

ARGOSY

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THE CHRYSALIDS

Here is neither moon magic nor Martian horror. Discarding ray gun and spaceship, Argosy offers a new sf story with all the originality and compelling power one would expect of the author of those enthralling novels, "The Day of the Triffids," and "The Kraken Wakes."

"We are no longer so interested in this or that scientific marvel," says John Wyndham. "We want to know what

EVEN when I was a small child I would sometimes see a place like this.

The picture of a city would come into my mind: there would be streets lined by buildings that were quite unlike anything I had ever really seen; there were machines, utterly strange to me, running along those streets; there were even machines flying in the sky above it. Sometimes I would see it by day; sometimes by night, as an unbelievable carnival of lights . . .

When I was still young enough not to know any better I asked my elder sister where this place could be. She shook her head, and said there was no such place. Perhaps, she suggested, I might somehow have been dreaming about the world that the Old People had known; the world as it had been before God sent Tribulation. But after that, she warned me very seriously not to mention it to anyone else: other people did not have such pictures in their heads, so it would be unwise to speak of them.

That was good advice, and it was lucky for me that I heeded it. Everybody where I come from has a swift eye for differences; and I was already under a slight cloud for being left-handed . . .

But now that I am here, now that I can be myself among people of my own kind, and do not need to be for ever on my guard, I feel it a duty to put on record some account of what life can be like for people of our sort in other parts of the world, and I think the best way I can do it is to tell my own story.

It is the time round about the day when my young sister Petra was born that is marked for me in half a dozen ways. Although I would be about eleven and a half then it was rather as if there had been no sharp marks in all that time. I had just been there and growing slowly and not noticing the world about me much

it will do to us and our children—to the people of tomorrow.”

So he takes us to Waknuk, in the country that was once called Labrador, and in this pioneer community, battling against new primeval difficulties and terrors, peopled by a generation with a different way of life, strange Commandments, and even undreamed-of powers—in this new society, for all its primitive strangeness, we recognize our own.

*This world could be our world—
we could be these people.*

BY JOHN WYNDHAM

except as a background which was sometimes pleasant, but usually severe and puzzling. And then all these things happened on top of one another: it was as if they woke me up, and after that the world could never look quite the same.

The first of these things was the invasion. That'd be about two or three weeks before Petra came, and it meant a kind of off-stage feeling of excitement all round because it was a real invasion that time.

Occasional small raids or forays used to happen two or three times a year. Nobody took a lot of notice of them as a rule except the people who got raided. Usually they had time to get away and only lost their stock and sometimes had their houses burnt. But this time it was different.

The people of the Fringes—at least, one had to call them people because although they are really Deviations, and therefore Blasphemies, they do often look quite like ordinary human people, if nothing has gone too much wrong with them—these people, then, don't have a lot out there in the Fringes, which is the border country between civilized parts and the Badlands. So they come to steal our grain and livestock and tools, weapons too if they can get them; and sometimes they carry off children.

Some years they get more hungry and come more often, but usually there is little plan about it; just a matter of a dozen or so of them raiding quickly, and then running off back into Fringes country. The people who live near the border seem to look on it rather as one might on a bad season.

There wasn't any plan to deal with it, either, because you never could tell within four or five hundred miles where they might come next. The result was that when the Fringes people found a leader and came as an organized invasion there was not at first any system

of defence to delay them. They simply pushed forward on a broad front, looting and stealing as they came, and meeting nothing to hold them up until they were over twenty miles into civilized parts.

By that time we had the beginnings of a militia to harry them and head them off. Our men—quite a lot of them, at any rate—had guns; the Fringes people for the most part were armed only with bows and arrows, and knives, and spears. Nevertheless, their path of advance was so wide that they were difficult to deal with. They were better woodsmen and cleverer in concealment than real humans, so that they were able to come on another twenty miles before we could contain them and bring them to battle.

It was exciting for a boy. The Fringes people were within ten miles of our house at Waknuk, and our yard was one of the rallying points for the militia. My father who had had an arrow through his arm a week before was helping to organize the newcomers into squads. For several days there was a great bustling and coming and going as they were registered and sorted, and eventually they rode out with a fine air of determination, and all the women of the household waving them off with handkerchiefs.

Finally, when they had all gone, the place seemed strangely quiet for a day. Then there came a rider, dashing back. He paused long enough to tell us that there had been a big battle and the Fringes people were running away as fast as they could and some of their leaders had been taken prisoner, before he galloped on with his news.

That same afternoon a troop of ten horsemen came riding into the yard, with two of the captured Fringes leaders in their midst.

I dropped what I was doing, and ran up to see. For a moment it was disappointing. There were such tales about the Fringes that I fully expected to see creatures with two heads, or hairy all over, or with half a dozen arms and legs. Instead, at first glance they seemed to be just ordinary bearded men, though rather dirty and in very ragged clothes.

One of them was a short man with long fair hair which looked as though it had been trimmed with a knife. But when I looked at the other, I had a shock and stood dumbfounded, staring at him. His face was so familiar that I felt physically jolted. I went on staring, with my mouth open. Except for the ragged clothes and the unkemptness of his beard, he was the image of my father. He might have *been* my father . . .

He looked down and noticed me, casually at first; then he stared harder, and a strange look that I didn't understand came into his eyes . . .

I don't know whether he would have spoken then or not, for at that moment people came out of the house to see what was happening—my father, with his arm still in a sling, among them.

I saw my father pause on the step and survey the group of horsemen; then he, too, caught sight of the man in the middle of them. For a moment he stared, just as I had done—then all his colour

drained away, leaving his face a blotchy grey. For a moment he looked like a very ill man, but his eyes never left the other's face.

I looked quickly at the other man again. He sat on his horse rigid, as though petrified. His expression made something clutch suddenly in my chest. I was terrified. I had never seen naked hatred before, the lines cut deep, the eyes glittering, the mouth like a savage animal's. It came like a sudden searing flash, this horrid revelation of something I had never known to exist; the expression seemed to burn my mind in an instant, so that I have never forgotten it . . .

Then my father put out his good hand to steady himself against the doorpost, and turned back into the house.

One of the escort cut the rope which held the prisoner's arms. He dismounted, and it was then that I was able to see what was wrong with him. He was a good eighteen inches taller than anyone else, but not because he was a big man. If his legs had been right, he would have been no taller than my father's five-foot-ten; but they were not: they were monstrously long and thin, and his arms were long and thin, too. He looked half spider, half man . . .

The escort gave him food and a pot of beer. He sat down on a bench, his bony knees sticking up almost level with his shoulders. He looked round the yard malevolently as he munched his bread and cheese, and noticed me again. He beckoned. I hung back, pretending not to see. He beckoned again. I became ashamed of being afraid of him, so I went a little closer, then a little closer still, but keeping warily out of range, I judged, of those spidery arms.

"What's your name, boy?" he asked me.

"David," I told him. "David Storm."

"That was your father at the door? What's his name?"

"Joseph," I told him.

He nodded several times, as though to himself.

"This place, then," he said, looking round the yard, the house, and the outbuildings, "this will be Waknuk?"

"Yes," I told him.

I don't know whether he would have asked more, but somebody told me to clear off, and presently they all remounted, and began to move on, the spidery man with his arms tied together behind him once more. I watched them ride away in the Kentak direction, glad to see them go. My first encounter with someone from the Fringes had not been exciting at all, but it had been unpleasantly disturbing.

I heard later that both the Fringes men managed to escape that same night. I can't remember who told me, but I am perfectly certain it was not my father. I never had the courage to ask him about that day, and I never once heard him refer to it . . .

It would be about three days after that that Petra was born. It happened, I think, about five in the morning—though, of course, nobody actually mentioned it at all. We of the household spent an anxious

morning, trying to pretend that there was nothing unusual afoot, while we waited for the Inspector to come and issue his certificate so that we could admit that Petra had been born, and give her a name.

