

# THEY WRITE...



## JOSEPH SHALLIT

"Wonder Child was written while I was undergoing the agonies of anticipated paternity. The imagined horrors of diaper-changing led naturally to the speculation that created the story. My career prior to fatherhood consists of six years on the now extinct Philadelphia Record, over three years in Uncle Sam's Military Police. The latter experience, plus my work as a police reporter, led to writing mystery novels, the fourth of which was recently published. For several years I was science editor of the Record, which explains my trips into science fiction."

## DEL MOLARSKY

"I barnstormed all over the country—at 17—giving marionette shows. I was a one-man team: making the puppets, composing the music, writing the scripts. I've been composing and writing ever since. Creating advertising copy takes up my days, but for relaxation I write—and sell—scripts to radio, TV, the films, and magazines. And I occasionally compose songs for such concert artists as Marian Anderson and Yi-Kwei Sze."



## ROBERT BLOCH

"The day after I was born World War I began—but I managed to dodge the draft. I spent a sadistic but scientific childhood: instead of tearing the wings off flies I tore the wings off model airplanes. I sold my first story when I was 17—since then have sold close to 300 stories of fantasy, science fiction and mystery, plus a novel and a book of short stories. Also adapted 39 of my stories for a radio transcription series. In my spare time I've acquired a wife, a child, and a slightly haggard look."



# fantastic

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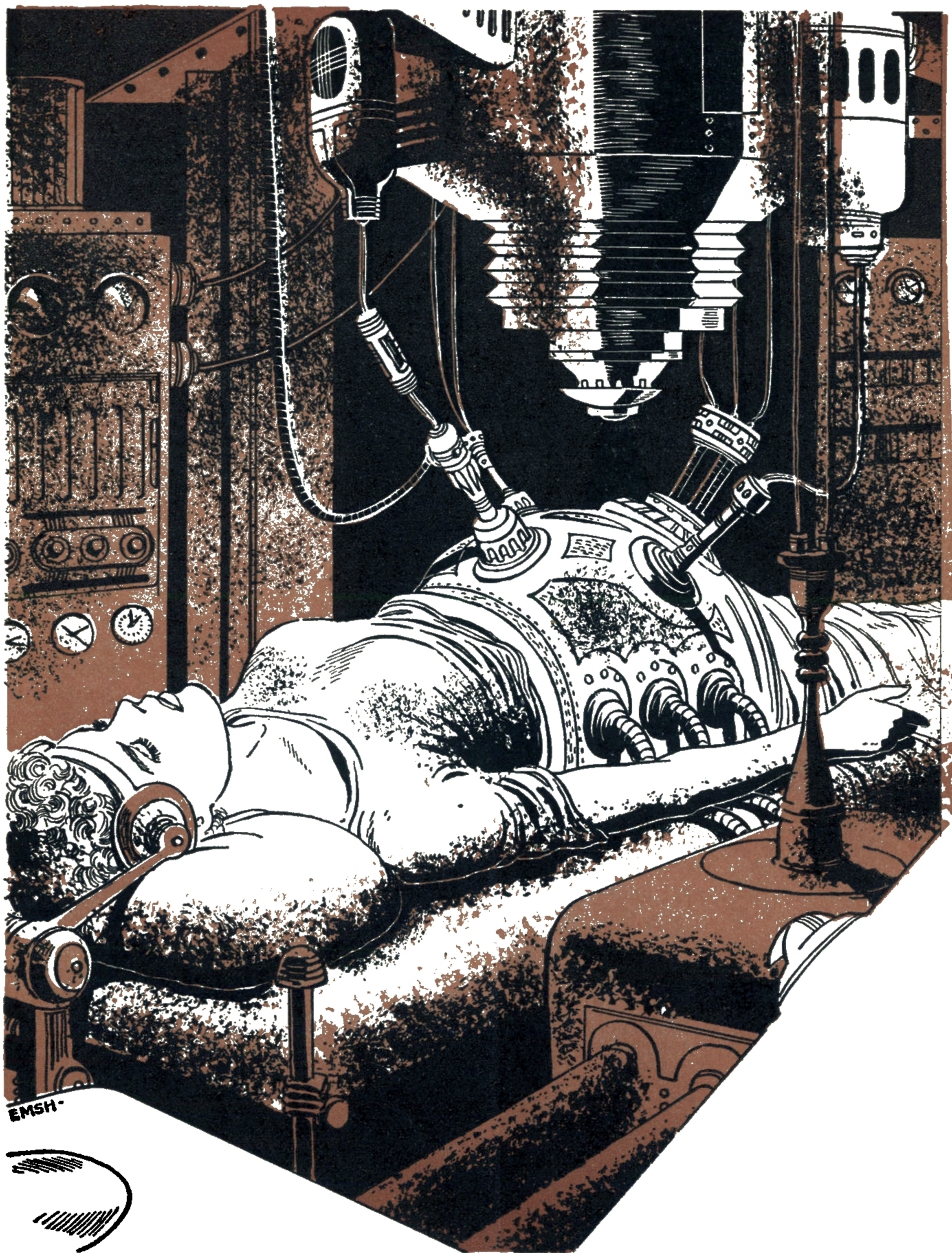
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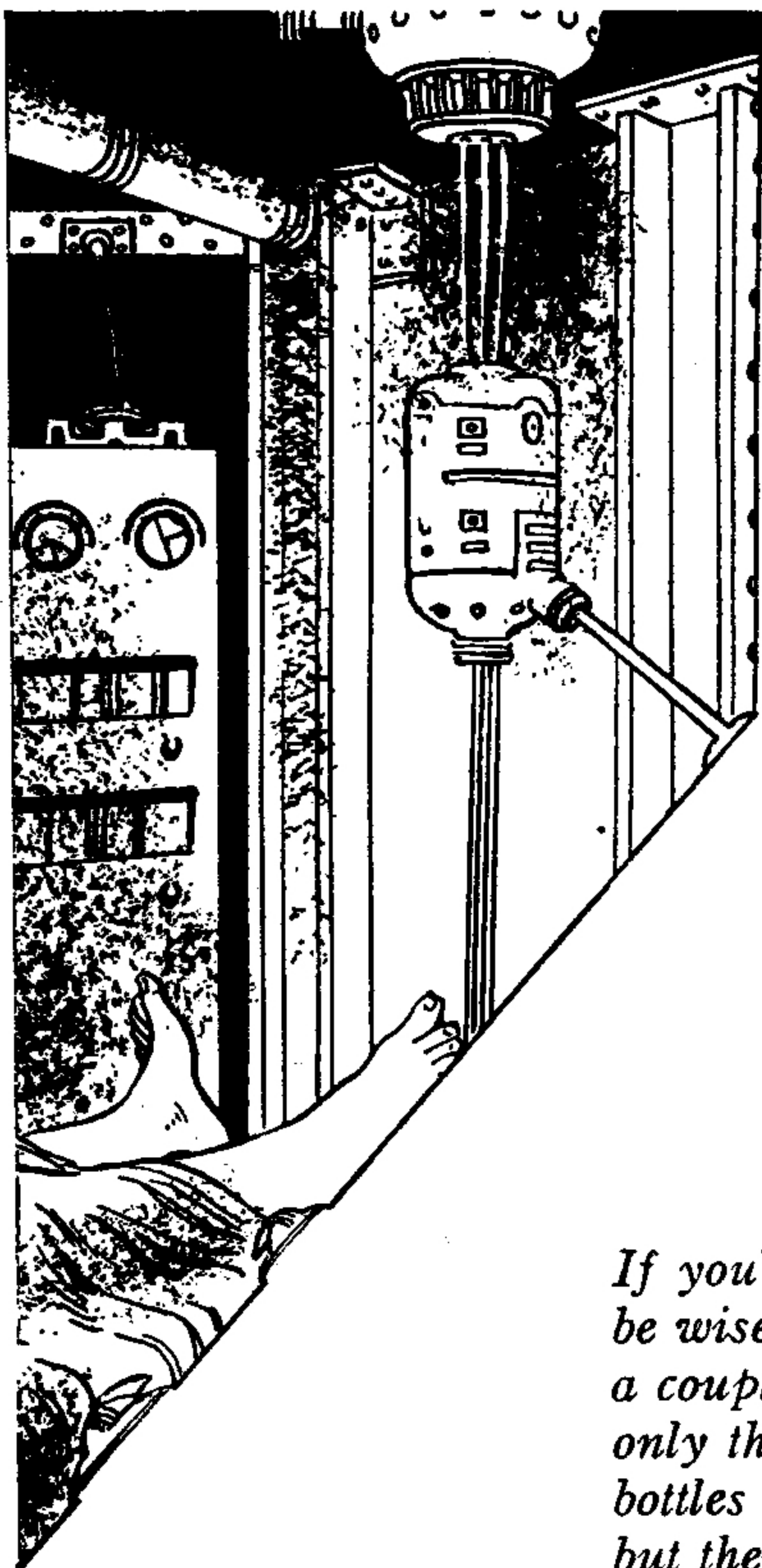
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EMSH-





