVING down the winding road, Adam said, "He called you a plain Jane. I don't think you're plain at all."

She gave him a warm look. "Thank you, sir, she said. But he didn't mean quite what you thought he meant."

He hesitated for a moment. Then, "I—I must be pretty far gone. When he said 'hand it over' I didn't have the remotest notion of what he was talking about—and yet I remember him from somewhere."

"No, Adam, you're not far gone at all—you've withdrawn temporarily from reality, that's all. Your withdrawal was occasioned by two factors—one emotional and one physical—and as a result it's more complicated than ordinarily would have been the case. I don't know yet what the emotional factor was, but I do know that the physical factor was the blow you received on the head."

"But I didn't receive any blow on the head!"

"Not in your present form—no. But you received one—take

my word for it. Blood and bludgeon shells don't lie."

"All right," he said. "Granted for the moment that someone did lay me low with some manner of gruesome weapon. Who was it?"

"One of our two friends back at the university possibly. Or, if not one of them, someone who's working with them. I don't know myself how many of them we have to deal with yet, but even if I did, it wouldn't do any good for me to brief you any more at this point, Adam, because until you regain at least part of your three-plus memory, no bells will ring."

"My *three-plus* memory?"

"See?" she said. "No bells. Until they begin to ring, I can't tell you a thing—and when they do begin to ring, I won't need to."

"Let's get on with your peripatetic psychotherapy then. What's the next item on your agenda?"

"It's on the same order as the first two. What did you do before you attended the university, Adam?"

"I—I was in the army," Adam said.

THE camp was located in an isolated valley, fifty miles from nowhere. A dirt road approached to within two miles of it, then veered off sharply in another direction. At the veering-

off point, another road—a brand new blacktop job—struck off across a stretch of countryside that was notable only for the number of rocks and boulders scattered over it and for the utter absence of anything else.

Adam turned gratefully into the new road. He was sick of ruts, and his pine ached from the innumerable bumps it had absorbed. Jane, in a similar mood, lay luxuriously back on the seat beside him. "I was beginning to think we'd never find the place," she said.

"Let's hope no one else has."

Apparently no one had. At any rate, there were no signs of life in or about the sprawling assortment of barracks, mess halls, PX's, officers' quarters, orderly rooms, and motor pools that presently came into view. Still life, yes—there were signs galore of that. Adam scowled at the immobile sentry standing at port arms by the ingate. Save for its uniform, it was a dead-image of Adam himself.

So was the sentry standing by the out-gate.

So was the PFC they passed as they drove along the camp road.

So was the captain they saw on a big parade ground drilling three platoons of troops.

So were the three platoons of troops.

Farther down the road they came to a motor pool that con-

tained four jeeps, two weapons-carriers, a cargo truck and a staff car. "I'll bet you none of them have motors," Jane said.

Adam stopped the Chevrolet and got out and looked. None of them did. "Which proves what?" he said, climbing back in behind the wheel.

"That in common with all of mankind's inventions, the one we have to deal with here is subject to the human factor."

He let the enigmatic remark pass, and drove on. In the last town they had gone through they had bought food and blankets, agreeing that it would be more practical to sleep in the camp, should it prove to be empty, than to drive any farther. The problem now was to find suitable quarters, and presently it solved itself when a building much less military in nature than the others came into sight. It was three stories high, was fronted by a stately four-column portico, and was topped by three big chimneys. The frieze that ran the gamut of the entablature succeeded admirably in conveying the owner's name without the slightest detriment to decor—

G * E * N * E * R * A * L * F * R * A
* N * C * I * S * G * E * N * E * R *
A * L * F * R * A * N * C * I * S * G
* E * N * E * R * A * L * F * R * A *
N * C * I * S * G * E * N * E * R * A *

L * F * R * A * N * C * I * S * G * E
* N * E * R * A * L * F * R * A * N *
C * I * S * G * E * N * E * R * A * L

—and parked by the portico steps were two jeeps and a staff car, each appended by a realistic set of tire tracks in the dust.

Adam pulled up behind the staff car, and both of them got out.

Jane stood with her hands on her hips, staring up at the frieze. At length, "I've seen examples of wish-fulfillment before," she said, "but this one takes the cake. What were you in the army, Adam?"

"A—a PFC," Adam said sheepishly.

"I thought so."

THEY ascended the portico steps. The big front door was wide open, and gave access to a high-ceilinged hall which in turn led to a large living room. The living room had no illumination of its own, but enough of the absconding daylight came through its windows to enable them to distinguish a huge fireplace and several voluminous chairs. One of the chairs stood by the fireplace, and there was an officer sitting in it.

Adam grimaced. "Hi, Adam," he said.

"Hi yourself," said the officer, standing up. Then, "Get them, men!"

None of the four M.P.'s who stepped out of the shadows had Adam's face. Neither did the officer, who, in the radiance of the gasoline lantern which he presently lighted, turned out to be a chicken colonel. "Well," he said to Adam, "welcome back to camp. Your buddies have missed you. I had a hunch you'd come straight to General Francis' humble abode to report in."