But the Inspector took his time. He had had a row with my father, and was taking the chance to get a bit of his own back.

Father hung about the house and yard, now and then exploding with bad temper over trivial things, so that everybody kept out of his way as much as possible. Everything was held up because the word "baby" couldn't even be mentioned or hinted at until the Inspector had issued his certificate declaring it to be a true and normal human being—if he could not do that, he would take it away with him, and everybody would pretend that nothing had happened; just as we were pretending now that Mother was in bed with a cold.

My elder sister, Alice, tried to cover up her anxiety by loudly bossing the household girls. I felt compelled to hang about so that I should not miss the announcement that the baby was all right. My father kept on prowling. The proprieties of the occasion would not even let him say aloud what he thought of the Inspector—which was perhaps as well, for such tardiness in coming to visit a household of our standing was little less than a studied insult. What made it worse was that on the last two similar occasions the Inspector had not given a certificate; and everybody was well aware of that unmentionable fact.

It was not until mid afternoon that the Inspector ambled up on his pony, and my father went out to receive him with a politeness which must almost have strangled him. Even then, the Inspector was not brisk.

He dismounted in a leisurely fashion and potted into the house, talking about the weather. Father, red in the face, handed him over to Alice, who took him along to Mother's room. Then there was the worst wait of all.

Alice said that he hummed and ha'ed for an unconscionable time while he examined the baby in minutest detail. At length, however, he emerged. In the living-room he sat down and fussed about for a time, getting a good point on his quill.

At last he took a form from his pouch and in a slow, deliberate hand wrote that he officially found the child to be a true female human being, free from any detectable form of deviation. After signing and dating it he handed it to my enraged father with a faint air of uncertainty. He had, of course, no real doubt in his mind, or he would have called in another opinion; my father was perfectly well aware of that, too.

Only then could Petra's existence be admitted.

I was officially informed that I had a new sister, and taken to see her as she lay in her crib beside my mother's bed.

She looked so pink and wrinkled to me that I didn't see how the Inspector could possibly have been quite sure; however, there was nothing obviously wrong with her, like having extra fingers and toes

and so on, so she got her certificate. Nobody could blame the Inspector for that: she *looked* as normal a human as I did . . .

Ours was a very godfearing household. My grandfather, who was one of the pioneers at Waknuk, had built the chapel, and preached in it. My father had followed his example and preached there frequently, too. He also preached and prayed a lot at home, so that some of our workers got rather tired of it. However, the thanksgiving for Petra was not a thing anybody would grudge, so we all listened patiently to my father and made our responses with a good will.

Most of the life of our house went on in the big kitchen, rather than in the sitting-room, and you had only to enter it to realize that we were orthodox and exemplary.

Among the burnished pans that hung against the walls because they were too big to go into the cupboards were a number of wooden panels with admonishments, mostly taken from Nicholson's *Repentances*, decoratively burnt into them.

The one on the left of the fireplace said: *Keep Pure the Stock*. On the opposite wall was: *Blessed is the Norm*, and the largest was a panel on the back wall that faced you as you came in. It warned everybody: *WATCH THOU FOR THE MUTANT!*

References to these texts had made me familiar with them long before I could read, and with the others elsewhere about the house, such as: *The Devil is the Father of Deviation*, and *The Norm is the Will of God*.

I think there was considered to be some virtue in my ability to quote them at an early age, but there might have been more if anyone had taken the trouble to see that I had some idea what they were about.

The truth is, however, that they meant almost nothing—I was able to join in the thanksgiving for the normality of Petra quite sincerely, and remain unperturbed by the surrounding precepts although I had by that time known for some years that I had one quality not shared by anyone else in the household. Somehow, I still failed entirely to connect my difference with the implications of those long-familiar texts.

There was, therefore, no mockery at all in my heart while I listened to my father thanking God for blessing his house with the addition of a new child of the true human stock. Even though at one moment I caught my Uncle Axel's gaze resting speculatively upon me while my father prayed, I thought nothing of it.

Nor did it occur to me—and probably not to anyone else, with the possible exception of Uncle Axel—that the Inspector could have been in any way deceived about Petra . . .

My half-Uncle, Angus Morton, owned the big farm less than a mile away, with fields that were in some places contiguous to our own.

Half-Uncle Angus and my father had never cared for one another.

My father had been heard to declare that Angus lacked moral fibre, and that the broadness of his principles, if he had any, was a serious menace to the rectitude of the neighbourhood; Angus reciprocated by considering my father to be a hard man and bigoted beyond the brink of stupidity. Though they were on the opposite sides of every question, the antipathy remained almost entirely verbal until the affair of Angus's greathorses came up.

My father had heard of greathorses, though none had previously been seen in our district, but when he went to look at the pair that Angus had bought, doubt was already in his mind. The moment he set eyes on the huge creatures, standing nearly twenty-eight hands at the shoulder, it was confirmed. He knew that they were *wrong*. He went straight to the Inspector and demanded that they should be destroyed as Offences.

But the Inspector shook his head. "You're out of order," he told my father cheerfully, with an air of relishing the fact that his grounds were incontestable. "They're Government-approved."

"I don't believe it," said my father. "God never made horses the size of these. The Government *can't* have approved them."

"They have," the Inspector assured him. "What's more, knowing this district pretty well by now, Angus took the precaution of getting individual certificates for them."

"Any Government that could pass such creatures as normal is corrupt and immoral," said my father.

"Possibly," agreed the Inspector, calmly, "but it is still the Government." My father was roused.

"It is easy to see *why* they'd approve them," he said. "One of those brutes could do the work of two or more ordinary horses, for a lot less than double the feed. But that's no excuse for casuistry. A horse like that is not one of God's creatures—and if it isn't His, then it is an Offence, and should be destroyed as such."

"The official approval states that the breed was produced simply by mating for size. And I defy you to find anything identifiably wrong with them, anyway," the Inspector told him.

"It doesn't follow that they're *right*," my father persisted. "No horse that size could be *right*. It is your moral duty to issue an order against them," he told the Inspector.

"It is my official duty to protect them and their owner against attacks by bigots, or any other irresponsibles," said the Inspector, growing suddenly short-tempered.

My father nursed his wrath for an address in chapel next Sunday in which he seared the whole community for tolerating Mutants.

The dispute died to a smoulder. My father did not change his opinions, but in face of the Government approval, they found little support. Six weeks later he shot at one of the greathorses on the grounds that it had broken down our fence and was on our land alarming our cattle. The creature was only lightly touched, but the incident did nothing to improve relations with Angus Morton.

The greathorses remained. My father continued to mention their presence as the cause of any divine displeasure manifested locally.

Half-Uncle Angus acquired the habit of referring to my father as "that purity bigot." And it was my father who came off worst, because it is always wise to keep on the right side of the District Inspector, as the delay over Petra's certificate showed.

Now, to you, in a country so differently situated, this matter of Offences, which played such a large part in our lives, may not be quite clear. Our neighbours to the east were less concerned with it the farther east one went, but when one was as far west as Waknuk there was need for constant vigilance.

Some thirty-five miles away at the nearest point, Wild Country began; ten or fifteen miles farther on, it merged into the lawless Fringes, which extended another forty or fifty miles until one reached the impassable barrier of the Badlands.

The chief difference between Waknuk and the Wild Country was the degree of stability. When proper care was taken, there was an almost eighty-per-cent chance that seeds sown or stock mated in Waknuk would produce orthodox results: with the rich soil, this made farming there quite profitable.