By JOSEPH SHALLIT

# WONDER CHILD

*If you're the parent of a new-born child you might be wiser to pass this story up entirely. It tells about a couple of nice people who would have liked a baby, only they didn't want to get fouled up with washing bottles and switching diapers. All wrong, of course, but their reasons seemed sound enough.*

*And then they met Dr. Elliott and his Maturator. A few jolts from his machine before the child is born, he claimed, and you'll have a junior genius on your hands. . . .*

*You'd like that? Sounds fine, hey? Well then, you'd better read Wonder Child after all!*

**W**HY don't you two break down and have yourselves a baby?" Dr. Elliott said.

Roy Crowley pulled his pipe out of his mouth so that he could properly grimace at the little psychologist. "Aren't you tired of that line?" he said. And from the corner of the living room came Phyllis's voice: "Throw that guy out of here."



"Let's be serious about this," Elliott said. "If you let this go much longer, the choice will be out of your hands — you won't be able to have a child."

"Uh-huh," Phyllis Crowley said. She was nested deep in a big upholstered chair, a sketch pad on her lap. She was making a pencil drawing of Moki, the black-and-white cat, which at the moment was curled up on the Magnavox.

"Hear that?" Roy Crowley grinned. "That ought to settle it. You can't have a baby if the wife is unwilling — and the husband is against it."

Elliott, a ruddy, round-faced, small-featured man, shook his head impatiently. "You can talk yourselves into it."

"Why?" Roy uncrossed his legs, stretched them out languidly and slumped back in his chair. "Why should we? I'm a writer. Phyllis is an artist. We both have plenty to keep us busy — a full day every day. We resent any little thing that steals our time. What's the point of adding another time-stealer to the house?"

"That's certainly a narrow attitude —"

"It certainly is," Roy said comfortably. "And we make no apologies for it. Why don't you have a baby yourself and stop bothering us?"

"I —" Elliott waved the question away — "some people are designed to be bachelors. That's

beside the point. I'm talking about you. Perfect parents. The father tall, full-chested, intelligent. The mother —"

"Cut it out," Phyllis said.

"It's a fact," Elliott said. "All the chances are in favor of fine offspring."

"Look — don't misunderstand me — I'd love a fine offspring," Roy said. "If we could get him ready-made. I mean, finished enough to ship him off to school. But we're not going to let ourselves in for that drawn-out, miserable ordeal of sterilizing bottles, 2 a.m. feedings, toilet training. Lord, we wouldn't go through that for anything. Just can't afford the time. We've got lots more interesting things to do."

Elliott settled his pudgy body against the back of the chair, as if this was the point he'd been waiting for. "That period can be speeded up," he said softly.

"Speeded up? How?"

Elliott half closed his eyes. "Take my word for it. It can be speeded up. Not eliminated, of course. But accelerated enormously."

Roy made a skeptical throat-clearing noise. "What're you talking about, you phony brain carpenter? You mean to say you can cut down the diaper time?"

"Right. You happen to have picked the homeliest aspect possible, but all right — you have a



limited imagination. I'm thinking not only of diaper time, but motor skills, language ability, socialization, and so on."

"You mean you can speed all that up?" Roy said, and without giving Elliott a chance to answer, "I don't believe it."

"I didn't think you would," Elliott said blandly. "I want you to come to my office and let me prove it to you."

"How?" Phyllis demanded from her corner. "How could you prove it?"

"Come and see. Tomorrow evening?"

Phyllis stood up out of her chair and fluffed out her orange dirndl. She was a slim, lithe, boyish figure, topped with dusty blonde hair cut in poodle style. "What are you trying to sell us, Doc?" she said.

"I want the two of you to come around tomorrow evening. I'll have the demonstration ready for you."

"Sorry," said Roy. "You're not going to finagle us into parenthood with any charts and graphs."

Phyllis gazed across the room at the psychologist. "What kind of demonstration do you mean?" she said quietly.

It was a large, well-lighted office, with pleasant pale green walls. Phyllis and Roy had seen it many times on social visits — Elliott's apartment was on the floor above — and every time they came they

noticed some new gadget in it. Elliott, though an M.D. and specialist in pediatrics, had been drifting away from purely medical practice and concentrating more and more on psychological problems such as stammering and reading defects. He was constantly buying or developing new testing-and-training devices, but the gadget the Crowleys saw now was really a whopper.

It was about five feet high, and the width and length of a double bed. In fact, there was a leather couch inside it. At the four corners rose heavy black steel supports, suspending between them a squat, cylindrical affair roughly resembling an aerial camera. At one side, between two of the steel supports, was some sort of control panel.

"This is my darling," Elliott said, standing beside the machine and smiling with all the shyness of a new bridegroom. "You're looking at three years' work."

"Wonderful," said Roy. "What's it do — make waffles?"

"I'll show you what it does," Elliott said. He went through a door into the adjoining room, a classroom where he trained his reading cases, and came back with a gray kitten in his arms.

"Oh, isn't it darling!" said Phyllis, her hands reaching out for it.

"Yes, hold it a moment," Elliott said. "Notice, please, that



this is a very young kitten — two and a half weeks old, to be exact.”

He went out another door, into a washroom, and this time came back with a small cage. A white mouse scampered frantically inside.

Phyllis, cuddling the kitten, let out a squeak of protest. “All right now,” Elliott said briskly, “let the kitten down on the floor and watch closely. Watch what it does.”

He stooped and opened the cage door. The mouse didn’t seem to recognize its freedom, and Elliott prodded it with his fountain pen until the mouse ran out on the green linoleum.

With a bound the kitten was after it. The chase went to the far corner of the room. It was over in a moment. The kitten’s jaws snapped audibly. Phyllis moaned weakly and turned her face away, and the kitten came trotting across the floor with the limp white fur dangling from its teeth.

“Good boy,” Elliott said. He scooped up the kitten, wrested the victim from its mouth and got rid of it in the washroom in some unseen way. He came back smiling. “What do you think of that kitten, eh?”

Phyllis’s shoulders turned up, shuddering. “I think it’s horrible.”

“You’ve just seen a remarkable thing, though you don’t seem to know it. You never saw a two-and-a-half week kitten run like

that before. It ran like a full-grown cat. And most important, did you see the finesse with which it snapped —”

“Please!” Phyllis protested.