The sarcasm was heavy-handed, but effective. Adam, taken aback, could not find his voice. Jane, however, was more than equal to the occasion. "Before you go any further, colonel," she said, "I think that you should know that I am a qualified psychoanalyst, and that this man is my patient. I am in the midst of administering to him the corrective therapy which my diagnosis of his case suggested to me as being the one most likely to bring about his return to normalcy, and I will regard any interference on your part as a tort, and will institute appropriate legal proceedings at the earliest opportunity."

The colonel appraised her with sharp brown eyes. "I must say that I find your therapy rather interesting, doctor, encompassing as it does the abetting of the escape of a criminal. You are to be commended for your originality, though hardly for your professional ethics."

Jane stiffened. "I'll have you know that my patient is not a criminal!"

"I'm afraid the state trooper at the gate in front of the Mephisto Products plant would disagree with you." The colonel turned toward Adam. "Prior to your appearance on the scene, he hadn't seen any of the Mephisto 'personnel' at close range, but when he did, he identified you instantly as the model for the male homunculi. We had already spotted this camp, and the tie-in between the two places was obvious, so it wasn't difficult for me to persuade my superiors that the best way to capture you would be by playing possum and waiting for you to show up. Do you have any idea of the dim view the United States Army takes of having its sacred traditions held up to ridicule?"

Adam could have sworn that he had seen that blunt smug face before, but where or when, he could not for the life of him recall. "No, I don't," he said, "and besides I didn't hold up anybody's traditions to ridicule. I've no more idea of how this camp got here than you have!"

Jane was looking at the colonel closely. "What made you think he would show up here?" she asked.

"It was a pretty safe bet. If a man visits two places that have a special significance to him, the

odds have it that he'll visit a third." The colonel turned toward one of the M.P.'s. "Lock them up in the stockade and post a guard, corporal—we'll take them back to headquarters in the morning. First, though, search them. Go through those blankets and those bags he's carrying too."

TO Adam's surprise, Jane did not object. He was about to do so himself, but seeing her shake her head, he deferred to her better judgment. He was allowed to keep everything he had in his pockets after the colonel examined each item minutely, and as for Jane, she had no pockets, and she had left her purse in the car. The search completed, they were led outside by two of the M.P.'s, loaded into one of the jeeps, and driven toward the outskirts of the camp. The other two M.P.'s followed in the remaining jeep.

The stockade proved to be a large one. It needed to be in order to accommodate all of the Adam Francis's that were imprisoned in it. The M.P.s deployed themselves to the three towers and the gate.

Jane took Adam's arm. "Let's go in one of the buildings so I can talk to you," she whispered.

He led the way across a small parade ground to the mess hall.

"Listen, Adam, I'm going to

have to step up your therapy—there's no other way. The colonel wants you for himself, not the army. More specifically, he wants something he thinks you have in your head, now that he knows for certain that you don't have it on your person."

The touch of her golden hair upon his cheek had in no way straightened out Adam's thoughts. "How do you know?" he asked.

"He betrayed himself when he said that you had visited *two* places of special significance. We saw no mention of the university in any of the papers we bought, and we didn't hear a single word about it on the radio, so we can safely assume, in view of all the publicity the Mephisto Products plant has been getting, that the university hasn't been reported to the authorities. Therefore, in order for him to have known about it, he must have been apprised in some other way. Originally I thought that both the 'bird watcher' and his friend had followed us from the city, but I know now that only the 'bird watcher' did. The other man was already posted at the university, just as the 'bird watcher' had been posted at the Mephisto Products plant, and just as the colonel himself was posted here. After they got loose from my nylons, the 'bird watcher' and his friend probably noti-

fied him that we were on our way, and now he's probably waiting for them to show up. When they do show up, the colonel is going to send his four enlisted men back to headquarters on some pretext or other, and we're going to have company. I can't escape by myself, and the colonel knows it; but what he doesn't know is that you are sufficiently cured to effect both our escapes—if I prod you a little. So I'm going to prod you, Adam—and I warn you, it won't be pleasant."

"I can take it," Adam said.

"Good. Listen carefully now: You created this camp. You created the university. You created Mephisto Products, Incorporated. You painted them, Adam. You *painted* them!"

ABRUPT blackness smote him, and he began a vertiginous slide down a chute of nothingness. Around him, spheres and squares and rectangles gradually took shape and began to glow in reds and greens and yellows; in purples and violets and blues. The chute grew steeper, the descent swifter. Terrified, he reached out wildly and tried to grasp the sides, but there were no sides to grasp, and he only fell the faster. He opened his mouth and screamed a long and soundless scream, and the squares and rectangles scat-

tered, and the spheres spun in color-riotous orbits round his head. Then, gradually, he became aware of a pressure upon his wrists, of a force being exerted in what seemed to be several directions at once. The force increased, and one by one the spheres and squares and rectangles went away, and the darkness of the mess hall settled round him once again.

Jane was leaning close to him, so close that her forehead touched his. He heard her voice: "You must trust me, Adam. Completely, implicitly." She released his wrists. "Now you are going back again, but this time you are going to go all the way through, and I am going with you. When we complete the passage, we will find ourselves in a large room looking down upon a painting of this camp. The only way I can enter this room is by accompanying you, since its para-dimensional field will respond to your three-plus pattern alone. The second you arrive there you will probably develop a splitting headache, so be prepared. You will go first, and I will follow. Ready?"