In Wild Country, however, although it was quite possible to live there in a civilized way, the chances were fifty per cent or more that a crop would go wrong, even using imported seed, so that farming became barely economic at all; while if you were to plant close to the Fringes, no one could say what monstrosity might not come up. All these things that you didn't expect were Offences. Uncle Axel explained it to me when I was small and rather worried by some of our more severe texts such as: *Accursed is the Mutant in the Sight of God and Man!*

"A Mutant," he told me, "is a thing that God didn't intend to exist. You know what a head of corn should look like, or a potato—well, that's the way God made them and intended them to look. But sometimes there is an evil in them which makes them grow differently, so they are called Offences. It is our duty to destroy these Offences so that they shall not produce young Offences of their own kind."

"But how do people know which are the right ones?" I asked.

"A lot of them are described—some with pictures—in Nicholson's *Repentances*," he told me. "I'll show you that one day. And then there is a list which the Government at Rigo sends out, so that if there is any argument the Inspector looks it up in his copy of the list, and if he still can't decide, he appeals to the Council. But that doesn't happen very often, because when there is anything wrong, you can usually tell pretty easily."

I was silent for a while. His explanation had shed a new and helpful light on several things that had puzzled me—and, while exciting me, had been rather frightening, too.

Sometimes these had been quite impressive occasions. The first sign of one was usually that my father came into the house in a bad temper. Then, in the evening, he would call everyone together and proclaim that we were harbouring an Offence.

The next morning we would all be gathered in the yard before it was properly light, and we would sing a hymn while my father, with a large knife, ceremonially slaughtered the two-headed calf, or four-legged chicken, or whatever the Offence happened to be.

Sometimes, too, my father would stamp into the kitchen and throw down on the table a few stalks of corn, or some vegetables that were Offences. If it was no more than a matter of a row or two of vegetables, they came out and were destroyed, but if it was a whole field, a few men would be sent off with scythes to mow a swathe on the leeward side of it.

Then, early the next morning, if the wind and weather were favourable, we would all march along to the offending field. Just as the sun came up, my father and one or two other men would set fire to it on the windward side, and we'd all sing hymns while it burnt. It was a very fine and exciting sight indeed.

We used to have more fires and slaughterings than anyone else because my father was a careful and pious man, with a very sharp eye for an Offence, but any suggestion that we were more afflicted than other people hurt him. He did not have any wish to throw good money away, he said. If our neighbours had been as conscientious as we were, they'd have had quite as many cleansings as we did—probably more.

All kinds of Deviations and Offences were serious, of course, but there was one much more serious than the rest, which was called a Blasphemy. Uncle Axel explained about that, too.

"You know that man was created in God's image?" he asked me.

"Yes," I said. I recalled what I had been taught: "And God created man in His own image; and God decreed that man should have one body, one head, two arms, and two legs: that each arm should be jointed in two places, and end in one hand: that each hand should have four fingers and one thumb . . ." And so on. I repeated some of it.

Uncle Axel nodded.

"Well," he said, "any child that is different from the definition is called a Blasphemy. People are so ashamed of it they just pretend it doesn't exist."

"What happens to it?" I asked.

"The Inspector takes it away," he told me.

"What does he do with it?" I wanted to know.

But he wouldn't tell me that. He went on to explain that Blasphemies were not to be talked about for fear of hurting people's feelings—except those that lived in the Fringes; their existence was a scandal that could be talked about and deplored.

I grasped the idea, in a rough way. A child is taught to regard customs and proprieties as the natural habits of his kind.

Differences of opinion can be very distressing: one has been taught what is right and what is wrong, so what can the dispute be about? It is very puzzling: if the difference becomes intense, it can be shocking too.

I was shocked some two days after Petra was born, without understanding why.

I was sitting quietly that afternoon in the small room next to my parents' bedroom where my mother still lay in bed. It was not entirely by chance. There was a tendency for people to find jobs for me to do in the afternoons, but if I could slip away early from the dinner-table and remain invisible until they had all gone to work again, I was safe. Nobody had yet thought of looking for me in that room.

The chief drawback was that the wattle wall between the two rooms was cracked so that I had to move very cautiously on tiptoe lest my mother should hear me.

On that particular day I was just wondering whether I had allowed enough time for safety, when a high-wheeled trap came driving up, and as it passed the window, I had a glimpse of my Aunt Harriet holding the reins.

I edged carefully on stockinged feet to the side of the window where I was able to watch her tether the horse, pick a white bundle out of the trap, and carry it carefully into the house. A moment later her steps passed the door of my room, and the latch of the next door clicked.

"Why, Harriet!" exclaimed my mother's voice, in surprise, and not altogether in approval, "so soon! You don't mean to say you've brought a tiny baby all that way!"

"I know," said my aunt's voice, accepting the reproof in my mother's tone, "but I had to, Emily—I had to. She was born a week ago. I didn't know what to do. Then I heard that your baby had been born early. It was like an answer to a prayer, so I came as soon as I could—Oh, there she is! Oh, she's lovely, Emily. She's a lovely baby."

There was a lot of mutual congratulation which didn't interest me very much.

Presently my mother said, "Henry must be delighted."

"Oh yes, of course he is," Aunt Harriet told her, but somehow there was a flatness in her voice. After a brief pause, she added: "You've got the certificate for her?"

"Of course!" My mother's tone was sharp, ready to be offended. I could well imagine her expression. When she spoke again, there was a quality in her voice that disturbed me.

"Harriet!" she said, abruptly, "you don't mean to say you've not got a certificate?"

My aunt made no reply, but I caught the sound of a suppressed sob. My mother said, "Harriet! let me see that child properly."

For some seconds I could only hear more sobs from my aunt. Then she said unsteadily: "It's such a little thing, you see. It's nothing much."

"*Nothing much!*" snapped my mother. "You have the effrontery to bring your monster into a godfearing house and say *it's nothing much!*"

Aunt Harriet broke into little moaning sobs.

After a time my mother said, "Why did you come here, Harriet? Why did you bring it here?"

Aunt Harriet's sobs grew less, slowly. She said, in a dull, flat voice, "When she came—when I saw her, I wanted to kill myself. I knew they wouldn't approve her, although it's such a little thing. But I love her. She's a lovely baby—but for that, isn't she?"

My mother didn't answer. Aunt Harriet went on, "Well, then I thought at least I'd keep her as long as I could. The month they give you before you *have* to notify. I decided I'd have her for that long, at least."

"And Henry? What did he say?"

"He said we ought to notify at once. But I wouldn't let him—I couldn't, Emily, I couldn't. I just prayed and hoped. And then when I heard your baby had come a month early . . ."

"Harriet," said my mother coldly, "I do not see what you mean."

"I thought," Aunt Harriet went on, spiritless now, but forcing herself to the words, "I thought that if I could leave my baby here, and borrow yours—"

My mother gave an incredulous gasp.

"It would only be for a day or two, just while I apply for the certificate," Aunt Harriet went on. "You are my sister, Emily—you are the only person in the world who can help me to keep my baby."

She began to cry again.

There was a longish pause, and then my mother's voice, "In all my life I have never heard anything so outrageous. You produce a Deviation, and instead of hiding your shame, you come here suggesting that I should make an immoral, criminal conspiracy to . . . I think you must be mad, Harriet. To suggest that I should lend—"

She broke off at the sound of my father's heavy step in the passage.

"Joseph," she said, as he entered, "get her out of this house—and see that she takes *that* with her."

"But—but it's Harriet, my dear," said my father, in bewilderment. "It's Harriet."

My mother explained, fully. There wasn't a sound from Aunt Harriet. At the end, he demanded incredulously, "Is this true? is this why you came here?"

Aunt Harriet said slowly, "They'll take my baby away. I can't stand it—not again. Henry will turn me out and take another wife who can give him proper children. There'll be nothing in the world left for me—nothing. I came here, hoping against hope for sympathy and help. I—I see now that I was foolish to hope at all."