“Like any adult cat,” Elliott said proudly.

“Hey,” Roy broke in, “what’s all this got to do with what you brought us here for?”

“That’s exactly what I’m coming to,” Elliott said amiably. He lowered his round little body into a leather chair across the room from them. “Listen.” He brought a cigar out of his breast pocket and bit the tip off zestfully and worked up a big flame before he continued.

“If I asked you why a kitten kills a mouse, you’d probably say it’s instinct. Wrong. There’s no such instinct. The only thing that’s inborn in the cat is a tendency to jump on small moving objects. That’s all. It’s a vague, generalized reaction. The specific technique of killing a mouse has to be *learned*. Most kittens learn it by watching the mother cat do it. Kittens who’ve never seen it done are likely never to become mousers. Some do, but they have quite a time before they learn the process themselves by trial and error. This, incidentally, isn’t any theory of mine — it’s been proven experimentally.

“Anyway, what I’m getting at is that this little kitten, which



never saw a cat kill a mouse, simply pranced across the floor and assassinated a mouse the first time it saw one. That was a week ago. The kitten was just ten days old at the time. It fumbled a little on that first try, but only for nine or ten seconds; that was all the time it needed to figure it out. Who helped it learn that fast?" He blew out a big puff of smoke. "I did."

Roy and Phyllis gaped at each other. They burst into simultaneous laughter. "This I've got to see!" Roy howled. "Doc Elliott demonstrating how to catch a mouse."

"Please, please!" Elliott looked very pained. "I'm telling you about one of the most remarkable achievements in the whole range of animal psychology, and you make silly jokes! Now listen carefully, will you, please? This kitten's precociousness is all due to that machine, that handsome-looking thing in the corner. I call it the Maturator. Tentative name, but it gives you the idea. Before this kitten was born — during the final two weeks of its fetal life — its mother spent an hour each day anesthetized on that couch, with that bomb-shaped mechanism pressed to the spot in the abdomen where the kitten's head was. I determined that by fluoroscopy, of course. From the moment of birth, this kitten has been ahead of its litter mates in learning abil-

ity and agility. It has kept its lead, even increased it, day by day. Today it's roughly a month ahead of the others.

"The implications for us are obvious. If we do this for a human infant, it will go through stages that normally take months, in weeks. It should be out of the suckling stage in two, three weeks — walking in a couple of months — talking shortly after that. . . . Fantastic, isn't it?"

Roy stared at him silently. He could sense the taut wonder of Phyllis, close beside him. "You think I'd ever let her inside that crazy torture machine?" he growled.

Elliott raised his pale eyebrows daintily. "You're using pretty strong language about something you know nothing about, young man. Actually, no pain is felt at all. The only reason I anesthetized the cat was to keep it still. There's nothing mysterious or uncanny about this machine. The heart of it is merely a kind of induction coil. Basically, all it does is induce potentials in nerve fibers. Simple enough?"

"Sure," said Roy. "I don't get it," he added.

"Naturally. But stick with me. What gave me the whole idea was this: research over the last few years on human fetuses that had to be removed operatively has shown that the unborn child's nervous system is amazingly well



developed at a very early age. By the end of the fourth month after conception, all the brain and nerve cells it will ever have are already formed. Not all operating, of course, but they're there. At fourteen weeks, the fetus can swallow. At sixteen weeks, it's already making breathing movements, though not actually breathing, since it's in a liquid medium. At eighteen weeks, it's opening and closing its hands. By the end of the sixth month, it's capable of sucking. These are all complicated things to do — many muscles and nerves involved.

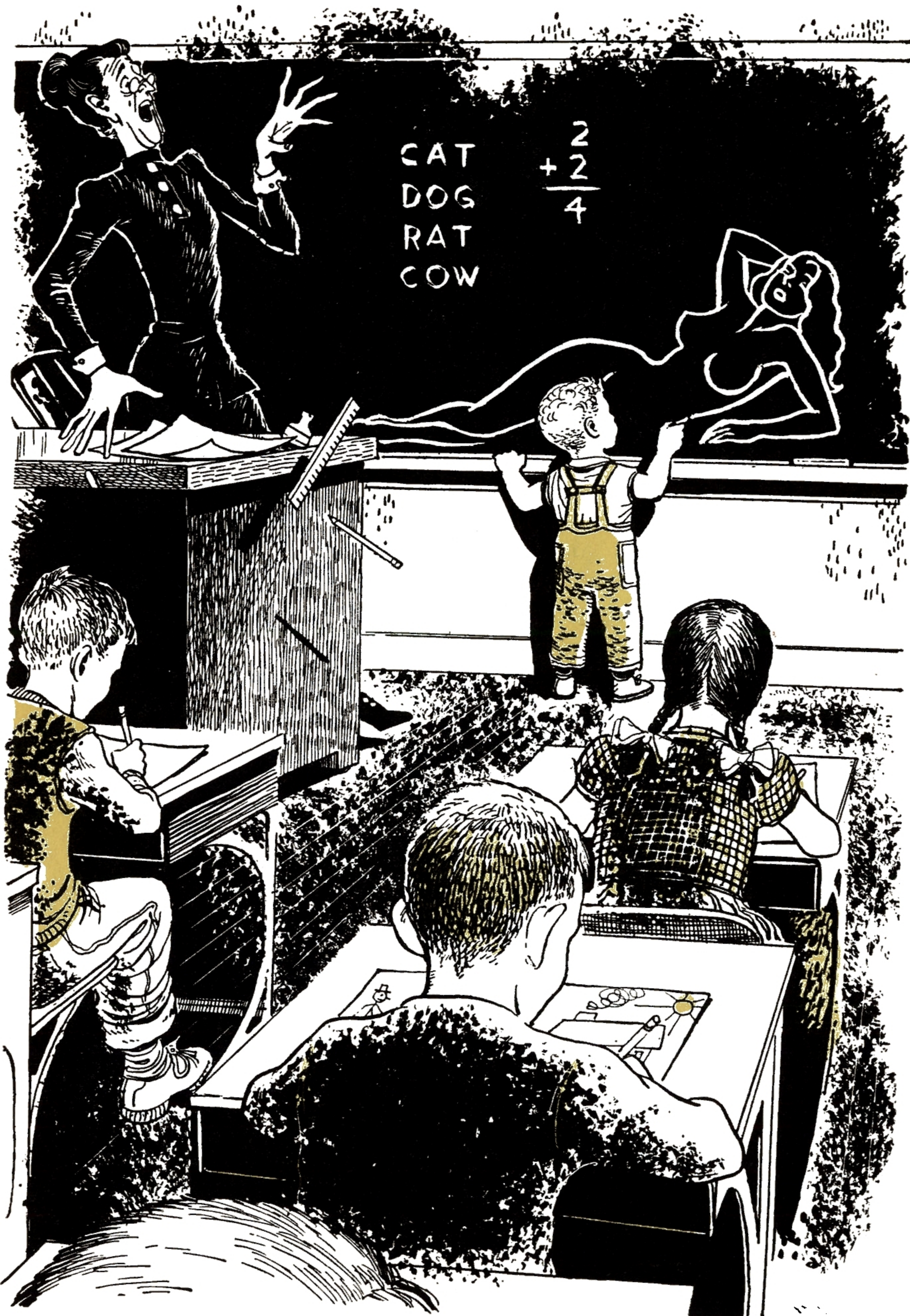
"How did the fetus learn them? Instinct, you'll say. But that doesn't really tell us anything. Consider the act of sucking. Personally, I don't see any basic difference between sucking and an activity like whistling. What's the difference, actually? You'll probably say sucking is an instinctive action, while whistling is a learned action. But that's merely playing with words. The term 'instinct' doesn't mean anything really; it just confuses things. The only real difference between sucking and whistling is that the child learns the first before it's born and the second after it's born. The nerve tracts, the pathways needed for the act of whistling, are all there long, before the child is born. They're not activated — not plugged in, so to speak. Well, that's where this machine comes in."

