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THE WILL

BY WALTER M. MILLER JR.

It has been said that our children do not belong to us — that we are only their custodians for a little time — that what confuses them can also confuse us — and, that in times of great crisis, they turn instinctively to the source of true understanding.

THE will of a child. A child who played in the sun and ran over the meadow to chase with his dog among the trees beyond the hedge, and knew the fierce passions of childhood. A child whose logic cut corners and sought shortest distances, and found them. A child who made shining life in my house.

Red blood count low, wildly fluctuating . . . Chronic fatigue, loss of weight, general lethargy of function . . . Noticeable pallor and muscular atrophy . . . the first symptoms.

That was eight months ago.

Last Summer, the specialists conferred over him. When they had finished, I went to Doc Jules' office — alone, because I was afraid it was going to be bad, and Cleo couldn't take it. He gave it to me straight.

"We can't cure him, Rod. We can only treat symptoms — and

hope the research labs come through. I'm sorry."

"He'll die?"

"Unless the labs get an answer."

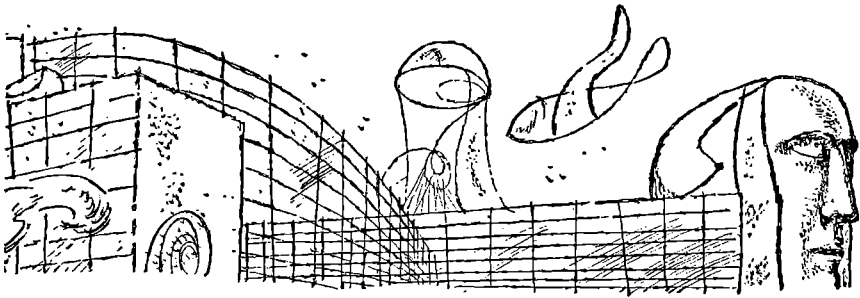
"How long?"

"Months." He gave it to me bluntly — maybe because he thought I was hard enough to take it, and maybe because he knew I was only Kenny's foster father, as if blood-kinship would have made it any worse.

"Thanks for letting me know," I said, and got my hat.

I would have to tell Cleo, somehow. It was going to be tough. I left the building and went out to buy a paper. A magazine on the science rack caught my eye. It had an article entitled *Carcinogenesis and Carbon-14*, and there was a mention of leukemia in the blurb. I bought it along with the paper, and went over to the park to read. Anything to keep from carrying the news to Cleo.





The research article made things worse. They were still doing things to rats and cosmic rays, and the word "cure" wasn't mentioned once. I dropped the magazine on the grass and glanced at the front page. A small headline toward the bottom of the page said: COMMUNITY PRAYS THREE DAYS FOR DYING CHILD. Same old sob-stuff — publicity causes country to focus on some luckless incurable, and deluge the family with sympathy, advice, money, and sincere and ardent pleas for divine intervention.

I wondered if it would be like that for Kenny — and instinctively I shuddered.

I took a train out to the suburbs, picked up the car, and drove home before twilight. I parked in front, because Cleo was out in back, taking down clothes from the line. The blinds were down in the

living room, and the lantern-jawed visage of Captain Chronos looked out sternly from the television screen. The Captain carried an LTR (local-time-reversal) gun at the ready, and peered warily from side to side through an oval hole in the title film. Kenny's usual early-evening fodder.

"*Travel through the centuries with the master of the clock!*" the announcer was chanting.

"Hi, kid," I said to the hunched up figure who sat before the set, worshipping his hero.

"*Sssshh! hhhhhh!*" He glanced at me irritably, then transferred his individual attention back to the title film.

"Sorry," I muttered. "Didn't know you listened to the opening spiel. It's always the same."

He squirmed, indicating that he wanted me to scram — to leave him to his own devices.