Nobody said anything.

"All right—I'll go now," Aunt Harriet told them presently, in a dead voice

My father was not a man to leave his attitude unexplained.

"I don't understand how you dared to come to a godfearing house with such a suggestion," he told her. "Worse still, you don't show a trace of shame."

Aunt Harriet's voice was steadier as she answered: "Why should I? I've done nothing to be ashamed of. I am *not* ashamed—only beaten. I have done my best to save my baby. I can't do any more."

"Not ashamed!" repeated my father. "Not ashamed of producing a mockery of your Maker—or of trying to plan a criminal conspiracy!" He took a breath, and launched off in his pulpit style: "The enemies of God work to distort the true image: through the weak vessels they attempt to defile the race. There is one defence only—eternal vigilance for the impurities they attempt to send among us. Deviation, *any* deviation from the true image is blasphemy. . .

"If you had your way, your child would grow to breed and, breeding, spread pollution until all around us there would be mutants and abominations. Shame on you, woman! Now go!"

There were two light footsteps. The baby gave a little whimper as Aunt Harriet picked it up. At the door she paused.

"I shall pray," she said. "I shall pray God to send charity into this hideous world, and sympathy for the weak, and love for the unhappy and unfortunate. I shall pray Him, too, that the hearts of the self-righteous may be broken."

Then the door closed behind her, and she passed slowly along the passage.

I moved cautiously to the window again. I saw her lay the white bundle gently in the trap. She unhitched the horse, climbed up, and took the bundle onto her lap, with one arm round it. For a moment she turned a face as blank and hard as granite toward's the house. Then she shook the reins and drove off.

Behind me, in the next room, my father was saying, "I could never have believed such wickedness in a sister of yours. But sometimes women get strange ideas at these times. We must pray for her."

My mother started to answer, but her voice cracked, and she began to cry. I had never heard her cry before. My father went on explaining about the importance of Purity.

I could not help feeling a great curiosity about the baby, but I never found out what was wrong. When they broke the news to me next day that my Aunt Harriet had been found drowned in the river, no one mentioned a baby.

Though there was much that I did not understand in what I had overheard, it was quite the most disturbing thing that had ever happened to me. For several nights I dreamt of Aunt Harriet lying in the river, with her open eyes seeing nothing, while her hair swirled round her pale face, and her arms still clasped the white bundle to her. And I was very frightened . . .

A Mutant, my father had called it . . . a Mutant! I recalled the voice of a visiting preacher, and the way he had thundered from the pulpit, "*Accursed is the Mutant!*"

Accursed is the Mutant . . . The Mutant, the enemy of the human race, of all God's creation; the emissary of the Devil who tries unflinchingly, eternally, to destroy the divine order and turn our land, the stronghold of God, into a lewd chaos like the Fringes; to make it a place without the law, where the plants and the animals and the almost-human beings, too, brought forth young unlike themselves; where unnameable creatures prowled, abominable growths flourished, and travesties swam in the waters, where madness mocked the Lord with obscene fantasies.

I prayed very earnestly those nights. "Oh God," I said, "please let me be like other people. I don't want to be different. Make it so that when I wake up in the morning I'll be just like everybody else."

But in the morning, when I tested myself, I'd find that the prayer hadn't altered anything. I had to get up just the same person as had gone to bed, and I had to go into the big kitchen and eat my breakfast facing the panel which said, *Accursed is the Mutant.*

And so I went on being very frightened . . .

After about the fifth night that praying hadn't done any good, Uncle Axel caught me at the end of breakfast and said I'd better come along and help him mend a plough. We worked on that for about a couple of hours, then he declared a rest, so we went out of the forge to sit in the sun, with our backs against a wall. He gave me a bit of bread and cheese. We munched for a minute or two, then he said, "Now, Davie boy, let's have it."

"Have what?" I said, though I knew.

"Whatever's been making you look as if you were sickening for something the last day or two," he told me.

Uncle Axel was the only person who could have asked me that without throwing me into a panic. He was the only one—well, the only *normal* one—who knew about the difference. All the same, I still hesitated.

Nearly two years before, he had come upon me one day when I was talking to Rosalind—Rosalind Morton, my half-cousin, whose father owned the greathorses—and I was doing it out loud because I hadn't had much practice then.

It must have been an instinct of self-preservation that had made me keep it to myself, for I had no active realization of danger—so little, in fact, that when Uncle Axel came across me behind the rick apparently chatting to myself, I made very little effort to dissemble. I can remember how he stood regarding me, with a half-amused frown: he must, I think, have been there for a minute or two before I looked up and saw him.

"Hullo, Davie boy, and who would you be chattering to? Is it fairies, or gnomes, or just the rabbits?" he asked.

I shook my head.

"Can rabbits talk?" I inquired. "I've never heard them.

"Nor have I," he admitted. "Still, I suppose they'd have to have some way of telling one another things, wouldn't they?"

"Yes," I said. "I suppose they would."

He limped closer, and sat down beside me, chewing on a stalk of grass from the rick.

"Feeling lonely?" he asked

"No," I told him

He frowned a bit again.

"Wouldn't it be better if you did your chatting with some of the other kids," he suggested. "Wouldn't it be more fun than just sitting and talking to yourself?"

"But I was," I protested.

"Was what?" he said, still frowning.

"Talking to one of them," I told him.

He looked puzzled. "Who?" he asked.

"Rosalind," I told him.

"H'm—I didn't see her around," he said.

"Oh, she's not here. She's at home—at least, she's near home, in a little secret hut her brothers built in the spinney," I explained. "She often goes there when she wants to talk."

He didn't seem to be able to understand at first. He kept on talking as if it were some make-believe game; but after I had gone on for some time trying to explain, he became quite quiet, and looked very serious. After I'd stopped, he didn't say anything for a bit; then he asked, "This is the real truth you're telling, Davie boy?"

He looked at me very hard and steadily.

"Yes, Uncle Axel, of course," I assured him.

"And you've never told anyone else—no grown-up person at all?"

"No," I told him, truthfully.

He threw away the remains of his grass-stalk, and pulled another from the rick. After he had bitten a few pieces off it and spat them out, he looked at me directly again.

"Davie," he said. "I want you to make me a promise."

"Yes, Uncle Axel?"

"It's this," he said, very seriously, "that you will never, never tell anyone else what you've just told me—*never*, it's very important. You mustn't do anything that would let anyone guess. Will you promise me that?"

His intensity and gravity were so unlike his usual self that they impressed me strongly.

When I gave my promise, I was aware that I was promising something more important than I understood.

He nodded, satisfied that I meant it. Then he went on, "It would be best if you could forget it altogether."

I thought about that, and then shook my head.

"I don't think I could do that, Uncle Axel. It just happens. It'd be like—" I broke off, unable to express what I meant.

"Like—forgetting how to see, perhaps?" he suggested.

"Rather like that, only different," I admitted.

He nodded, and thought again.

"You hear the words inside your head?" he asked.

"Well, not exactly *hear*; and not exactly *see*," I told him.

"But you don't have to say the words out loud as you were doing just now?"

"Oh no—but sometimes it helps to make things clearer."

"It also makes things a lot more dangerous, for both of you. I want you to make me another promise, *that you will never do it out loud any more.*"

"All right, Uncle Axel," I agreed again.

"You'll understand when you're older how important it is," he told me, and then went on to insist that I should get Rosalind to promise the same things, too.

I didn't tell him anything about the others because he seemed so worried already, but I decided I'd make them promise, as well. At the end he put out his hand.

"We'll swear to keep it a secret?" he said.

And with that, we had clasped hands and sworn, very solemnly.

Since that day, we had scarcely mentioned the matter, and then only when we were far away from everyone else.