Elliott heaved up out of his chair and trundled his little keg-shaped body to the machine in the corner. "This bomb-shaped mechanism in the center is a device that induces electrical potentials in objects brought near it. As you probably know — or perhaps you don't — such induction devices create a large magnetic field, extending indefinitely. My contribution is mainly a way of concentrating the field down to microscopic size. As a result, I can so direct it that the field affects only a few nerves at a time. I can pick and choose the nerves I want to activate.

"The rest ought to be obvious. The unborn infant's brain has all its nerve cells — an estimated nine billion — but most of them aren't plugged in yet. There's resistance at the plugs — the synapses, we call them. Very well. This machine of mine overcomes the synaptic resistance. It induces a current in a nerve — an impulse — that shoots across the synapse into the end-fibers of the next nerve. Once that pathway is opened up, it's in business — it's there for good.

"To get a better idea of what I mean, consider how you learned to ride a bike. You practiced and got discouraged and practiced some more, until finally you broke through the synaptic resistances and established new pathways. Once you did that, everything







came easy. Even if you discontinued bicycling and tried it again five years later, you found you got over your rustiness in a few minutes and were able to coast along as well as ever. Why? Because once those nerve pathways were established, they were there for good, always ready for you to use them.

"Well, that's what I do for the baby by my artificial method. I stimulate selected nerves into forming pathways. When the child is born and has to learn things, the pathways are already there. No laborious practice is necessary. Just a few trials, and it's coasting along. It's really wonderful. I wish somebody had done it to me in my prenatal days."

"Somebody should have done *something* to you, anyway," Roy said

Elliott wrinkled his little round face at him. "What're you whining about?"

"You have the gall to expect people to let you monkey around with their kids like that? Suppose you addle the kid's brain?"

"Impossible." Elliott closed his thin lips firmly. "I'm not changing a single brain cell. All I'm doing is activating some pathways that are dormant — waiting."

"Tell me something," Phyllis said. "Isn't it awfully complicated in there — I mean, all those brain cells and things. How do you

know which ones to — to give a push to?"

"Good question." Elliott glowed at her gratefully. "An awful lot of work's been done these last few years on localization of cerebral functions, both in animals and humans. They've really got things down to fine points. For example, they have the speech center so precisely identified that by electrically stimulating that part of the brain during surgery, they can actually make the larynx give out sounds, practically talk. But with all this wealth of new knowledge, nobody has made any practical use of it in a developmental way. Until Elliott came along."

"And you've already tried this out on some babies?" Roy asked.

"No. The first will be yours."

"Whose?"

"The lucky Crowleys will be the first in history to have all the pleasure of bringing up their child without fuss or trouble."

"Doc, somebody else'll have to make history," Roy said. "It's not our line. Right, Phyllis?"

She didn't seem to hear. "Doc," she said, "tell us some more. . . ."

There was a long silence in the car as Roy and Phyllis drove home. Finally he said, "I never knew you wanted a baby."

"You never asked," she said quietly.

"But you always derided the idea," he protested.



"That was only because you were against it."

"But I never was against it. I always thought you were. You always were afraid of anything that would interfere with our careers —"

"Apparently that won't happen now with the Doc's new system."

"Well, I've always been in favor of a baby."

"Then won't you tell me so now, please?"

It was an easy birth. The obstetrician used little anesthesia — just nitrous oxide in small dosage. He wanted to use more, but Elliott talked Phyllis into standing the extra pain. He was afraid deep anesthesia might block off some of the pathways he had opened. "No use taking a chance," he told her, "after all the trouble we've gone to."

She had visited his office daily during the last three months and spent an hour under the machine each time. She had read or sketched; she hadn't minded it at all. "Like going to the hairdresser's," she had said.

The baby was a boy, pure corn-silk blond, blue-eyed, eight and one-half pounds, husky, well-shaped. They named it Donald Lee Crowley. Elliott came to crow over it, and Roy practically had to eject him from Phyllis's room when nursing time came. "God-dammit, you think you're the father?" Roy howled at him. "If I

catch you handing out cigars —!"

"I've put in a lot of time and expense on this project," Elliott said huffily. "I don't want to see it spoiled by a bungling busybody like you."

They didn't say a word to the obstetrician about the treatments Phyllis had been given, and he didn't seem to notice anything unusual. Donald squawled, just like other infants. He yawned and sneezed. He regurgitated. He swallowed air and had to be burped. And he dripped like a broken faucet.

"Hey," Roy shouted at Elliott over the phone. "What's the deal? We going to have this yowling and dripping indefinitely? Phyllis and the baby are going home day after tomorrow, and we haven't seen a damn thing yet."

"Be patient —"

"Patient? I'll break your greasy little neck. Didn't you promise we wouldn't have any trouble? Do I have to spend my nights now walking a yowling baby and getting drenched down my front?"

"All right," Elliott said calmly. "I went easy on the motor association area, but if you're so all-fired impatient, I'll reinforce those pathways. Bring the baby here when you leave the hospital. I'll give it three solid hours in the Maturator. That ought to speed things up for you, if that's what you want."



"If that's what I want? Holy hell, man, don't you believe in doing a job right? You got us into this — get us out of it."

On the tenth day, Roy brought Phyllis and Donald home, stopping en route at Elliott's place for the treatment. The next day, Elliott came calling. He had a wire recorder with him. "I'm going to leave this in the baby's room. Turn it on when he's especially vocal. I think the speech development will give us our most significant record. I really put some juice into Broca's area, the speech center."

He bent over the crib and tickled Donald's middle. "Say! You notice something? Notice how he lies, with his arms almost straight out?"

"Is that unusual?" Phyllis said.

"Sure is. Babies lie fairly continuously in the fetal posture, arms flexed and hands near the face, until about four weeks. This child's not even two."

"You mean that everything's going to —?"

"Let's keep our fingers crossed — but it looks good," Elliott bragged. "It looks good."

When Elliott came around again, after a lapse of three days, Roy left his typewriter and came downstairs to greet him. "Doc, I've got to give you credit. Things are easing up — the kid's crying less and less. Hardly even cries when

he's hungry. It's getting to be livable around here again."

The pudgy red face puffed up ecstatically. "I told you! I told you!" He turned with a bird-like dart of his head to Phyllis. "What does he do when he's hungry — just fuss around?"

"That's right," Phyllis said. "Just sort of squirms around and makes little noises, as if he's talking to himself."

"Won-derful! You know what that means? The eight-week level, at least! My God, this is even better than I anticipated. The eight-week level at two weeks!"

He followed them into the nursery. "What kind of sounds does he make?"

"Well," Phyllis reflected, "sort of cooing."

"Cooing!" Elliott sounded as if he were cooing himself. "You have it recorded?"

"I think so."

He listened to the machine play back the baby's vocalizations. "Definitely cooing," he said. "That's eight weeks. Yes, sir, eight weeks minimum."

"When," said Phyllis hesitantly, "when do you think we can start . . . toilet training?"

"At this rate of acceleration, I'd say in another ten days."

"You're not kidding?"

"Ten days," Elliott said firmly.

During the succeeding week, the third of Donnie's life, the fol-



lowing events took place, to the accompaniment of Elliott's mounting excitement: the baby developed good head balance; he clutched a toy; when shown his face in the mirror, he smiled and patted it; he said something that sounded like "ma" ("six-month level!" Elliott shouted).