I scrambled to the library, but the excited chant of the audio was still with me. “. . . *Captain Chronos, Custodian of Time, Defender of the Temporal Passes, Champion of the Temporal Guard. Fly with Captain Chronos in his time-ship Century as he battles against those evil forces who would —*”

I shut the door for a little quiet, then went to the encyclopedia shelf and took down “LAC-MOE.” An envelope fell out of the heavy volume, and I picked it up. Kenny’s. He had scrawled “Lebanon, do not open until 1964; value in 1954: 38¢,” on the face. I knew what was inside without holding it up to the light: stamps. Kenny’s idea of buried treasure; when he had more than one stamp of an issue in his collection, he’d stash the duplicate away somewhere to let it age, having heard that age increases their value.

When I finished reading the brief article, I went out to the kitchen. Cleo was bringing in a basket of clothes. She paused in the doorway, the basket cocked on her hip, hair disheveled, looking pretty but anxious.

“Did you see him?” she asked.

I nodded, unable to look at her, poured myself a drink. She waited a few seconds for me to say something. When I couldn’t say anything, she dropped the basket of clothes, scattering underwear and linens across the kitchen floor, and

darted across the room to seize my arms and stare up at me wildly.

“Rod! It *isn’t* —”

But it was. Without stopping to think, she rushed to the living room, seized Kenny in her arms, began sobbing, then fled upstairs when she realized what she was doing.

Kenny knew he was sick. He knew several specialists had studied his case. He knew that I had gone down to talk with Doc Jules this afternoon. After Cleo’s reaction, there was no keeping the truth from him. He was only fourteen, but within two weeks, he knew he had less than a year to live, unless they found a cure. He pieced it together for himself from conversational fragments, and chance remarks, and medical encyclopedias, and by deftly questioning a playmate’s older brother who was a medical student.

Maybe it was easier on Kenny to know he was dying, easier than seeing our anxiety and being frightened by it without knowing the cause. But a child is blunt in his questioning, and tactless in matters that concern himself, and that made it hell on Cleo.

“If they don’t find a cure, when will I die?”

“Will it hurt?”

“What will you do with my things?”

“Will I see my real father afterwards?”

Cleo stood so much of it, and then one night she broke down, and we had to call a doctor to give her a sedative and quiet her down. When she was settled, I took Kenny out behind the house. We walked across the narrow strip of pasture and sat on the old stone fence to talk by the light of the moon. I told him not to talk about it again to Cleo, unless she brought it up, and that he was to bring his questions to me. I put my arm around him, and I knew he was crying inside.

"I don't want to die."

There is a difference between tragedy and blind brutal calamity. Tragedy has meaning, and there is dignity in it. Tragedy stands with its shoulders stiff and proud. But there is no meaning, no dignity, no fulfillment, in the death of a child.

"Kenny, I want you to try to have faith. The research institutes are working hard. I want you to try to have faith that they'll find a cure."

"Mack says it won't be for years and years."

Mack was the medical student. I resolved to call him tomorrow. But his mistake was innocent; he didn't know what was the matter with Kenny.

"Mack doesn't know. He's just a kid himself. Nobody knows — except that they'll find it sometime. Nobody knows when. It might be next week."

"I wish I had a time-ship like Captain Chronos."

"Why?"

He looked at me earnestly in the moonlight. "Because then I could go to some year when they knew how to cure me."

"I wish it were possible."

"I'll bet it is. I'll bet someday they can do that too. Maybe the government's working on it now."

I told him I'd heard nothing of such a project.

"Then they ought to be. Think of the advantages. If you wanted to know something that nobody knew, you could just go to some year when it had already been discovered."

I told him that it wouldn't work, because then everybody would try it, and nobody would work on new discoveries, and none would be made.

"Besides, Kenny, nobody can even prove time-travel is possible."

"Scientists can do anything."

"Only things that are possible, Kenny. And only with money, and time, and work — and a reason."

"Would it cost a lot to research for a time-ship, Dad?"

"Quite a lot, I imagine, if you could find somebody to do it."

"As much as the atom-bomb?"

"Maybe."

"I bet you could borrow it from banks . . . if somebody could prove it's possible."

"You'd need a lot of money of

your own, kid, before the banks would help."

"I bet my stamp collection will be worth a lot of money someday. And my autograph book." The conversation had wandered off into fantasy.

"In time, maybe in time. A century maybe. But banks won't wait that long."

He stared at me peculiarly. "But Dad, don't you see? *What difference does time make*, if you're working on a time-machine?"