"But how?" Adam asked. "Where?"

"Through the doorway. See?—it's right there at your elbow."

He saw the vertical slot of blackness then, and it was right at his elbow, just as she had

said. It had been there at his elbow all along, but somehow he had failed to perceive it. He slipped into it, consciously this time, and again blackness smote him, and again the vertiginous descent began. As before, spheres and squares and rectangles took shape, and pulsed in thrilling colors, and gradually he realized that they were a part of the chute . . . that they *were* the chute, and that he was sliding down them, no not down them, through them, no, not sliding, drifting; drifting gently down against a cobalt-blue swirl of nothingness, down, down into a surge of pink and purple, of mauve upturning, rising, flowing, spreading out for light years, ages, parsecs, eons. Growing bolder now, he glanced over his shoulder, and saw Jane drifting just behind him, drifting in multicolor, in variegation, in geometric panoply, golden hair flaring upward like a solar prominence, arms and shoulders glowing against the deep-blue background, green dress fluttering in a nonexistent breeze . . . Jane, just plain Jane. No, that wasn't right. Not 'plain'—'plane'. *Jane is a Plane Jane*, he thought giddily. *A Plane Jane is Jane*. And then, *Thy hand, thy touch, they comfort me . . .* and all the while he thought, he did not understand . . . Words, empty words; words without meaning,

words out of a past he had put behind him, out of a reality he once had known, and had thrown away . . .

THE descent—if descent it was—ceased. The blue background faded, and one by one the spheres and squares and rectangles dissolved and disappeared. The room that took shape around him struck a resounding chord of *deja vu* on the keyboard of his memory, but he could not identify the concerto of which it was a part. To his right stood a familiar desk. On it sat a familiar coffee pot, and beside the coffee pot stood a familiar cup. Not far from where the desk stood, there was a dark stain on the metal floor, and several feet from the stain, a small object glittered in the bright light that rained down from three powerful ceiling lamps. Before him, a large painting rested on a makeshift easel. It was a painting of the camp.

His head began to throb, and raising his hand, he discovered a blood-caked wound on his forehead. Jane, who had emerged beside him, pulled his hand away and examined the wound herself. "It's not as serious as I feared," she said presently. "You're going to be all right, Adam."

He hardly heard her. He was too absorbed in the painting. It was astonishingly detailed, and

astonishingly accurate. He could see the tiny figures of the various Adam Francis's throughout the camp. Indeed, if it hadn't been for the painting's relative smallness and its lack of depth, it could have been the camp itself, and even despite these two drawbacks, he caught himself searching for Jane and himself and the four M.P.'s. He did not find any of them, of course, because the painting wasn't really the camp, but the *original* of the camp.

Now how had he known that? he wondered.

He looked at the painting again. At its base, a relatively wide strip of canvas had been left blank, and a single wavy black line began at the bottom edge of the canvas and extended up to the "plant gate." Presently he identified the line as the "blacktop road" he had walked along the previous day on his way to the plant.

The throbbing of his head increased.

To the right of the painting, another painting rested upon another makeshift easel, and just beyond the second painting, still another painting rested upon a genuine easel. The second painting depicted the university, and the third, the Mephisto Products plant. Each was astonishingly detailed and accurate, and each was connected to the bottom

edge of the canvas by a wavy black line.

"The micro-macro transdimensional projector is just behind you," Jane said.

TURNING, he saw the huge machine that pre-empted half of the room. Protruding from its dial-bedight panel were three lens units. They were approximately five feet apart and approximately eight feet above the level of the floor, and were focused on a painting apiece. A detailed image of the machine's complex interior flashed through his mind, and he knew suddenly that the machine was his brain-child, that he had supervised the machining of its parts, and that he had assembled it himself in this very room—this sanctum sanctorum which the company that had employed him had set aside for his exclusive use and attuned to his personal reactive pattern alone. However, the knowledge did not thrill him—it repelled him instead.

Jane was talking. She had been talking for some time now, but her words had not been getting through to him. "Adam," she said sharply, "pull yourself together and listen. There should be one more painting—a painting of the village of Greenview, the village where you were born and went to school. Do you have any idea where it might be?"

Miserably he shook his head. "Not the slightest."

"But you do remember there being such a place, don't you?"

"Oh yes. I can remember Greenview quite well. Much better than I can remember any of the—the other places. I can remember being in the army quite well too—up to—up to—" His thoughts went awry, and he paused. The throbbing of his head intensified. "Let's get out of here, Jane. My head's killing me."

"Poor Adam," she said. And then, "We'll go. But I want to make a few changes in the camp first. It will never do for us to go back and find it exactly the way we left it."

She went over to where a tall cupboard stood, opened it, found some paint, a small brush, and a bottle of transparent fluid. She squeezed a small amount of paint onto the brush, stepped over to the camp-painting, and painted five walls, one around each of the stockade towers, one around the stockade gate, and one around G * E * N * E * R * A * L * F * R * A * N * C * I * S *

mansion. Next, she wet her handkerchief from the contents of the bottle and wiped away a sizeable section of the stockade fence just to the left of the gate. Finally she put everything back, turned to Adam brightly. "Lead the way," she said.