During the fourth week of Donnie's life, he got up to two-syllable words — mama and dada — learned to wave bye-bye and even to say it, responded to his name, learned to play pat-a-cake. In the middle of this week, Phyllis introduced him to the mysteries of the pot. By the end of the following week, he had mastered it.

There was enormous jubilation in the Crowley household when this was accomplished. Roy broke out the bottle of Napoleon brandy. He and Phyllis got pretty high. They even gave Donnie a lick of it. He beamed his pleasure and said "moh moh," but they didn't let him have any more. They didn't want a dipso in the family.

At the age of six weeks, Donnie Crowley was dressing himself — everything but tying the shoelaces — handling his own spoon at table, keeping himself busy with toys. Phyllis was able to get in four hours of painting a day. Roy was at his typewriter almost without hindrance. It was a happy household.

In fact, the only source of difficulty was the neighbors. They

were too curious; they noticed things; they asked questions. Neither Roy nor Phyllis wanted to tell anybody about the business with the Maturator. They were uncomfortable about it; they vaguely felt it would be almost like confessing some other man had fathered the child.

But what could they do when the neighbors dropped in and found Donnie at the table feeding himself? You could see their suspicions. What kind of baby was this? Some sort of freak? It couldn't be six weeks old. Maybe the Crowleys had lost their baby and adopted an older one and were trying to palm it off as their own. *Something* was funny. . . .

Donnie happened to be somewhat big for his age; not extraordinarily so, but noticeably above average. How old? the neighbors would repeat slyly. How old did you say? It was very uncomfortable. Particularly since Roy and Phyllis were always self-conscious about the story they were concealing. The neighbors could sense their feeling of guiltiness. It was a complication that Roy and Phyllis had never anticipated. They found themselves forced to act cold to their favorite neighbors in order to discourage visits. Every marvelous new progression in Donnie's development was a cause for anxiety: suppose the neighbors noticed. The gossip going around was unimaginable.



Roy and Phyllis felt as if they were living in some frontier outpost, surrounded by enemies, spies and traitors.

By the time Donnie reached his first birthday, the Crowleys had managed to alienate every one of their neighbors. Phyllis arranged a party — a wistful affair — just the three of them and a little cake with one candle. There were still a few friends who would have brought their children, but Roy and Phyllis were too afraid to invite them. The experience of watching Donnie for three or four hours would have been too staggering. The guests would have seen a one-year-old boy who used phrases like "What is that?" and "I don't like it" with precise enunciation; who could walk, run and climb; who could even get somewhere with an erector set.

Elliott came around the next day with congratulations and a gift book — *Bobbie and Janie at the Fair* — which was listed for the three- and four-year level.

"It's time you started a little socialization," he said. "Kid's got to start playing with the neighbors' kids."

"Oh, no," Phyllis whimpered.

"Got to. Don't you want the child to develop properly?"

"It won't work out. The neighbors all think Donnie's queer."

"The devil with what they think. I'm not interested in them.

I'm interested in seeing that Donald develops to his full potentialities. You'd better start letting him out in the garden to play with the other kids. Better start right away."

"But you don't know. . . ." Phyllis said.

He didn't. The thing fizzled from the very start. When Donnie came out to play, it promptly became meal time or nap time for the neighbors' kids. Or else little Jimmie was sick — bad cold — certainly wouldn't want your Donnie to catch it. Phyllis tried bravely to overcome the neighbors' resistance, but after two weeks of continuous rebuffs, she gave up, limp and disheartened. Donnie sat in the living room and plaintively asked where Jimmie and Billie were — he wanted to play with Jimmie and Billie. Phyllis couldn't work up any satisfactory answer. She had to spend more and more of her time playing with him, keeping him busy. Her time at the easel was cut down to hardly more than an hour a day. She took to painting at night, after Donnie went to sleep; but she had always been accustomed to painting by daylight, and the electric light drove her mad.

"Roy," she wailed, "how did we ever get into this? It's killing me — I haven't turned out a decent painting in months."

"It's knocking hell out of my writing, too," Roy said. "God,



this never occurred to me at all. I thought if he matured early, he'd use up less of our time. It's worked exactly the other way around."

"What're we going to do?"

"I don't know. Say! Wait a minute. How about a nursery school? Sure. Why don't we enroll him in there?"

Phyllis shook her head miserably. "They don't take one-year-olds."

"Who says he's one year old? He's three. They won't ask for his birth certificate. Maybe he's a little small for three — but not very much so, at that. Put him in with three-year-olds and he'll be right where he belongs — get along fine."

Next morning Roy drove Donnie to the Hopewell Nursery School, on the other side of town. He scanned the names of the parents of the children enrolled, and didn't spot any he knew. Fine. "Donnie's three," he told the registrar without a quiver.

It was a brilliant idea, as Phyllis conceded on the second day. Donnie loved the place. He got along splendidly with the other children. He was full of talk when he came home at noon — full of Jerry and Tommy and Mary and Nancy. Miss Lawson, the supervisor, reported he was a model child. If the Crowleys would like to enroll Donnie in the afternoon session as well as the morning one, with

lunch at the school, she thought the child was quite mature enough to stand the long absence from home.

They tried it. It worked out fine. The Crowley house was a peaceful, noiseless haven from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. every day except Sunday. Donnie was drawing pictures now. After his first week at the school, he was promoted to the drawing class for specially gifted four- and five-year-olds. In another week, he was making sketches which Miss Lawson thought were remarkable representations of human and animal figures. "Of course," she said to Phyllis, "I'm sure Mrs. Crowley must give him lots of coaching."

"Uhm-uhm," Phyllis mumbled. She had never shown him how to draw a line. The boy had picked it all up in his few sessions in the drawing class. The pictures *were* pretty remarkable for a three-year-old. But Donnie, she kept forgetting — Donnie was only a little over one!

"Roy," said Phyllis awesomely, "we've got a prodigy on our hands."

"I don't think so," Roy said. "He's ahead of his age — we know that — but it'll all even out as he gets older."

One afternoon, the phone jangled and an excited Miss Lawson was on the phone. They'd have to come for Donnie, they'd have to



come for him right this minute. Did they understand? The boy was unfit to associate with decent children. If that was the way Mrs. Crowley brought up her child —!

Roy drove to the school and managed to extract the story from the incoherent Miss Lawson. Donnie had been making what Miss Lawson considered pornographic sketches. Roy got a look at them. One, he could see at once, represented himself taking a shower. He recalled that the previous week Donnie had strayed into the bathroom while he was in the glass shower. The boy hadn't left anything out of his sketch; in fact, he rather exaggerated some features. Another sketch was evidently inspired by a glimpse Donnie had caught of his mother in one of her filmier nightgowns.

Roy went into the public phone booth outside the school office and called Elliott. "What are they so excited about?" the psychologist said. "The boy is only showing the normal sexual curiosity of a five-year-old."

"But they think he's three and a half," Roy whispered. "And he's actually one and a half."

"Makes no difference. He's psychologically at the five-year level. Getting closer to six. You have to expect such behavior."

"But what should I do? They want to kick him out of the school."

"Well . . ." Elliott grumbled.

"Tell them to take his crayons away. He doesn't have to draw. Let them keep him busy with basketwork or weaving — something like that."

Miss Lawson was finally appeased. Very well, she said, Donnie could stay if he behaved. But she did want to say that Mrs. Crowley certainly showed poor judgment in the subjects she taught her child to delineate.

Donnie's interest in drawing disappeared readily. His new fascination was books. He was the most attentive child at the story hour, she grudgingly reported. He always maneuvered himself to the seat beside her, and was already picking out some of the words as she read them.