That one stopped me. "Try to have faith in the medical labs, Kenny," was all I could find to say.

Kenny built a time-ship in the fork of a big maple. He made it from a packing crate, reinforced with plywood, decorated with mysterious coils of copper wire. He filled it with battered clocks and junkyard instruments. He mounted two seats in it, and dual controls. He made a fish-bowl canopy over a hole in the top, and nailed a galvanized bucket on the nose. Broomstick guns protruded from its narrow weapon ports. He painted it silvery gray, and decorated the bucket-nose with the insignia of Captain Chronos and the Guardsmen of Time. He nailed steps on the trunk of the maple; and when he wasn't in the house, he could usually be found in the maple, piloting the time-ship through imaginary centuries.

He took a picture of it with a box camera, and sent a print of it to Captain Chronos with a fan letter.

Then one day he fainted on the ladder, and fell out of the tree.

He wasn't badly hurt, only bruised, but it ended his career as a time-ship pilot. Kenny was losing color and weight, and the lethargy was coming steadily over him. His fingertips were covered with tiny stab-marks from the constant blood counts, and the hollow of his arm was marked with transfusion needles. Mostly, he stayed inside.

We haunted the research institutes, and the daily mail was full of answers to our flood of pleading inquiries — all kinds of answers.

"We regret to inform you that recent studies have been . . ."

"Investigations concerning the psychogenic factors show only . . ."

"Prepare to meet God . . ."

"For seventy-five dollars, Guru Tahaj Reshvi guarantees . . ."

"Sickness is only an illusion. Have faith and . . ."

"We cannot promise anything in the near future, but the Institute is rapidly finding new directions for . . ."

"Allow us to extend sympathy . . ."

"The powers of hydromagnetic massage therapy have been established by . . ."

And so it went. We talked to crackpots, confidence men, re-

spectable scientists, fanatics, lunatics, and a few honest fools. Occasionally we tried some harmless technique, with Jules' approval, mostly because it felt like we were doing *something*. But the techniques did more good for Cleo than they did for Kenny, and Kenny's very gradual change for the worse made it apparent that nothing short of the miraculous could save him.

And then Kenny started working on it himself.

The idea, whatever it was, must have hit him suddenly, and it was strange — because it came at a time when both Cleo and I thought that he had completely and fatalistically accepted the coming of the end.

"The labs aren't going to find it in time," he said. "I've been reading what they say. I know it's no good, Dad." He cried some then; it was good that he had relearned to cry.

But the next day, his spirits soared mysteriously to a new high, and he went around the house singing to himself. He was busy with his stamp collection most of the time, but he also wandered about the house and garage searching for odds and ends, his actions seeming purposeful and determined. He moved slowly, and stopped to rest frequently, but he displayed more energy than we had seen for weeks, and even Jules

commented on how bright he was looking, when he came for Kenny's daily blood sample. Cleo decided that complete resignation had brought cheerfulness with it, and that acceptance of ill-fate obviated the need to worry or hope. But I wasn't so sure.

"What've you been up to, Kenny?" I asked.

He looked innocent and shook his head.

"Come on, now. You don't go wandering around muttering to yourself unless you're cooking something up. What is it, another time-ship? I heard you hammering in the garage before dinner."

"I was just knocking the lid off an old breadbox."

I couldn't get any answer but evasions, innocent glances, and mysterious smirks. I let him keep his secret, thinking that his enthusiasm for whatever it was he was doing would soon wear off.

Then the photographers came.

"We want to take a picture of Kenny's treehouse," they explained.

"Why? — and how did you know he had one?" I demanded.

It developed that somebody was doing a feature-article on the effects of science-fantasy television shows on children. It developed that the "somebody" was being hired by a publicity agency which was being hired by the advertisers who presented Captain Chronos and the Guardsmen

of Time. It developed that Kenny's fan letter, with the snapshot of his treehouse time-ship, had been forwarded to the publicity department by the producer of the show. They wanted a picture of the time-ship with Kenny inside, looking out through the fish-bowl canopy.

"It's impossible," I told them.