The slot of blackness was right at his elbow. Funny, how he had been unable to see it before. Perhaps you had to look a certain way. He slipped into it, and as he did so, his headache disappeared. Once again he found himself drifting down the chute that was not a chute, but a gently descending lane of spheres and squares and rectangles, a rainbow lane of flagstones and flowers. Turning his head, he saw Jane, and marveled at her flaming golden hair, and the spheroid flowers blooming all around her. This time, giddiness did not touch him, and his mind remained clear. *Paradimensional travel*, he thought. And then, *sidling*. Yes, that was it: sidling—sidling through the paraplane. There were two worlds, not one. Two universes. One was three-dimensional, the other, four, and aside from their dimensional difference and the slight variations which that difference gave rise to, they were identical.

The secret of who he was lay right at his fingertips. But he did not touch it.

He was afraid.

* * *

THEY emerged in the mess hall, not on the bench where they had been sitting, but near the door. "Apparently our coun-

terparts were about to do a little exploring," Jane said. "Poor things. It must be awful suddenly to find yourself in a strange place and not have the remotest idea of how you got there." She picked up the thermos and one of the bags of sandwiches and they headed outside. Each of the three sentry towers now had a high pink wall around it, and a similar wall enclosed the stockade gate. From behind each came the sound of muffled shouts.

They disabled one of the jeeps by removing the distributor, commandeered the other and set out for the mansion, Adam at the wheel. The wall around G * E * N * E * R * A * L * F * R * A * N * C * I * S * mansion was much higher than the other walls, and the colonel's shouts were barely audible.

Adam pulled up beside Jane's Chevrolet, and they got out. He was removing the distributor from the jeep when he saw the headlights of the approaching car. Jane saw them simultaneously. "Looks like I painted my walls too soon," she said. "That's our 'bird watcher' and his friend as sure as my name is Jane."

"We can always paint another one," Adam said, getting into the spirit of things. "See, they've stopped by that barracks there."

"Let's."

He preceded her through the

dark doorway. "This time I'll be the artist."

RESOLUTELY ignoring the headache that beset him the instant he emerged from the paraplane, he chose a bright yellow and applied it artfully. Two new muffled voices were audible when they returned to the camp, and the new wall rose up like a chrome-yellow version of the Bastille. "It's rough on their counterparts," Jane said, climbing into the Chevrolet, "but it can't be helped."

For the second time he let her confusing use of the word "counterparts" go unchallenged. He kept seeing the golden-haired girl hanging against the cobalt cheek of the paranight. Getting behind the wheel, he asked, "Where to now?"

"Greenview—where else?"

Then: "Are you married, Jane?"

"No."

"Do your male patients ever fall in love with you?"

She started. "Sometimes. Why?"

"Because I have."

She took a deep breath. "I think we'd better be on our way, Adam."

Dutifully, he started up the motor. "I just told you I was in love with you," he said. "Don't I rate any reaction at all?"

She would not look at him.

"You just told me you were in love with me as a patient. There's a difference, you see."

"But that's not what I meant at all. I—"

"It's the only thing you could have meant." She turned toward him then, and to his astonishment he saw that the verdant fields and foothills were glistening with dew. "You can't be in love with me any other way, Adam, because you're already in love. You're in love with the girl you used as a model for the university 'co-ed.'"

The sudden emptiness that pervaded him told him that what she had said was true.

V

JANE saw the sign first. It stood at the intersection of two state highways, and it said, GREENVIEW, 61 MILES. "Well no wonder we couldn't find the fourth painting, she said. "There wasn't one. Greenview's on the level." She shook her head in bewilderment. "I didn't figure on anything like this at all."

Adam straightened up on the seat. "Maybe I'm going to turn out to be real after all," he said bitterly.

"Well, there's one possibility," she said. "You mentioned having a buddy while you were in the army. What was his name?"

"That's the funny part about

it—his name was my name turned around. Francis Adam. It was our names that drew us together—that and the fact that we were both the same age, and both PFC's."

"When did he die?"

He stared at her in amazement. "How did you know he died?"

She ignored the question. "It was while you were still in the army, wasn't it?"

Adam nodded. "It was back in 'fifty-four. There was an accident on the firing range—one of those crazy things that aren't supposed to happen, but sometimes do. A ricochet." He shook his head. "I felt awful about it for a long time. We were pretty close. I think we knew almost as much about each other as we did about ourselves."

"I'm sure you did," Jane said. She pulled over onto the shoulder and stopped the car. "Take the wheel for the rest of the way, will you, Adam? I'm way overdue for a brown study."

She sat silently beside him as he drove over hills counterpaned with green grass and meadow flowers. Greenview stood on a green hillside overlooking a vista of fields and forests that was familiar and yet not familiar, and the highway wound down the gentle slope past a cemetery, a saw mill, and a shoe factory, and merged with the elm-lined

main thoroughfare of the village proper. He looked this way and that for a remembered house or a remembered tree or a remembered blade of grass, and got nothing for his trouble but a feeling of sadness.

Presently houses and trees gave way to a sequence of false fronts and naked walks. At Jane's direction, he pulled up in front of a small restaurant whose glowing neon sign proclaimed it to be open. "Wait for me inside," she said. "There's something I have to find out for certain before we go any farther."