Now, while I hesitated, he went on, "What's the trouble? Has anyone found out?"

"No," I said.

He looked greatly relieved. "What *is* the trouble, then?"

So I told him about Aunt Harriet and the baby, and before I had finished, I was talking through tears. It was such a relief to be able to tell someone.

"It was her face as she drove away," I told him. "I've never seen anyone look like that before. I keep on seeing it, in the water. And it was all because the baby was different—and I'm different. [—I'm frightened, Uncle Axel.]"

He put his hand on my shoulder. "No one is ever going to know about it," he reminded me. "No one but me—and I'm safe."

"One of us stopped suddenly six months ago," I said.

He looked puzzled.

"Rosalind—" he began.

"Not Rosalind—one of the others," I explained.

He was startled. It took him a few moments to understand; then, "Who?" he asked.

I shook my head.

"I don't know. Names don't have any thinking-shapes so we don't bother with them. You just know who people are. I only found out who Rosalind was by accident. But we used to talk to this one—and then he suddenly stopped. We've been wondering if somebody found out . . ."

Uncle Axel shook his head. "I don't think so. We should be sure to have heard of it. Was he far away from here?"

"I don't think so. I don't know really," I admitted.

I told him what little I did know and when it had happened, and he said he'd try to find out about it.

"I'd be pretty sure something as sudden as that means an accident, though," he consoled me.

"Aunt Harriet called this a hideous world," I said. "Do you think it's a hideous world, Uncle Axel?"

He thought that over, spending what seemed to me a long time on a simple question, then he said, "If it's the people she was meaning, I think they're more stupid than bad. As for the place—" he lifted his head and looked across the fields and woods, and then at the blue mountains in the distance—"well, I reckon it's not as good as it might be, and I reckon it was once a whole lot better than it is now, most likely: but, for all that, I'd rather be here than in the other places I've seen."

I looked where he was looking. In the foreground the great bank came curving into view from the left, and then ran straight as an arrow towards the mountains. It was very, very old, and crumbled almost away in some places, but no one could ever mistake it for a work of nature. The sight of it prompted me to ask, "Was the world better when the Old People were here?"

"Must've been," said Uncle Axel.

"The Old People must've been very wonderful themselves," I said, looking at the massiveness of the bank, "with their big cities, and the machines that ran about, and the other machines that could fly."

"That's nothing but stories," he told me. "People like to think the Old People were wonderful, so they say they could do anything—even fly like birds. What I say is if they were only half as wonderful as people say, how is it they're not still here?"

"But it wasn't like birds," I told him. "The machines didn't have wings, they had kind of whirling things on the top of them."

He looked at me very hard. So then I had to tell him about the dreams I had had of this place—only I still thought it was the Old People I was dreaming of. He couldn't make a lot of that. He seemed to think they were just stories I'd picked up somewhere, and kept on thinking about. He shook his head.

"There's a lot of nonsense talked about the Old People," he persisted, "but where are they?"

"God sent Tribulation upon them," I quoted.

"Sure, sure. That's easy to say, but not so easy to understand, especially when you've seen a bit of the world. Tribulation wasn't just tempests and hurricanes and floods and fires, the way they often tell you. It was like all of them together, and something a lot worse, too. I can understand that it destroyed almost all the world. What I don't understand is *the queer things it did to what was left.*"

"Except here," I suggested.

"Not except here, but *less* here than anywhere else," he corrected me. "What could it have been? That's what's been puzzling me for nearly twenty years now. You've got to see it to understand what I mean. What could possibly have caused it?"

I did not see his real difficulty. After all, God, being omnipotent, could cause anything He liked. I tried to explain that to Uncle Axel, but he shook his head.

"We've got to believe that God is sane, Davie boy. We'd be lost indeed if we didn't believe that. Whatever happened out there—" he waved a hand round the horizon at large—"what happened there was *not* sane, not sane at all. It was something too great for men, but beneath the wisdom of God. So what was it? What can it have been?"

"Tribulation . . ." I began.

"A preacher's word," said Uncle Axel. "A peeled mirror of a word, reflecting nothing. It'd do them good to see for themselves. They'd not understand, but at least they might begin to think."

"What *is* it like out there, then?" I asked.

He looked at me seriously for a moment. Then he said, "All right, but keep it to yourself. There are plenty like your father who want to think that the outside is nothing but Badlands to the end of the earth, except where it's sea."

"Isn't it?" I said, in surprise.

"It isn't, boy. I'll tell you—the part of it I know, anyway . . ."

I knew, of course, that Uncle Axel had made several voyages, but he seldom spoke of them, and because I believed that there was nothing but Badlands or sea, there hadn't seemed to be much to inquire about.

That was what I had been taught, and that in the centre of the world of Badlands there was one oasis of purity, ever threatened and ever to be defended against external encroachment and internal deviation; this was our land of Labrador, of which Waknuk was only a very small district.

Labrador was thought to be the name that the Old People had given the country. The one or two references in Nicholson's *Repentances* were puzzling. Round most of Labrador there was a great deal of water, called the sea, which was important because of fish.

Nobody in Waknuk, except Uncle Axel, had ever seen this sea: it was a long way off, but if you were to go four hundred miles or so to the east or north, or a little less to the north-west, you would come to it. But if you were to go south-west or south, you wouldn't, because you would be stopped by the Badlands.

From some of the higher places in the Fringes you could look out over the Badlands, and guess about them, but nobody knew what it was really like there. There were lots of stories about them, of course, but as no one who had ever ventured into them had been known to survive for long, it was difficult to see how they could be true.

People said, though on no clear authority, that in the time of the Old People, Labrador had been so cold that no one could really live there. But that had been a long time ago. A thousand years? two thousand years? even more? Nobody knew.

There was no way of telling how many generations had lived in near savagery between the coming of Tribulation and the start of recorded history. Out of that dim wilderness period only *Repentances* survived to tell of the struggle against barbarism, and that only because it had lain safely sealed in a stone coffer for a long time—perhaps centuries—before it had been rediscovered.

The past, then, except for the last three recorded centuries, was a long state of oblivion. But if the long line of tongues had relayed some of the truth about Labrador, it must have changed greatly, for it was no longer cold except in a couple of the winter months, and, though there was plenty of forest country about Waknuk, the farther east one went the smaller the woods became, and the more the land was covered with pastures and arable fields. However, that was no reason to suppose that tradition lied—a mere change of climate was only one of the lesser things that Tribulation could have caused.

The world was thought by most people to be a pretty big place. It was probably round and, in all parts other than Labrador and Newf, quite godless.

It was, therefore, somewhat shocking, as well as exciting, for me to hear the account which my Uncle Axel opposed to this conventional view.

In Rigo (said my Uncle Axel) the sailors tell a lot of stories, but mostly they tell them among themselves, or they're liable to get into trouble with the preachers.

They say that if you sail due east the sea goes on for ever: or else it comes to an end suddenly, and you sail over the edge. To the north you can keep along the coast, and then turn west, and then south, and reach the other side of Labrador—or, if you keep straight on northwards, where it is colder, you come to a great many islands with not much living on them. To the north-east there is said to be a great land which is very godless and impure. There are Deviations there which look just like human women . . .

But the only way I know is south. Three times I've been south. You sail down the river from Rigo, and keep along with the shore to starboard. After a couple of hundred miles or so you come to the Strait of Newf. Forty miles or more farther on, the Strait widens right out; you lose Newf to port, and soon after that the Labrador coast to starboard turns into Badlands.

When you sail close inshore, you can see that there's plenty growing there. Nearly all of it is deviational. Some of the animals are so different that it'd be hard to classify them as Offences against any known species.

The fact that they are there at all makes some people think that the Badlands line may have receded thereabouts and that it has actually become habitable Fringes country now, but nobody has risked landing there to find out.