They showed me a dozen pictures of moppets with LTR-guns, moppets in time-warp suits, moppets wearing Captain Chronos costumes, moppets falling free in space, and moppets playing Time-Pirate in the park.

"I'm sorry, but it's impossible," I insisted.

"We'll be glad to pay something for it, if . . ."

"The kid's sick, if you must know," I snapped. "He can't do it, and that's that, so forget about it."

"Maybe when he's feeling better . . . ?"

"He *won't* be feeling better," Cleo interrupted, voice tense, with a catch in it. "Now please *leave!*"

They left, with Cleo herding them out onto the porch. I heard them apologizing, and Cleo softened, and began to explain. That was a mistake.

A week later, while we were still drinking our coffee at the dinner-table, the doorbell rang. Cleo, expecting an answer to her recent wire to some South American clinic, left the table, went to

answer it, and promptly screamed.

I dropped my cup with a crash and ran to the living room with a butcher knife, then stopped dead still.

It stood there in the doorway with a stunned expression on its face, gaping at Cleo who had collapsed in a chair. It wore a silver uniform with jack-boots, black-and-red cape, and a weird helmet with antenna protruding from it. It had a lantern jaw and a big, meaty, benign countenance.

"I'm awfully sorry," it boomed in a gentle deep-rich voice. "We just drove over from the studio, and I didn't take time to change . . ."

"Ulk!" said Cleo.

I heard footsteps at the head of the stairs behind me, then a howl from Kenny who had been getting ready for bed, after being helped upstairs.

"*Captain Chronos!*"

Bare feet machine-gunned down the stairs and came to a stop at a respectful distance from the idol.

"ggaaaaAAAWWSSSShhhh!" Kenny timidly walked halfway around him, looking him up and down. "Geee . . . Gaaawwssshh!"

Cleo fanned herself with a newspaper and recovered slowly. I tossed the butcher-knife on a magazine stand and mumbled something apologetic. There were two of them: Chronos and the producer, a small suave man in a

business suit. The latter drew me aside to explain. It developed that the photographers had explained to the boss, who had explained to the client, who had mentioned it to the agency, who had returned the fan letter to the producer with a note. It would appear that Captain Chronos, for the sake of nutritious and delicious Fluffy Crunkles, made it his habit to comfort the afflicted, the crippled, and the dying, if it were convenient and seemed somehow advantageous. He also visited the children's wards of hospitals, it seemed.

"This on the level, or for publicity?"

"On the level."

"Where's the photographer?"

The producer reddened and muttered noncommittally. I went to the door and looked out through the screen. There was another man in their car. When I pushed the screen open, it hit something hard — a tape recorder. I turned:

"Get out."

"But Mr. Westmore. . . ."

"Get *out!*"

They left quickly. Kenny was furious, and he kept on being furious all through the following day. At me. Cleo began agreeing with him to some extent, and I felt like a heel.

"You want Kenny to get the full treatment?" I grumbled. "You want him to wind up a sob-story child?"

"Certainly not, but it was cruel, Rod. The boy never had a happier moment until you . . ."

"All right, so I'm a bastard. I'm sorry."

That night Abe Sanders (Captain Chronos) came back alone, in slacks and a sport shirt, and muttering apologies. It developed that the Wednesday evening shows always had a children's panel (Junior Guardsmen) program, and that while they understood that Kenny couldn't come, they had wanted to have him with the panel, in absentia, by telephone.

"Please, Dad, can't I?"

The answer had to be no . . . but Kenny had been glaring at me furiously all day, and it was a way to make him stop hating me . . . still, the answer had to be no . . . the publicity . . . but he'd be delighted, and he could stop hating my guts for kicking them out . . .

"I guess so, if the offer's still open."

"*Dad!*"

The offer was still open. Kenny was to be on the show. They rehearsed him a little, and let him practice with the tape recorder until he got used to his voice.

On Wednesday evening, Kenny sat in the hall doorway to the living room, telephone in his lap, and stared across at Sanders' face on the television screen. Sanders held another phone, and we heard

both their voices from the set. Occasionally the camera dollied in to a close shot of Sanders' chuckle, or panned along the table to show the juvenile panel members, kids between eight and sixteen. There was an empty chair on Sanders' right, and it bore a placard. The placard said "KENNY WESTLER."