MISERABLY he entered the restaurant and ordered coffee. The building evoked no recognition. Neither did the waitress. There was something shadowy about all this. There was something shadowy about himself. Something unreal. No, he had never been to Greenview before, or, if he had, all memory of the experience had been wiped away.

But he had been *born* here, he reminded himself desperately. Before entering the army he had *lived* here. The operator's license he carried in his wallet *proved* that he had lived here. He got the wallet out of his pocket and looked at the license: *Adam Francis, 11 Sharon Drive, Greenview, NY.*

A thought struck him, and he beckoned to the waitress. "How would I get to Sharon Drive from here?" he asked.

"Straight up the street, second turn to your left."

He wrote down the address on a paper napkin and handed the napkin to the waitress. "If a blonde in a green dress comes in here asking for me, tell her that that's where I've gone," he said, and laying a half dollar on the counter, he walked out.

The treeless interval of the business section gave way presently to stately elms and maples, and pleasant houses sitting well back from the walk shortly supplanted the sequence of tinselly false fronts. Sharon Drive carried on this happy residential scheme of things on a slightly less pretentious scale, and he found himself hoping desperately that the street really would turn out to be the background against which he had grown up, and that the American Colonial house, before which he presently paused, really would prove to be the house where he had been born.

Certainly there was something familiar about the house; but it was a vicarious familiarity—the sort of familiarity a person experiences when viewing an object or a scene that someone else has told him about. Bewildered, Adam started up the little shrub-

bordered walk that led to the front door. He was astonished when a girl came running out to meet him. She had light-brown hair, hazel eyes, and a heart-shaped face, and she was wearing a blue dress. She threw her arms around his neck and kissed him on the mouth. "Oh Adam, I knew you'd come back!" she cried. "I *knew* you would!"

Gasping, Adam stepped back. Anguish gripped him momentarily, and then tenderness took its place. He was in love with the girl—there was no doubt about that—and yet when he tried to think back to when he had known her, his thoughts froze in their tracks. He was able to identify her as the prototype of the Gaynor University "co-eds," but that was all. "Who—who are you?" he asked.

She took his arm solicitously. "Poor Adam," she sighed. "It's that awful blow you received on the head when you fell down the basement stairs. I knew that when you ran off with that blond hussy there was something wrong. I knew you'd never do such a thing if you were your normal self." She kissed his cheek. "Where is she now?"

Adam looked at her uncomprehendingly. Was it possible that she was referring to Jane? "I'm—I'm afraid I don't know what you mean," he said.

"She really has bewitched

you, hasn't she. Hypnotized you, I'll bet. Well, no matter. I'll keep an eye out for her."

"But who *are* you?" he repeated.

"I'm Barbara Gaynor—don't you remember? Your fiancée. Come on, let's go inside. Your mother and father have been half out of their minds since you went away, and I've been staying here with them night and day. They'll be overjoyed to see you."

HE let her lead him up the verandah steps to the front door. There was a long, low car parked beside the house, he noticed. It rang no more bells, though, than the hall in which he presently found himself. "They're in the parlor, come on, we'll surprise them."

She maded him step into the room first. "Mom! Dad!" she called over his shoulder. "Look who's here!"

The woman reached Adam first. She was tall and buxom, and had dark-brown hair. Once upon a time her face had been heart-shaped, but now it had gone to fat. "Adam dearest," she said, kissing him on the cheek, "we're so glad you're back!"

The man was tall and rangy. His hairline had receded half-way to the back of his head, and he had beady hazel eyes. "Welcome home, son," he said.

Adam knew both of them from somewhere. Well, why not? They were his mother and his father, weren't they?

"I kept telling Barbara all along that you'd be back," his mother said. "I knew you'd come to your senses about that awful blond woman you ran off with."

Barbara nodded in agreement. "I knew that my fiancé would never give me up for someone like her. I knew he'd be back."

"Son," said his father, "Do you remember that projector you and I were working on in the basement-workshop before you went away? Well, you won't believe this, but that diagram for the patent application that you made is all wrong. Did you happen to make another one by any chance?"

Diagram . . . patent application . . . Adam raised his hand to his forehead. For a moment the dream he had described to Jane superseded reality, and he found himself sitting at the familiar table or workbench, looking down at the indecipherable blueprint. As always, he tried to turn his head to see who was sitting beside him, and, as always, his head would turn only just so far, and try as he would, he could turn it no farther. He tried and he tried, and sweat squeezed out on his forehead and rolled down into his eyes—

Suddenly he found himself sit-

ting in another room—a much smaller room this time. Before him was another desk—a genuine desk. It was the same desk he had seen in the room where the three paintings stood. The paintings were not there now, though. This was before the paintings had come into being. On the desk before him was a sheet of paper with a diagram of some kind on it. The diagram seemed wrong somehow, and he leaned forward to see what the wrongness was. Suddenly there was a knock on the door—

A DAM swayed and would have fallen, had not his father caught his arm. "The second diagram," his father said. "Where is it?"

"I—I seem to recall drawing one—" Adam began.

"Yes?" said his father, leaning eagerly forward.

"Yes?" said his mother, breathing down the back of his neck.