When you get a day or two's sail farther on, there's plenty of Badlands coast, with no doubt about it; and soon there aren't

any gaps: it's all Badlands. There's a mighty big river-mouth there, with Badlands up both sides, so you turn south till you pick up the coast again.

When the first sailors came to those parts, they were pretty scared. They felt they were leaving all purity behind and sailing farther and farther away from God. They all knew that if you walk on Badlands you die, and they'd never expected to see them so closely with their own eyes. But what worried them most was to see how a lot of things that are against God's laws flourish there just as if they had a right to. And it's a shocking sight, too.

You can see giant, distorted heads of corn growing higher than trees; you see huge saphrophytes on rock pinnacles, trailing fathoms of aerial roots in the wind; some places there are colonies of huge fungi that you'd take at first sight for boulders; some of the succulents are like big barrels, as large as small houses, and with spines ten feet long.

You see plants that grow on the cliff-tops and send long green cables down a hundred feet and more into the sea. There are hundreds of kinds of queer things, and scarcely a normal one among them—it's a kind of jungle of Deviations, for miles and miles. Just occasionally you may see an animal, but there don't seem to be many of them.

There are a few birds, and once or twice people have seen flying things in the distance with a motion that didn't look right for birds. It's an evil land, and many a man after seeing it has suddenly understood for the first time what might happen here, but for the Purity Laws and the Inspectors.

But the Badlands aren't the worst.

Farther south you begin to see patches where only the coarser plants will grow, and poorly, at that. Then there are stretches, maybe forty or fifty miles long, where nothing grows. All the coast is empty and black and hard.

The cliffs stand up, all harsh and stark, out of the sea; and in that sea there are no fish, no weeds, not even slime. There's death in the water there. Even the barnacles and the fouling on a ship's bottom drop off, and leave her hull clean. There are no birds.

The land and the sea and the sky are all empty: it is all desolate, nothing moves except the waves, lapping on a cinder shore. It is a fearful place; a land so damned that ships put about and run out to sea for fear of it.

But it hasn't always been like that. There have been some ships that risked sailing closer inshore, and they reported that in some places they were able to see great stone ruins protruding from the black, naked ground. There was no doubt that they were artificial; they might, they thought, be remnants of one of the Old People's cities. But no one knows any more about that, for nearly all the men who were in those ships died of strange sicknesses, and those who survived were never the same men again.

The Badlands, with stretches of the utterly dead lands, go on for hundreds of miles down the coast. So far that on earlier

voyages ships turned back for fear they would never reach any place where they could water and provision. They came home, saying that they thought the alternation of Badlands and Blacklands must continue to the end of the earth.

But they don't. The Badlands do come to an end, but the world beyond them isn't civilized, it isn't civilizable, it's more like the Fringes. They don't have any sense of sin to stop deviation. The people are Mutants, and unashamed of it; it doesn't seem to worry them when children turn out wrong.

In other parts you'll find a deviational form that thinks that it is normal, and has suppressed all other deviations. There's one tribe where all the men and women are hairless, and think that hair is the devil's mark. Another where they all have white hair and pink eyes. Some of them think it is right to have webbed fingers and toes. Some places, no woman who is not multi-breasted is allowed to have children.

Wherever the people were friendly, we tried to talk to them. Sometimes you couldn't understand anything of it, but more often, after you'd listened a bit, you'd begin to find that a lot of the words were really like our own, but spoken differently. And we'd find out some strange, disturbing things. One was that they all have much the same legends of the Old People as we have—how they had machines that could fly, how they used to build cities that floated on the sea, how a person could speak to any other person, even hundreds of miles away, and so on.

But there was another thing, too. Most of them, whatever they were like—whether they had seven toes, or four arms, or hair all over, or six breasts, they all thought they were the true image of the Old People, and anything different was a Deviation.

Of course, that seemed very foolish at first, but when we found more and more kinds just as convinced of it as we were ourselves, it began to worry some of us a bit.

We'd never thought about it before. When you are at home, you don't, because everyone is quite convinced; but after you've come across a dozen or more kinds of deviations just as much convinced as we are—well, you can't help wondering. You begin to say to yourself: what real evidence have we got about the true image? And you find it all comes from Nicholson's *Repentances*—and he admits that he was writing some generations after Tribulation started, so perhaps Nicholson himself wasn't a true image, but only *thought* he was . . .

Uncle Axel paused for a minute or more before he added, "Do you see why I've been telling you all this, Davie?"

I saw well enough, but I resisted admitting it. I was reluctant to allow the flaw in the foundation of all that I had been taught.

"I'm telling you that a lot of people saying that a thing is so doesn't *prove* it," went on Uncle Axel. "I'm telling you that nobody, *nobody* can *know* what the true image is—they can only think they know." He turned, and looked steadily at me again.

"How can I be sure that this *difference* that you and Rosalind have doesn't bring you nearer to the true image? After all, one of the things they say about the Old People is that they could talk to one another over great distances. Now, *we* can't do that—but you and Rosalind and the others you spoke about, you *can*."

He paused awhile to let that sink in.

Of course, I know now what he was doing. He did not really believe the one any more likely than the other, but he had seen that I, as well as being frightened, was beginning to feel that the difference made me inferior to other people, and he meant to give me more confidence.

He did, too.

I stopped praying to be made like other people. Instead, I lay awake in the dark that night and told Rosalind and the others all he had said. It shocked them at first, but when they had thought it over, I could feel that it helped to give them more confidence.

There was another thing, as well, that helped us. Uncle Axel made inquiries and found that just about the time we had lost one set of thought-shapes a nine-year-old boy called Walter Brent on a farm ten miles away had been hit by a falling tree, and killed. We were sorry about Walter, of course, but it was a relief to know that it had been simply an accident.

After that, we thought it wiser to find out one another's names in case something should happen to one of us. We did, but I am not going to give their real names. Some of them still live near Waknuk: soon they may have children of their own, and it would be bad for them if word should somehow get back there.

There were five of us, in all—well, when I say that, I mean that there were five of us who could talk easily in thought-shapes; there were some others, but they could do it only very weakly, so they scarcely counted. We just caught occasional shapes from them, nothing really connected.

We kept on being very discreet and careful; I'm sure nobody really knew about us but Uncle Axel, and he knew no names but Rosalind's and mine. We were able to strengthen one another, and we almost ceased to worry about the warnings and texts against Mutants. We stopped being oppressed by the thought that we were Deviations of some kind. We were just us, but very secretly . . .

And so it went on for almost six years until, suddenly, the five of us became six . . .

It was a funny thing about my little sister Petra. She seemed so normal; we never suspected—not one of us. She was a pretty child, with close golden curls, a happy child, too.

I can still picture her as a small, brightly dressed figure, constantly dashing hither and thither at a staggering run, clasping an atrociously cross-eyed doll that she loved with uncritical passion. A toy-like creature herself, prone as the next child to bumps, tears, chuckles, and solemn moments, and to a very sweet faith and trust.

I loved her. We all loved her . . . No thought of difference ever crossed my mind, until it happened . . .

It was harvest-time. Up in the twelve-acre we had six men mowing in echelon. I had just given up my scythe to one of them and was helping with the stooking by way of a breather, when the thing hit me . . . I had never known anything like it.

One moment, I was placidly and contentedly propping up sheaves; the next, it was as if something had struck me, inside my head. Whether I staggered physically I don't know, but I shouldn't be surprised to know I did: certainly my mind staggered.

Then there was pain, pulling like a fish-hook embedded in my brain. There was no questioning whether I should go or not: I *had* to go.

I dropped the sheaf I was holding, and pelted off across the field, past a blur of amazed faces. I ran for all I was worth; across half the twelve-acre, into the lane, over the fence, and down the slope of the East Pasture, towards the river. I did not know why I was running; only that I must . . .