It lasted maybe a minute. Sanders promised not to mention Kenny's address, nor to mention the nature of his illness. He did neither, but the tone of conversation made it clear that Kenny was in bad shape and probably not long for this world. Kenny had stage fright, his voice trembled, and he blurted something about the search for a cure. Cleo stared at the boy instead of the set, and my own glance darted back and forth. The cameraman panned to the empty chair and dollied in slowly so that the placard came to fill the screen while Kenny spoke. Kenny talked about stamp collections and time machines and autographs, while an invisible audience gaped at pathos.

"If anybody's got stamps to trade, just let me know," he said. "And autographs . . ."

I winced, but Sanders cut in. "Well, Kenny — we're not supposed to mention your address, but if any of you Guardsmen out there want to help Kenny out with his stamp collection, you can write to me and I'll definitely

see that he gets the letters."

"And autographs too," Kenny added.

When it was over, Kenny had lived . . . but *lived*.

And then the mail came in a deluge, forwarded from the network's studio. Bushels of stamps, dozens of autograph books, Bibles, money, advice, crank letters, and maudlin gushes of sugary sympathy . . . and a few sensible and friendly letters. Kenny was delighted.

"Gee, Dad, I'll never get all the stamps sorted out. And look! — an autograph of Calvin Coolidge! . . ."

But it never turned him aside from his path of confident but mysterious purpose. He spent even more time in his room, in the garage, and — when he could muster the energy — back in the maple woods, doing mysterious things alone.

"Have they found a cure yet, Dad?" he asked me pleasantly when an expected letter came.

"They're . . . making progress," I answered lamely.

He shrugged. "They will . . . eventually." Unconcerned.

It occurred to me that some sort of psychic change, unfathomable, might have happened within him — some sudden sense of timelessness, of identity with the race. Something that would let him die calmly as long as he knew there'd

be a cure *someday*. It seemed too much to expect of a child, but I mentioned the notion to Jules when I saw him again.

"Could be," he admitted. "It might fit in with this secrecy business."

"How's that?"

"People who know they're dying often behave that way. Little secret activities that don't become apparent until after they're gone. Set up causes that won't have effects until afterwards. Immortality cravings. You want to have posthumous influence, to live after you. A suicide note is one perversion of it. The suicide figures the world will posthumously feel guilty, if he tells it off."

"And Kenny . . . ?"

"I don't know, Rod. The craving for immortality is basically procreative, I think. You have children, and train them, and see your own mirrored patterns live on in them, and feel satisfied, when your time comes. Or else you sublimate it, and do the same thing for all humanity — through art, or science. I've seen a lot of death, Rod, and I believe there's more than just-plain-selfishness to people's immortality-wishes; it's associated with the human reproductive syndrome — which includes the passing on of culture to the young. But Kenny's just a kid. I don't know."

Despite Kenny's increasing helplessness and weakness, he began

spending more time wandering out in the woods. Cleo chided him for it, and tried to limit his excursions. She drove him to town on alternate days for a transfusion and shots, and she tried to keep him in the house most of the time, but he needed sun and air and exercise, and it was impossible to keep him on the lawn. Whatever he was doing, it was a shadowy secretive business. It involved spades and garden tools and packages, with late excursions into the maples toward the creek.

"You'll know in four or five months," he told me, in answer to a question. "Don't ask me now. You'd laugh."

But it became apparent that he wouldn't last that long. The rate of transfusions doubled, and on his bad days, he was unable to get out of bed. He fainted down by the creek, and had to be carried back to the house. Cleo forbade him to go outside alone without Jules' day to day approval, and Jules was beginning to be doubtful about the boy's activities.

When restricted, Kenny became frantic. "I've got to go outside, Dad, *please!* I can't finish it if I don't. I've got to! How else can I make contact with them?"

"Contact? With whom?"

But he clammed up, and refused to discuss anything about the matter. That night I awoke at two a.m. Something had made a sound. I stole out of bed without

disturbing Cleo and went to prowl about the house. A glance down the stairway told me that no lights burned on the first floor. I went to Kenny's room and gingerly opened the door. Blackness.