"Yes?" said his fiancée, gazing raptly up into his eyes.

"—but I can't remember what I drew it on."

For a moment he thought he saw anger on the three faces hovering round him. "Think," said his father. "Think hard."

Desperate to please them, he concentrated with all his might. "I—I seem to recall a board of some kind," he said presently.

This time the anger on the three faces was unmistakable. "A board!" said his mother. "A board indeed." She swung on Barbara. "I told you we were wasting our time. I told you psychology wouldn't work. Just because you happened to hear the Plane Jane's analysis of his case, you think you're a Plane Jane too. Well, you're not! You have to go to school to be a Plane Jane."

"Shut up!" Barbara said flatly. Then, to Adam, "You mustn't mind mother, darling. She's all shook up. Worrying about you has brought her to the verge of a nervous breakdown. Now, you said a board of some kind. What kind of a board? An ordinary one, or a special one?"

"A—a special one," Adam said. "It—it seems to me like it was black."

"Black!" gasped Barbara. Abruptly she faced his father and mother. "Don't you see?" she said. "It's the blackboard with the diagram on it that we saw when we posted George at the university. Why, it was there in plain sight all the time, and we never tumbled. Talk about your purloined letters!"

His mother's fat face glowed like a full moon coming out from behind a cloud. "That's it!" she said. "Come on you two."

His father hesitated. "What about him?" he asked.

"Charlie and George and the colonel should be along any minute now. They'll take care of him—and the Plane Jane too."

"But we don't know what happened at the camp," his father objected. "Maybe they ran into trouble."

"With Ted in command?" Barbara flashed. "Not a chance. He can outsmart a Plane Jane any day! Come on."

They walked out of the room.

DAZED, Adam started to follow them. Someone who had been hiding in the hall stepped in front of him. Someone wearing a green sheath. Someone with golden hair and lupine-blue eyes. "No Adam," Jane said. "You stay with me."

He tried to edge past her. In vain. Outside, a car door slammed. Another. "But I have to go with them, Jane," he said. "Let me by. They're my mother and father. She's—she's my girl."

"And how did they explain me, pray?"

"You're—you're the blond hussy I ran away with. Who—who bewitched me. Who used me to gain her own evil ends." Outside, a motor started up, and there was the crunching sound of tires on gravel. "Let me by, Jane," he repeated. "Please!"

Compassion came into the lupine-blue eyes. "Poor Adam, they

took you in all over again, didn't they. People like you are made to order for people like them." The compassion gave way to contempt. "They're no good, Adam. They're just no good, and she's the worst one of the lot!"

He was trembling. "Don't say such things, Jane. They believed in me. They made me real again. They're my people—I've got to go with them!"

She sighed. "It's too late now. But you can join them later on, if you still want to. Meanwhile I want to show you something."

Dejectedly he accompanied her out of the house and down the walk. They drove out of town and up the hill. When they came opposite the cemetery, she turned in at the gate. Presently she stopped the car and got out. "Brace yourself, Adam," she said. "This won't be pleasant."

He joined her and she led the way up a gentle green slope to where a lonely marker stood. She pointed to its weathered face. "Read what it says, Adam—and read the words the way they really are, not the way you want them to be. You've got to face the truth."

He bent forward. At first, the inscribed letters and numerals refused to align themselves intelligibly on his retina. When, at last, they did, they unleashed a wave of blackness that all but overcame him:

Francis, Adam

B. Jan. 5, 1933

D. Feb. 9, 1954

Jane had moved closer to him. Now she touched his arm. "It was a cruel thing to do, but I had no choice," she said. "Can you remember now?"

"Yes," he said, "I can remember."

THE blackness was gone, put to rout by the penetrating radiance of memory regained. This time when he returned mentally to the workbench-desk, he found that he could turn his head without the slightest difficulty, and when he did so, the first person he saw was Barbara. Turning it still farther, he saw the man who had claimed to be his father but who was really Barbara's father, and the woman who had claimed to be his mother but who was really Barbara's mother. The man was operating a turret lathe and the woman was operating a drill press. Near them, their son George—Barbara's brother—was operating a surface grinder. At the opposite end of the room, the "bird watcher" was studying a set of blueprints with the colonel.

Barbara Gaynor. John and Elsa Gaynor. George Gaynor. Charlie Schell. Colonel Theodore Carter.

At first, there had been just

Barbara, the secretary Christo Products, Inc. had assigned to him when they had given him the green light on his micro-macro transdimensional projector. Then, when the need for semi-skilled machinists had arisen, he had hired her brother George and her uncle Charlie, solely upon her recommendation. A little while later, also solely upon her recommendation, he had hired her mother and father. When Christo Products, Inc., outlined the projector's military possibilities to the Department of Defense, Colonel Theodore Carter was sent to the plant to serve proceedings, and the cast was complete.

Adam Francis, *nee* Francis Adam, raised his hand to his forehead where the bludgeon-slug wound should have been, but wasn't. He shuddered. Was remembering worthwhile?

Jane looked up into his face with gentle eyes, and answered his unspoken question. "Yes, Francis, it is. You must face the truth."

Resolutely, he faced it.