But the peace lasted only three more weeks. This time when Miss Lawson phoned, she was adamant. Donnie Crowley couldn't stay in the Hopewell Nursery School another minute. Roy cursed and abandoned his typewriter again and took a fast drive to the school. Miss Lawson flatly refused to say what Donnie had done this time. It was unspeakable. Roy hunted up the registrar, who had already investigated the incident. What, it seemed, Donnie had done was to raise his hand during the reading of a fairy tale and inquire how the queen could have a baby if the king had been away at the wars for five years.



"Every kid in the world is curious about sex," Roy complained. "They all ask such questions."

"Not at the age of three," the registrar said. "It shows a morbid preoccupation with sex, to say the least. It's very disruptive to our other children. I'm afraid we can't have this sort of thing around here."

Roy dispiritedly put Donnie in the car and drove home. Donnie kept looking at him worriedly, his blue eyes crinkled, his little button nose turned up at his father. "What did I do, Daddy?" he said plaintively.

"You little brat," Roy said.

Phyllis was waiting for them. Roy had to take Donnie to his room and close the door before he could tell her what had happened. "Can't even talk in front of the kid," he said bitterly.

"We'll have to find another nursery school, that's all," Phyllis said.

"What's the use? He'd only do something else to get himself expelled."

He jerked up the phone and dialed Elliott's number. As soon as the psychologist answered, Roy poured a tirade into his ear.

"Take it easy," Elliott said. "He's gotten too advanced for nursery school anyway. I'm ready to take over now."

"You? What do you mean?"

"I've got a class of six- to eight-year-olds who come here for read-

ing and speech problems. Donald ought to be just about their level. He can spend at least four hours a day here. And it's all on the house, of course; I want the chance to really watch him from now on."

Phyllis didn't like it. "I'm not sure Doc Elliott is the best kind of influence, or example, for a child."

"Darn right he isn't," Roy said. "But what're we going to do? What can we do with the kid all day? We've got to send him somewhere."

Within two months after Donnie started in Elliott's private class, he was reading, with only slight assistance, such books as *The Poky Little Puppy*, *The Leaky Whale* and *Ted and Nina Go to the Grocery Store*. A few weeks after that, he was up to *The Story of Ferdinand*, *Winnie the Pooh* and *A Child's Garden of Verses*. He was even making up rudimentary poems of his own.

"Fantastic," Roy said. "Phyllis, we've got a literary genius on our hands."

"Heaven preserve us from any such," said Phyllis. "I'd drown the poor little tyke before I'd let him become a writer."

"I wonder," Roy mused. "I wonder if Doc Elliott can teach him how to type. . . ."

Now Donnie was deep in books, he was a bookworm, a bibliophile, a bibliomaniac. He was reading,



or trying to read, everything in the Crowley library. Now the days became a constant barrage of questions. "What does *peripheral* mean, Daddy?" "What does it mean when it says, 'Art during this period was hampered by a severe academicism'?" Roy didn't mind this too much; he got a kick out of seeing Donnie's growing command of language, and he soon took the pressure off himself by teaching the boy how to use the unabridged dictionary.

But Donnie's wide reading began to become annoying when he got onto the innocent-question gag. It would go like this: "Daddy, how many bones does a person have?" "Thousand or so," Roy would say carelessly. "Two hundred and six!" Donnie would cry in triumph and derision.

That sort of thing got under Roy's skin after a while. He found himself rereading books he hadn't looked at in years. Science books particularly. Donnie was rapidly stuffing himself with facts covering the whole range of natural history. Roy experienced a definite feeling of tension every time Donnie asked a question; he never knew whether it was a sincere request for information or just a trap.

One evening, while Roy and Phyllis were watching television — Donnie was in his room, too busy reading to spend his time this way — the idea suddenly hit

Roy. He pointed excitedly at the screen. "That — that's what I'm going to do!"

"What?" said Phyllis. There was a Milton Berle show on. At the moment, Milton happened to be getting amorous with a girl in tights. "What?" said Phyllis more sharply.

"Not this program," Roy said impatiently. "Thursday night. Junior Quizmasters. Why didn't I think of it before? He'll be terrific!"

Phyllis stared at him. "What do you want to do that for?"

"Use up some of that energy. Keep him busy. Give some motive, some direction to his reading. And make a few bucks in the process."

"Does a two-year-old child have to earn his own living?" Phyllis said acidly.

"He's not two. He's at least seven. Maybe nine or ten. Ask Doc Elliott."

The program director fell in love with Donnie at first sight. So did the producer and the sponsor's representative. That rounded innocent face, the pale blue eyes, the golden blond hair . . . Every kid in the panel was dark brunet — visual monotony. The executives had been hunting for a blond prodigy for months. When Donnie handled a dozen of their practice questions with only two slight errors, they whipped a contract



out. Seventy-five dollars a week, with a raise to a hundred if he weathered the four-week trial period successfully.

"Can I borrow your pen?" said Roy.

They didn't wait four weeks; they raised Donnie to a hundred after the second program. The mail response had been terrific. TV Digest scheduled Donnie for a cover picture, and John Crosby did a whole column on this brilliant five-year-old (the age Roy had settled on) who had none of the obnoxious cuteness and affectations of most juvenile performers.

Roy, who had been running into a dry spell in his writing and was beginning to worry about finances, now found he could relax a little. Phyllis, however, was worried. "It's unnatural, all this fuss and glamor, for a two-year-old child," she said. "It'll make it even harder for him to adjust to other children."

But, actually, the social part of Donnie's life improved. The neighbors, suddenly discovering they had a celebrity in their midst, quickly warmed to the Crowleys. They were willing now to overlook the Crowleys' previous attempt to pass off their grown child as an infant. It was just one of those eccentricities artists go in for, the neighbors decided indulgently. Wouldn't the Crowleys please drop in? And it certainly would be

very sweet if little Donnie came to play with their children.

Roy promptly discontinued Donnie's attendance at Doc Elliott's clinic. Elliott protested that Donnie needed his personal attention, but Roy said firmly, "It's time he learned to play with normal kids." Donnie now became a member of the seven- to nine-year social set. He was shorter than his playmates, but not punier. He was sturdy-boned and firm-muscled, and he held his own in all their games.

Now got under way a new era of peace and security in the Crowley household. Donnie was well balanced, well adjusted, a source of nothing but parental pride. Roy, of course, wasn't doing much writing any more. He was too busy handling Donnie's interests. Donnie had his own show now — A Day with Donnie — in addition to the Quizmasters thing, and that meant Roy had to make two trips to New York each week with him. Then there were the other matters: Donnie's Oats, the new breakfast cereal; Donnie Denims, the two-piece outfits that were selling by the thousands in the department stores; Donnie's Quiz Book; the Donniehat, a modified mortarboard; Donnie's Own Chemistry Set; the Donniecycle, a bicycle with a horn that squeaked "I know"; and Donnie Tablets, Your Children's Favorite Way of



Taking Vitamins. Roy had to handle the royalty arrangements on all of those.

In addition, there were fan mail, pinup pictures, interviews, personal appearances. Merely handling the tax complications was a job in itself. Donnie was getting \$26,000 a year on his TV shows, and the royalties came to about \$30,000 more. Roy was claiming a high rate of depreciation on Donnie, since obviously he'd stop making dough as soon as he got out of the kid stage; but the local tax office wouldn't allow the claim, and Roy was fighting it out in the courts.

Only Phyllis seemed discontented with all this prosperity. "I thought you were a writer," she said.

"Good God, woman," Roy barked at her, "I never made more than seven thousand in my best years."

"I thought you loved your work."

"What are you talking about? This is something *big*. Do you realize next year we'll have Donnie up to at least a hundred thousand?"