"Kenny —?"

No sound of breathing in the room. Quietly I struck a match.

The bed was empty.

"*Kenny!*" I bellowed it down the hall, and then I heard sounds — Cleo stirring to wakefulness and groping for clothes in our bedroom. I trotted downstairs and turned on lights as I charged from room to room.

He was not in the house. I found the back screen unlatched and went out to play a flashlight slowly over the backyard. There . . . by the hedge . . . caught in the cone of light . . . Kenny, crumpled over a garden spade.

Upstairs, Cleo screamed through the back window. I ran out to gather him up in my arms. Skin clammy, breathing shallow, pulse irregular — he muttered peculiarly as I carried him back to the house.

"Glad you found it . . . knew you'd find it . . . got me to the right time . . . when are we . . . ?"

I got him inside and up to his room. When I laid him on the bed, a crudely drawn map, like a treasure map, with an "X" and a set of bearings, fell from his

pocket. I paused a moment to study it. The "X" was down by the fork in the creek. What had he buried there?

I heard Cleo coming up the stairs with a glass of hot milk, and I returned the map to Kenny's pocket and went to call the doctor.

When Kenny awoke, he looked around the room very carefully — and seemed disappointed by what he saw.

"Expecting to wake up somewhere else?" I asked.

"I guess it was a dream," he mumbled. "I thought they came early."

"Who came early?"

But he clammed up again. "You'll find out in about four months," was all he'd say.

He wouldn't last that long. The next day, Doc Jules ordered him to stay inside, preferably sitting or lying down most of the time. We were to carry him outside once a day for a little sun, but he had to sit in a lawn chair and not run around. Transfusions became more frequent, and finally there was talk of moving him to the hospital.

"I won't go to the hospital."

"You'll have to, Kenny. I'm sorry."

That night, Kenny slipped outside again. He had been lying quietly all day, sleeping most of the time, as if saving up energy for a last spurt.

Shortly after midnight, I awoke

to hear him tiptoe down the hall. I let him get downstairs and into the kitchen before I stole out of bed and went to the head of the stairs.

"Kenny!" I shouted. "Come back up here! Right now!"

There was a brief silence. Then he bolted. The screen doors slammed, and bare feet trotted down the back steps.

"Kenny!"

I darted to the rear window, overlooking the backyard.

"Kenny!"

Brush whipped as he dove through the hedge. Cleo came to the window beside me, and began calling after him.

Swearing softly, I tugged my trousers over my pajamas, slipped into shoes, and hurried downstairs to give chase. But he had taken my flashlight.

Outside, beneath a dim cloud-threatened moon, I stood at the hedge, staring out across the meadow toward the woods. The night was full of crickets and rustlings in the grass. I saw no sign of him.

"Kenny!"

He answered me faintly from the distance. "Don't try to follow me, Dad. I'm going where they can cure me."

I vaulted the fence and trotted across the meadow toward the woods. At the stone fence, I paused to listen — but there were only crickets. Maybe he'd seen me

coming in the moonlight, and had headed back toward the creek.

The brush was thick in places, and without a light, it was hard to find the paths. I tried watching for the gleam of the flashlight through the trees, but saw nothing. He was keeping its use to a minimum. After ten minutes of wandering, I found myself back at the fence, having taken a wrong turning somewhere. I heard Cleo calling me from the house.

"Go call the police! They'll help find him!" I shouted to her.

Then I went to resume the search. Remembering the map, and the "X" by the fork in the creek, I trotted along the edge of the pasture next to the woods until I came to a dry wash that I knew led back to the creek. It was the long way around, but it was easy to follow the wash; and after a few minutes I stumbled onto the bank of the narrow stream. Then I waded upstream toward the fork. After twenty yards, I saw the flashlight's gleam — and heard the crunch of the shovel in moist ground. I moved as quietly as I could. The crunching stopped.

Then I saw him. He had dropped the shovel and was tugging something out of the hole. I let him get it out before I called . . .

"Kenny . . ."

He froze, then came up very slowly to a crouch, ready to flee.

He turned out the flashlight.