As I pounded at a slant across the slope, I could see the field, one of Angus Morton's, which ran down to the other side of the river, and on the path that led to the footbridge was Rosalind, running like the wind.

I kept right on: down to the bank, along past the footbridge, downstream towards the deeper pools. There was no hesitation. I kept on right to the brink of the second pool, and went into a dive without a check. I came up quite close to Petra. She was on the deep, steep-banked side, holding on to a little bush whose roots were on the point of pulling free from the soil. I swam to her and caught her under the arms . . .

Just as suddenly as it had started, the compulsion stopped. I towed her to an easier landing-place. When I found bottom and could stand up, I saw Rosalind's startled face peering anxiously over the bushes.

"Who is it?" she said, in real words, and a shaky voice. She put her hand on her forehead.

"Who was able to do that?"

I told her.

"Petra?" she repeated incredulously.

I carried my little sister ashore, and laid her on the grass. She was exhausted, and only semi-conscious, but there did not seem to be anything seriously wrong with her.

Rosalind came and knelt on the grass on the other side of her. We looked down at Petra in her sopping dress, with her curls darkened and matted. Then we gazed at one another.

"I didn't know. I'd no idea she was one of us," I said.

Rosalind put her hands on either side of her face, fingertips on her temples. She shook her head slightly, and looked back at me from deeply disturbed eyes.

"She isn't," she said. "She isn't one of us. None of us could *command*, like that. She's something much more than we are."

Then other people came running up. Some who had followed me from the twelve-acre, some from the other side, wondering why Rosalind had run as she had. I picked Petra up to carry her home. One of the men from the field looked at me in a puzzled way: "But how did you know?" he asked. "None of us heard a thing."

Rosalind turned on an expression of surprise.

"What, with the way she was yelling for help! You must be a deaf lot," she remarked, disparagingly.

It was confirmation enough to make them uncertain of themselves, and stop curiosity.

That night I had a dream. The whole household was gathered in the yard, singing hymns as it always did when an Offence was to be expiated. My father stood in the middle, waiting for the first rays of the rising sun. Presently they glanced redly across the yard.

He lifted the knife in his right hand. It glittered there, and everybody sang a little louder. Then he brought it down with a sweeping motion to cut the throat of the Offence—only, this time, it was no deviating lamb or sucking-pig that was being cleansed: the form that his left hand grasped by both ankles and held up ready for the knife was Petra's . . . I woke up, sweating with fright.

The next day I tried to send thought-shapes to Petra. I was anxious for her to know as soon as possible how important it was not to give herself away.

I tried hard, but I could make no contact with her. I told the others, and they tried, too, but there was no response.

Rosalind and I consulted, wondering whether we should try to warn her in ordinary words. Rosalind was against it.

"It must have been panic that brought it out," she said. "If she can't feel it now and understand, it might be dangerous to tell her about it at all. She's only six, remember. She might easily say something to make them suspicious."

I had to agree with that. It isn't easy to keep on hiding things all the time. They will slip out now and then. We'd all had difficulties at times with the unexpected word or comment that made people's eyebrows rise. Most of that trouble was due to Michael.

School, in Waknuk, meant going to the parlour of one of several old women who taught a few children how to read and write and do a little with figures. You read parts of the Bible there, and some of Nicholson's *Repentances*, but there wasn't much more to it; when you could do that well enough, you had finished with school.

But Michael's parents wanted more than that for him, so they sent him to a school over in Kentak where he learnt a great deal more than our old ladies could teach us. Of course, he wanted the rest of us to know what he was learning.

At first he wasn't very clear, but when he'd had some practice, he got good enough to hand on everything he was being taught to the rest of us. So after a time it was difficult always to remember how much one was supposed to know. We had to watch ourselves

very carefully, particularly when people were having silly arguments that we could have settled at once; or wanted to do things one way when we knew there was a much better way.

So I understood well what Rosalind meant when she said it might be dangerous to tell Petra. We decided to wait a bit, and see how things went. We had to keep on waiting for nearly a year.

By that time, Rosalind and I were wondering how we could get married. It wasn't going to be easy. The feud between our families had been established for years. My father and half-Uncle Angús both kept hawk-like eyes upon each other's land for the least Deviation or Offence, and even went to the length of rewarding informers who brought news of irregularities in the other's territory. Rosalind's mother had already attempted match-making for her; and my mother had put one or two suitable girls in my way. Neither had any idea about us, for we only seldom and accidentally met.

Both of us knew, and had known for some time that when we married, it would have to be to one of "us." To have to live intimately with someone who had no thought-shapes would be intolerable: we'd still be closer to one another than to the people we had married, and from them we should be separated by something as wide as a different language, and more solid than a wall.

Worst of all, we'd never be able to have any confidence: it would mean a lifetime of guarding against slips, and we knew already that some slips were inevitable. Besides, when two people have known one another's thought-shapes for as long as Rosalind and I had, they grow to need one another very much.

I don't see how "normal" people who can never share their thoughts can understand how it is with us: we are so much more a part of one another. We don't flounder among the shortcomings of words; we don't hide or pretend, nor do we misunderstand one another. What, then, could there be for any of us tied closely to a half-dumb "normal" who can never at best make more than a clever guess at another's feelings and thoughts? Nothing but misery and frustration—with, sooner or later, the fatal slip or sum of slips . . .

It was an impasse. We should have had to make our own way out if the course had not been thrust upon us.

One fine May afternoon Petra went off, riding the pony. She did two things that she knew to be forbidden. First, although she was by herself, she went off our own land: secondly, she went into the woods.

As a rule, the woods about Waknuk are fairly safe, but it never does to count on that. Creatures can work their way down the necks of forest which thrust out of the Fringes almost clear across the Wild Country in places, and then slink across from one patch of woodland to another.

Big creatures seldom get as far as Waknuk; nevertheless, it is unwise to go into the woods without a weapon of some kind.

The call that came to us this time was distressed and anxious, and, though it did not have the violent, compulsive panic of the other, it was bad enough to be highly uncomfortable.

The child had no control. She simply set up a thought-pattern which blotted out everything else with a great, amorphous splodge.

I tried to get through to the others to tell them I'd attend to it, but I couldn't make contact even with Rosalind. It is difficult to describe: something like being unable to make oneself heard against a loud noise, but also rather like trying to see through a thick fog.

What made it still more troublesome was that it gave no picture or hint of what was happening. This trying to describe one sense in terms of others is so difficult—but one could say it was like a wordless yell of protest. It wasn't directed: I doubt even if she knew she was doing it . . .

I ran from the forge where I was working, and got the gun—the one that always hung ready charged and primed on the wall. Then I saddled up the bigger pony, and was away in a few minutes. The one thing that was as definite about the call as its quality was its direction. Once I was out on the green lane, I gave the pony a touch of my heels, and we were off towards the West Woods at a canter.

If only Petra had let up on that distress-pattern of hers for just a few minutes, the consequences would have been quite different. Indeed, the whole affair might have had no consequences at all. But she did not. She kept it up like a screen, and one could do nothing but make for the source as quickly as possible.

I took the branch of the track that cut through the wood to the north-east. It was kept clear because it was fairly well used to save a considerable circuit. Soon, however, I knew that the trouble was away to the right: that meant turning onto a small path where the going among the trees was less easy, but I had only to cover a couple of hundred yards of it before I reached the scene.

Petra herself, I did not see at first. What took all my attention was her pony.

It was lying in a small glade, with its throat torn open. Working at it, ripping flesh from its haunch with such single-minded intent that it had not heard my approach, was as deviational a creature as I had seen until then.