THE first part of the truth was the parallel universe that existed beyond the paraplane—the four-dimensional universe of which he was a part and from which he had withdrawn, naively believing as had innumerable withdrawal neurotics before him

that a reality with only three dimensions would be less complicated, and therefore easier to cope with, than one with four. Inhabitants of the three-dimensional universe were blissfully unaware of the four-dimensional universe, and always would be, because, while it was possible to shed a dimension, it was impossible to acquire one, unless that dimension had been present originally. That was all sidling was, actually—losing one's fourth dimension on the way out, and regaining it on the way back in, with neither the loss nor the gain having the slightest effect on the person's perspective, owing to the relativity of flatness. The paraplane gave the process visual imagery, or perhaps the sidler himself supplied the imagery out of his own unconscious—no one knew for sure. The paraplane was pretty much of a mystery, and beyond the fact that it separated two parallel universes, not even the Plane Janes, who derived their nickname from it, knew very much about it.

Every person living in the four-dimensional universe had a counterpart living in the three-dimensional universe, and whenever the former sidled from Four to Three, he emerged wherever his counterpart happened to be, blended with him, and took him over completely. When sidling

back to Four, he simply left his counterpart behind him and emerged in a locale in Four that corresponded to the one he had occupied in Three. In the event that the corresponding locale was inaccessible, it was necessary to choose a different departure point. Nine hundred and ninety-nine times out of a thousand, the counterpart was engaged in an occupation that was identical to the one the sidler was engaged in, and the exception to the rule arose only when the extra dimension endemic to Four brought about complications and/or developments inconsistent with Three. Thus, while Jane's counterpart was an ordinary psychoanalyst, she herself was a "paraplane psychoanalyst," since the only way to cope with the dimensional-withdrawal neurotics who constituted the majority of her cases was by following them through the paraplane to Three, and treating them and bringing them back to Four; and, while Francis Adam's counterpart worked for a parallel Christo Products company, he had not developed a parallel micro-macro transdimensional projector because his reality lacked a corresponding sub-dimensional universe into which anything could have been projected. Similarly, no one in Three had ever developed a parallel bludgeon pistol, because such a

weapon would have been inoperable in only three dimensions.

THE second part of the truth was the micro-macro transdimensional projector itself. It could photograph a painting, enlarge it to any given size, and project it through the paraplane onto any predetermined site in the three-dimensional universe. An artist or a critic or a dilettante could then sidle to three, enter the painting as his counterpart, and examine it from a totally different perspective. Such a procedure was analogous to an inhabitant of Three shedding one dimension and entering a life-size two-dimensional materialization of, say, Van Gogh's "Landscape With Cypress Trees," and it was for the abetting of the study of the works of the grand masters that the projector had been invented and developed.

However, the purpose which a machine can be made to serve need have very little to do with the purpose which it was created to serve, and the projector was no exception. Hence, while it could be used to photograph, enlarge, and project paintings, it could also be used to photograph and project other things too. A person doing the projecting could sidle to Three, confiscate the materialization and bring it back to Four, where it would instantly acquire the dimensions

of the original object. In other words, the projector could be made to *duplicate* four-dimensional objects, mainly money, and in the wrong hands could very well lead to the upsetting of the four-dimensional economic apple cart. It could be used, in short, to build an empire, and only an idealist such as Francis Adam could have been naive enough to have failed to grasp its possibilities. The fact that Christo Products, Inc. did not share his naïveté was borne out by the special room they had designed for him to build his brainchild in—a room so impregnable that, now that he was gone, they couldn't get into it themselves without resorting to methods that might damage the projector.

The third part of the truth was Barbara. Once again he looked into her eyes during the split-second before the bludgeon pistol coughed, and once again he saw the greed and the deceit and the selfishness; the contempt all opportunistic women like herself had for impractical idealists like him; the little affair she had been having with the colonel as an inducement to his joining her familial organization; the driving ambition and the utter disregard for everyone who stood in her way—all of these things he saw in all of their ugly nakedness just as he had seen them

that other time, only this time, he did not reject them.

The fourth—and final—part of the truth was himself. Himself, unable to confront the reality of Barbara's trying to kill him, of her stealing the defective diagram and leaving him for dead; himself, regaining consciousness after she had left, rejecting his own reality and identifying with his army-buddy, Adam Francis. Himself, extrapolating Adam Francis' brief life with a series of *mise en scènes* designed in his semi-deranged state to throw his persecutors off his trail, and projecting them onto three-dimensional sites selected from the projector's inbuilt map, and then memorizing the location of those sites; *mise en scènes* that betrayed his unhappy childhood, his desperate need for affection and approval, his desire to punish himself; *mise en scènes* compounded of paint, self-pity, wish-fulfillment, oversubmissiveness, and megalomania. Himself, stuffing his pockets with all his available cash, then fleeing to Three and bending with this counterpart and setting himself up as Adam Francis. Himself, his phony past behind him, cowering in a hotel room, desperately trying to plug up the holes in his leaking reality with the straw of self-deception. Himself, rising to the bait and running

to a Plane Jane and hiding behind her skirts like a frightened child—

VI

STANDING on the green hillside, looking down at the weathered marker, Francis Adam groaned. "The diagram," he said. "I drew it on one of the classroom blackboards when I was doing the university painting. They'll get it now. I told them about it."