"Kenny, don't run away from me again. Stay there. I'm not angry."

No answer.

"Kenny!"

He called back then, with a quaver in his voice. "Stay where you are, Dad — and let me finish. Then I'll go with you. If you come any closer, I'll run." He flashed the light toward me, saw that I was a good twenty yards away. "Stay there now . . ."

"Then will you come back to the house?"

"I won't run, if you stay right there."

"Okay," I agreed, "but don't take long. Cleo's frantic."

He set the light on a rock, kept it aimed at me, and worked by its aura. The light blinded me, and I could only guess what he might be doing. He pried something open, and then there was the sound of writing on tin. Then he hammered something closed, replaced it in the hole, and began shoveling dirt over it. Five minutes later, he was finished.

The light went out.

"Kenny . . . ?"

"I'm sorry, Dad. I didn't *want* to lie . . . I *had* to."

I heard him slipping quickly away through the brush — back toward the pasture. I hurried to the fork and climbed up out of the knee-deep water, pausing to

strike a match. Something gleamed in the grass; I picked it up. Cleo's kitchen clock, always a few minutes slow. What had he wanted with the clock?

By the time I tore through the brush and found the path, there was no sound to indicate which way he had gone. I walked gloomily back toward the house, half-heartedly calling to Kenny . . . then . . . a flash of light in the trees?

BRRUUMMKP!

A sharp report, like a close crash of thunder! It came from the direction of the meadow, or the house. I trotted ahead, ignoring the sharp whipping of the brush.

"Kenny Vestmore? . . . Kenny . . . ?"

A strange voice, a foreign voice — calling to Kenny up ahead in the distance. The police, I thought.

Then I came to the stone fence . . . and froze, staring at the thing — or perhaps at the *nothing* — in the meadow.

It was black. It was bigger than a double garage, and round. I stared at it, and realized that it was not an object but an opening.

And someone else was calling to Kenny. A rich, pleasant voice — somehow it reminded me of Doctor Jules, but it had a strong accent, perhaps Austrian or German.

"Come on along here, liddle boy. Ve fix you op."

Then I saw Kenny, crawling

on toward it through the grass.

"Kenny, *don't!*"

He got to his feet and stumbled on into the distorted space. It seemed to squeeze him into a grotesque house-of-mirrors shape; then it spun him inward. Gone.

I was still running toward the black thing when it began to shrink.

"Come along, liddle fellow, come mit oss. *Ve fix.*"

And then the black thing belched away into nothingness with an explosive blast that knocked me spinning. I must have been out cold for awhile. The sheriff woke me.

Kenny was gone. We never saw him again. Cleo confirmed what I had seen on the meadow, but without a body, Kenny remains listed as missing.

Missing from this century.

I went back to the fork in the creek and dug up the breadbox he had buried. It contained his stamp collection and a packet of famous autographs. There was a letter from Kenny, too, addressed to the future, and it was his will.

"Whoever finds this, please sell these things and use the money to pay for a time machine, so you can come and get me, because I'm going to die if you don't . . ."

I paused to remember . . . *I*

don't think the bank'd wait a hundred years.

Eut Dad, don't you see? What difference does time make, if you're working on a time machine?

There was more to the note, but the gist of it was that Kenny had made an act of faith, faith in tomorrow. He had buried it, and then he had gone back to dig it up and change the rendezvous time from four months away to the night of his disappearance. He knew that he wouldn't have lived that long.

I put it all back in the box, and sealed the box with solder and set it in concrete at the foot of a six-foot hole. With this manuscript.

(To a reader, yet unborn, who finds this account in a dusty and ancient magazine stack: *dig*. Dig at a point 987 feet southeasterly on a heading of 149° from the northwest corner of the Hayes and Higgins Tract, as recorded in Map Book 6, p 78, Cleve County records. But not unless the world is ready to buy a time machine and come for Kenny, who financed it; come, if you can cure him. He had faith in *you*.)

Kenny is gone, and today there is a feeling of death in my house. But after a century of tomorrows? He invested in them, and he called out to them, pleading with the voice of a child. And tomorrow answered:

"Come, liddle boy. *Ve fix.*"