Unfortunately, Donnie's social life began to give trouble again. By the time he was three, his seven- and eight-year-old neighbors utterly bored him. Roy had to scout around and find some nines and tens for him to play with. But Donnie used them up in

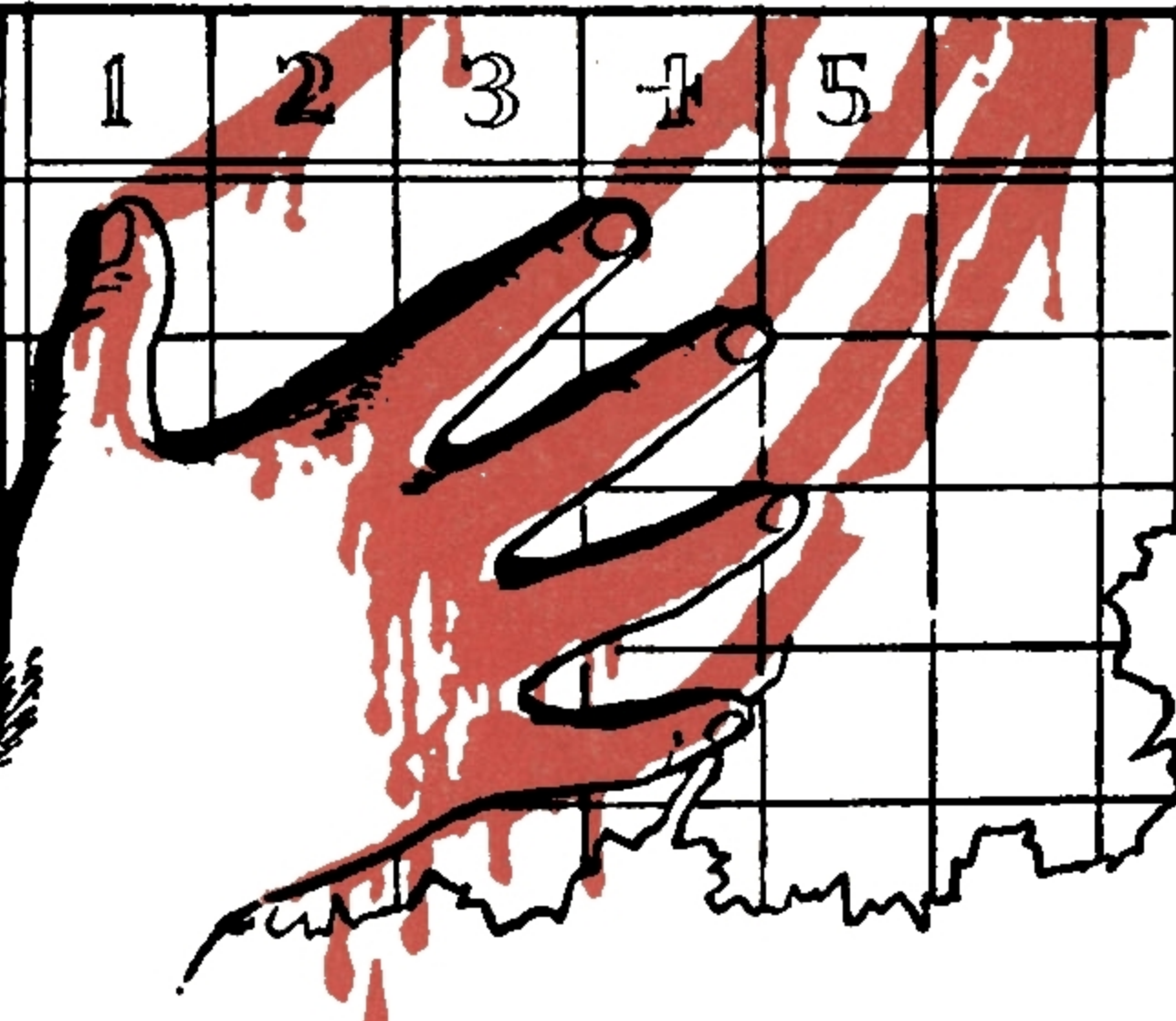
a few months, and Roy had to go out hunting again. It got to be an annoying problem.

Roy finally hit on the idea of *hiring* friends for Donnie. He got them through a talent agency. He contracted for a team of four boys who came to visit Donnie according to a formal schedule of working hours. When Donnie squeezed them dry, in about three months, Roy got the agency to send over a new batch. Donnie surmised that the boys were being paid for their visits, but he didn't mind. "I understand I have to complete my social integration in one way or another," he said. "And this seems the best way."

Shortly after Donnie reached the age of five — he was playing with fourteen-year-olds then — calamity struck: Donnie broke a boy's arm. It was during a baseball game. Donnie was playing with his hired troupe plus some of the bigger boys of the neighborhood. One of the neighbor boys got ready to bat, and Donnie insisted it was his turn, and when the other boy refused to give in, Donnie twisted the bat loose and calmly fractured the boy's forearm.

The victim's parents sued for twenty-five thousand dollars. Roy quickly settled out of court for five. He was furious. Not so much at Donnie or the money-grubbing neighbors as he was angry at Doc Elliott.



NAME		Donald Lee Crowley				
FATHER		MOTHER				
Roy		Phyllis				
FATHER'S OCCUPATION		Writer, free-lance				
MOTHER'S OCCUPATION		artist, free-lance				
WEIGHT AT BIRTH		8½ pounds				
HEIGHT AT BIRTH						

"For God's sake," Roy stormed, "you were supposed to mature the kid's mind. Who said anything about developing his muscles? He's so goddam strong — he's like a little weight-lifter."

"You'd prefer him to be a weakling?" Elliott said harshly.

"Just normal!" Roy shouted. "That's all. Just normal."

"I'm sorry. I should've thought you'd be pleased, but there's no telling what goes on in that so-called brain of yours. You'll just have to bear with the situation. What's happened, of course, is that the prodding we gave the nerves caused them to branch out more — their axons sent extra fibers ramifying through the muscles. The constant stimulation of those extra fibers caused the muscles to develop faster. That's all. Sort of the reverse of what happens in polio, where deterioration of the nerves causes the muscles to shrivel."

"What good does this explanation do me?"

"Listen, you ungrateful chump, what do you want your boy to be — a pushover? Somebody was trying to take his place at bat. He wouldn't stand for it. What's wrong with that?"

"He didn't have to break the boy's arm, dammit."

"That's only an incident. The important thing is that Donnie has enough aggressiveness to see that his rights are recognized."

"Don't you think maybe it's too damn much aggressiveness?"

"Too much for now, perhaps. But remember — Donnie is a boy of the future. He must be ready for the world as it will be when he's older. Society is becoming more competitive year by year. You think things are hectic in the world today, but wait till another generation has passed. It'll *really* be dog-eat-dog then. Donnie has to be prepared for that. If he doesn't have a highly developed competitiveness, he'll go under."

Roy was too angry to carry on the conversation. He stalked out



of Elliott's office without a good-bye. That's the last time, he told himself; I'll never have anything to do with that jerk again.

But within two weeks, Roy was ringing him up on the phone. "Why did I ever get connected with a crumb like you?" he howled.

"What's the trouble now?" Elliott said calmly.

"Everything! That damned competitiveness of yours — it's gotten out of hand. Donnie can't play with *anybody* now. Even the boys we're paying — they're all quitting. He's intolerable. He just knocked one down — knocked out two teeth. I'll have a lawyer's letter in the morning."

"What did he knock the boy down for?" Elliott asked curiously.

"Nothing. Some silly thing about the boy's making a scoring mistake in a tennis game."