Jane shook her head. "All they'll get is a headache. I scraped the diagram off the blackboard when I went back inside the building, and a few minutes ago I alerted the proper three-plus authorities as to the forthcoming appearance of three of your ex-employees on the scene. I also apprised those same authorities of the whereabouts of Uncle Charlie, Brother George, and the colonel. The counterparts of all six will be given false memory patterns to account for their actions over the past several days. So will the four M.P.'s who the colonel was forced to take with him for the sake of pretense when he talked his superiors into letting him stake out the camp. Shall we go?"

They descended the slope and climbed into the car. She circled back to the highway, and soon

Greenview was far behind them. "When did you catch on that Barbara was behind the whole thing?" Francis Adam asked.

"At the army camp, when I tumbled to the fact that your 'bird watcher' didn't just happen to discover the Mephisto Products plant and didn't just happen to tie you in with it. The fact that the colonel was waiting for us at the camp proved that they must have known of the existence of the three projections all along, and the only way they could have known was by Barbara having told them, since she was the only one, outside of myself and a few trusted plant officials, who viewed the room on the main-office inter-department television screen the morning after you locked the door from the inside and disappeared. She wouldn't have had the opportunity, but it was Saturday and she happened to be the only secretary available, and one of the officials wanted someone to take down my tentative analysis of your case. I see now, though, that she didn't just *happen* to be available. After discovering that the diagram she had stolen was defective and after learning that you weren't quite as dead as you were supposed to be, she made it a *point* to be available."

He shuddered. "She must have monitored me on the main-office television screen after she took

care of the night watchman, and then come aound and knocked on my door after I completed the first diagram."

CORRECTION," Jane said. "After she *killed* the night watchman. Your girl friend is a rather cold-blooded individual, Francis. I suspected from the first that the robbery and the attempt on your life was an inside job because of the name you chose for your make-believe plant, and when you let drop your remark concerning the people you had been forced to work with, I was certain that it was. But I didn't tie in Barbara for the simple reason that I had been told that she was your fiancée, and quite naturally took it for granted that she was in love with you. As for the rest of your employees, none of them was present when I was called in, and even if they had been, I wouldn't have suspected them, because they were her relatives. Naturally I didn't suspect the colonel. I should have tumbled to the whole setup, though, from your reaction when I brought up the subject of girls. It was the reaction of a sorely disillusioned man. There's still one thing I don't understand, though. Seeing the three paintings and hearing my analysis of your case apprised Barbara of the sort of situation she was

going to have to cope with if she wanted to get the correct diagram, but how did she know about Greenview,"

"I told her about Adam Francis lots of times," he answered, "And I must have mentioned his home town at least once. When she found out I'd taken Adam's name, she probably guessed what I was up to. The 'bird watcher' must have notified her after he followed me back to the hotel the night I checked out. I had a hunch someone was following me when I phoned you."

"She beat me to the punch on that one. I thought you had merely changed your name around. Lots of my patients play little tricks like that with their names—they think they're being cunning. Well anyway," she went on, "She didn't do poor Adam's parents in. Mr. and Mrs. Francis left Greenview some time ago, and the house was for rent. All Barbara had to do was to pay a month in advance, move in with her father and mother, and wait for you to come along in the event that you eluded the other two ambushes she'd set up for you."

"Tell me one thing," he said. "Why, after I went to such lengths to hide myself, did I take your bait and come running to you less than a week after I'd assume my new identity?"

She smiled. "Because your

counterpart hadn't invented a projector, and consequently hadn't received a parallel head-injury. So when you sidled, and blended with him, your head-injury disappeared, and all that remained was your emotional shock. It wasn't quite strong enough to sustain your new reality, and you began to doubt. Your doubts resulted in your 'shadow-complex,' and you became frightened. I was only gambling, of course, when I planted my decoy in the hotel bar, but the gamble paid off. Incidentally," she went on, "locating you gave me no trouble at all. The psychological connection between the words 'Christo' and 'Mephisto' was obvious, and it wasn't difficult to figure out that in your new reality you would be playing the role of a disillusioned ex-employee and be living somewhere in the vicinity of your 'last place of employment' probably in a hotel room. The position of the locator dials on the projector panel told me where your 'last place of employment' was, and told Barbara too. But the 'Christo'-'Mephisto' connection escaped her."

HE looked wistfully at her profile. "Where are we going now?"

"Back to my office. I'm going to supply my counterpart with a memory pattern that will explain

why she rented an other office in another city, and you're going to supply your counterpart with a memory-pattern that will explain what he's doing in that office, after which you and I are going to take our leave of them and sidle back to Four and get your head-injury taken care of."

His eyes did not leave her profile. Once again he was seeing the square and rectangular flagstones and the spheroid flowers of the paraplane, and the golden-haired girl hanging against the cobalt cheek of the para-

night. She had been right when she told him that he had fallen in love with her as a patient, but that had been yesterday. Today he had fallen in love with her again.

"There's a little matter I'd like to discuss with you right now, and in considerable detail," he said.

"As a Plane Jane"

"As just plain Jane."

She pulled over onto the shoulder. "Please begin," she said.

THE END