"I see," Elliott said blandly. "Donnie's coming along splendidly."

"*What?*"

"Certainly. Nobody's going to get the better of *him*. He's a real boy of the future."

"What's this boy of the future stuff?" Roy yelled.

"Stop shouting in my ear and I'll tell you. In the future, all intelligent parents will pre-condition their children the way we did with Donald. It's the only way the

child will be able to survive in the fierce competition that will prevail then. You know, I've made a study of the competitive tenor of society for the past hundred years. When you put the data on a graph, you see it getting steeper and steeper until now it's almost a vertically ascending line. I tell you, Crowley, every competitive aspect of our society will be intensified a thousandfold within the next two generations. Donnie is a boy for that age. I saw very carefully to that."

"You mean . . . you *deliberately* made him competitive?" Roy said hoarsely.

"Certainly. Of course, competitiveness isn't a simple trait that you can localize in one part of the brain. But we stimulated his motor area and also the hypothalamus, the emotional center, at the expense of the prefrontal area, which is the part of the brain involved with restraint, self-denial and similar traits. In that way, we achieved a stronger drive — a more untrammelled will, you might say. Which now manifests itself in competitiveness, among other things."

"You never told me anything about this before."

"For gosh sakes, man, I couldn't tell you everything. You wouldn't have understood it anyway. It's all part of a complicated plan — everything in the brain is inter-related. This whole thing was very



carefully charted out before I ever went into it."

"If I'd ever known we were going to have all this trouble —"

"Do you know you disgust me?" Elliott snapped at him. "You absolutely make me sick. Whining to me like this . . . You didn't complain when you were spared the little unpleasantnesses other people go through when they have children. You were quite happy to get all the benefits I was able to give you, weren't you? In fact, you were pretty impatient with the least inconvenience — you insisted I put the child through another round in the Maturator, didn't you? Furthermore, you seem to be quite content to exploit the child's abilities and squeeze every last dollar you can out of him. You haven't whined about that —"

"Skip it," Roy snarled, and slammed down the receiver.

Now alone, without playmates, Donnie began to become moody, irritable, snappish. Roy and Phyllis began to find it very hard to manage him. It struck Roy that the boy's competitive impulses, which had found their outlet in play with other boys, was now being vented on them. But knowing the explanation didn't make it pleasanter, or excusable in Roy's eyes. All the fancy terms in all the psychology books couldn't alter the fact that the boy was simply

being bad. He was surly to his father. He talked back to his mother. He complained continuously. He was dissatisfied with everything. He wanted to run the whole house.

One day, he was sitting in a chair, twanging a piece of wire. Phyllis told him to stop — then went over and snatched the wire from his hands. Donnie jumped up and punched her, full in the chest. Roy was coming in the door just as it happened. He ran over and grabbed the boy and gave him a licking, an old-fashioned, non-scientific licking. It was a fierce struggle — the boy was very strong — but Roy got him over his knee and applied his hand with all the bitterness he'd been storing up.

He let up only when his arm tired. He ordered the boy to go to his room. Donnie did as he was told; but he walked away with a defiant swing in his shoulders. And just before he passed through the doorway, he turned and gave Roy a look. A look that shocked Roy to his depths. It wasn't a boy's hurt look, a look of understandable resentment or bitterness. It was a stone-hard, stone-cold malevolence; a look of cold, unfeeling separateness, of unrelatedness. . . .

From then on, the Crowleys had a stranger in the house. A stranger whom they had once trustfully taken in and who had proved to be



an enemy. He would not sit at the table with them. He would not speak. He ignored everything they said. He refused to go to the television studio — the networks were told he was sick and they'd have to get a substitute. He spent days just sitting in the living room and staring at his parents. Phyllis was becoming frantic. "He'll drive me mad," she whimpered.

"That's what he's trying to do," Roy said. "Hold tight."

Donald's sixth birthday arrived. Suddenly, hysterically, Phyllis was all afire with plans for a party. She wanted it rich, complete, a gay, frolicsome time, the way most of their previous ones had been. She was sure the magic of the lighted candles would revive all the close, warm happiness of their previous years. "I'm going to bake the cake myself," she said, tense and flushed. "Roy, you go out and buy decorations — all kinds — everything —"

"For that monster?" Roy said grimly.

"Roy — please!"

He went out. He drove to the variety store, gave the salesgirl a ten-dollar bill and told her to load a bag with birthday-party decorations — he'd be back and pick them up. Then he drove to Elliott's place.

He found Elliott in the classroom giving blackboard instruction to half a dozen children. Roy

waved him into the office. As soon as they were inside, Roy closed the door and grabbed the psychologist by the lapels.

"Where's that plan?" he gritted.

"What — what's the matter?" Elliott trembled.

"That plan — the chart that tells the kind of boy you were trying to make. Where is it?"

"You — you wouldn't understand —"

Roy dragged him across the room to the desk. "Get it out!" He twisted the lapels across Elliott's throat.

"I d-don't have it —" Elliott choked, struggling to free himself.

"Get it out!" Roy twisted the lapels tighter. But suddenly he saw it. It was right there on top of the desk. Elliott had evidently been reviewing it. A brown folder, with a typewritten title: *Prospectus: The Child of the Future*.

Roy flung the little psychologist aside, sent him tumbling halfway across the floor. He ripped the folder open. A thick sheaf of typewritten pages, more than a hundred of them. He riffled through them. Charts of the brain. Nerve pathways. A diagram of the Maturator. A long discussion of trends of social competition. The requirements for successful living in the years ahead. Roy kept turning impatiently. Abruptly he stopped. Here it was. A list, month by month, of anticipated levels of be-

havior. The words the child was expected to use at each stage. Toilet behavior. Feeding behavior. Sex interests. Attitudes toward playmates, parents. Roy read quickly. He came to the Sixth Year. His flesh became cold and crawling as he read:

*In the child of the future, the thoroughly Maturated Child, the sixth year should mark a high development of his competitive drive; so high, that it will now turn naturally against his parents and quickly destroy them, as impediments to his further development. His expanded physical powers should make this easily feasible. . . .*

Roy hurled the papers away and started grimly toward Elliott.

"It's — it's only theoretical — the future —" Elliott stammered.

"I'll —"

The psychologist fled through the doorway.

Roy stopped. He rushed back to the desk, grabbed the phone and dialed his own number. His heart pounded. "Phyllis! Are you all right?"

"Of course," she said. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing — nothing — Look, I'm coming right home. I'm bringing what you wanted. What are you doing now? Where's the boy?"

"He's in his room. I'm making the cake. What is the matter?"

"Nothing at all — just a — What color icing are you making?"

"White and pink. Why?"

"Make it green," he gritted.

"Green? Why on earth —?"

"Do as I say! Make it green."

"Well, if you're so insistent . . ."

Elliott was nowhere in sight when Roy strode through the classroom. He went out and got into his car and sped to the variety store. His package was ready. He carried it to the garden counter. "Give me a can of Paris green," he said.

The clerk took the skull-marked can off the shelf. "Anything else, sir?"

"That'll be all I need," Roy said.

He drove home quickly. Phyllis needn't know anything about it — ever. He'd figure out some excuse to get her and the boy out of the room while he cut the cake and fixed up the boy's slice. It struck Roy that he had already, unwittingly, paved the way for this outcome by telling the television people the boy was sick. When he died, there would be no inquest, no investigation — not if Doc Elliott filled out the death certificate as a natural death. And he'd have to. Roy had a story that could ruin him if he balked.

There couldn't be any hitch. Roy felt a huge sense of release and freedom as he walked up the front steps. He unlocked the door.

And heard, faintly, his wife's last despairing cry.