It was a reddish-brown, dappled with both yellow and darker brown spots. Its huge pads were covered in mops of fur which was matted with blood on the forepaws, showing long, curved claws. The tail, too, had fur hanging from it in a way that made it look like a huge plume.

The face on the large head was retroussé, but with two large incisors projecting. It used these, as well as its claws, to tear at the pony.

I had time to see that much and was still in the act of unslinging the gun when an arrow took it in the neck. The creature leapt writhing into the air, landed on all fours, and stood searching for the source of attack. My movement in trying to aim the gun

attracted its attention. It turned and crouched, its yellow eyes glaring.

My pony took fright, and reared, but before the creature could make its spring, two more arrows took it, one through the hind quarters, the other in the head. It stood stock-still for a moment, and then rolled over, dead.

Rosalind rode into the glade from my right, her bow still in her hand. Michael appeared from the other side, with a fresh arrow already on the string, and his eyes on the creature, making sure about it. Even though we were so close to one another, Petra's distress was still swamping us.

"Where is she?" Rosalind asked, in words.

We looked round and found her. A small figure ten feet up a young tree, clinging to it with both arms round the trunk. Rosalind rode over to encourage her to come down. She seemed unable to let go, or to move. I got off my pony, climbed up, and helped her down until Rosalind could reach up and take her. She put her on her pony in front of her, and tried to soothe her, but Petra was looking down at her own dead pony. Her distress was, if anything, intensified.

Michael joined us. He regarded Petra worriedly for a moment.

"She doesn't know what she's doing. Better start by getting her where she can't see the pony."

We moved off a little. He spoke to her.

She did not seem to understand, and glanced at me for reassurance. The distress-pattern did not abate.

"Perhaps if we were all to try the same thought-pattern on her simultaneously," I suggested. "Soothing—sympathizing—relaxing. Ready?"

We tried, for a full fifteen seconds.

"No good," said Rosalind. "There was a moment's check, then she crowded us out again."

The three of us regarded Petra helplessly.

"Rosalind," I said, "it's very dangerous. Petra will bring them all here. We've got to stop this."

Then, as we were waiting, tense and anxious, the thing that I had been afraid of happened . . .

★ *The Second Part of "The Chrysalids," by John Wyndham, appears in next month's Argosy on sale September 9.*

ARGOSY

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THE CHRYSALIDS

BY JOHN WYNDHAM



As a boy, David Storm had made a very exciting discovery—he was able to send thoughts and thought-pictures to Rosalind and some of his friends, and receive a thought-reply flashed back instantly from wherever they might be. Soon he found that Petra, his six-year-old sister, possessed this extraordinary thought-power in a shattering degree.

Suspicion must be avoided at all costs. Death or banishment to the Fringes would await each of them if their new power was even guessed at. David's father was a stern destroyer of the abnormal forms of life that had come into being after the Tribulation of the atomic age. Children, cattle, and crops that did not conform to their true natural image were done away with. For Petra and the others, their new abnormal telepathic power was fraught with danger . . . as they were soon to realize.

In acute distress at an attack on her pony, Petra had flashed out a blinding thought-summons to them all, compelling them to go at once to the woods to her help—where a strange horseman bears down suspiciously to question David . . .

And now begin the Second (and last) Part of this intriguing new sf story by the brilliant author of "The Day of the Triffids." It is to be published as a full-length novel by Michael Joseph.



A LARGE man on a bay mare thrust out of the trees into the glade. He reined in and sat looking at us.

"What's going on here?" he asked suspiciously.

I explained that my sister Petra's pony had been attacked, and that we had answered her calls for help. He did not take that at its face value. He looked sharply at Sally and Katherine, the two girls who had just galloped up and were staring incredulously at Petra.

"Well, you two didn't come here for that," he said.

"But we did," one of them told him.

He stared at them. "I was right behind you, and I heard no calls," he said.

Sally and Katherine looked confusedly at one another. "But we did," Sally told him again.

"Everybody for miles must have heard it," I told him. "There was the pony screaming, too."

I led him round the clump of bushes, and showed him the savaged pony and the dead creature. It seemed as if he hadn't expected that evidence, but he wasn't altogether appeased. He demanded to know who we all were. We told him, and showed our identity tags. Luckily, Michael had already ridden off.

"You don't look as if you're from the Fringes," he admitted grudgingly.

"Of course we aren't. Why should we be?"

He surveyed us all again, frowning. "You didn't know the Fringes have got spies out?" he asked.

"No," we told him.

He still wasn't satisfied. "I'd say it's a good half-hour since that pony did any screaming," he said, turning to Sally and Katherine. "How did you two manage to come straight to this spot?"

Sally opened her eyes surprisedly. "This was the direction it came from, and then when we got nearer we heard the little girl crying," she told him.

"It was very good of you to follow it up," I put in, "but it's all over now, and luckily she wasn't hurt. We'd better get her home, and thank you both for coming to help." They took that up all right. They congratulated us on Petra's escape, hoped she would get over the fright quickly, and rode off.

The man hesitated, still looking puzzled. Finally, he gave the three of us a long, searching stare, and then rode off in the wake of the other two.

We watched him disappear among the trees. "Who is he?" asked Rosalind uncasily.

I could not tell her. He was not a man I had ever seen before, nor had our names seemed to mean much to him. Automatically I started to put the question to Sally in a thought-picture, only to come up against the barrier of distress that Petra was still making. It gave one a strange, muffled feeling to be cut off from the rest like that. Rosalind started walking her horse homeward, still trying to calm Petra down. I collected the dead pony's saddle and bridle, and the arrows out of the creature, and then followed them.

During the evening the disturbance fluctuated from time to time; then, at last, it diminished quite steeply and disappeared.

"Thank goodness for that! She's asleep at last," came from one of the others.

"Who was the man?" Rosalind and I asked, simultaneously and anxiously.

It was Sally who answered, "He's fairly new here. My father knows him. He has a farm a bit less than halfway to Kentak. It

was just bad luck his seeing us; and of course he wondered why we were going at a gallop. He seemed very suspicious."

"Why?" asked Rosalind. "Does he know anything about thought-shapes? I didn't think any of them had the slightest suspicion . . ."

"I don't know," Sally said. "But he can't make them himself, or receive them. I tried him hard."

Michael's distinctive pattern came in, inquiring what it was all about. We explained. He told us, "They have an idea that there may be something of the kind—but only a very rough idea—a sort of emotional transference of thought. They call it telepathy—at least, those who believe in it do, though they aren't all sure that it even exists."

"Do they think it's deviational?" I asked.

"It's difficult to say. I'm not sure that the question has ever been put bluntly. Academically, though, there is the point that since God is able to read men's minds, the true image ought to be able to do the same. It could be argued that it is a power that men have temporarily lost as a punishment, part of Tribulation. If that's what he thinks, we'd all have quite a case."

"What about the rest?" Rosalind asked. "Does anybody seem suspicious?"

She got four noes to that.

"Good. Then you four are out of it; the rest of us will have to be wary. David must talk to Petra in words, and try to teach her some control of her thought-power. If this distress of hers occurs again you must all ignore it, and leave it to David and me. If it is compulsive, the way it was the first time, and compels us to go to her, whoever reaches her first will have to try to make her unconscious, and the moment the compulsion breaks, you must turn back and do your best to cover up. Whatever happens, we must see that we aren't drawn together into a group again. It is very dangerous and certain to cause suspicion. Does everybody understand and agree?"

Their assents came in. Then the rest of them withdrew, leaving Rosalind and me to discuss how best I could tackle Petra.

I woke early the next morning, and the cause of my waking was Petra's renewed distress over the loss of her pony. Luckily, it did not have anything like the intensity of the previous day. I tried to make contact with her, and though she did not understand, there was a perceptible check for some seconds. I got up and went along to her room. She was glad to see me, and the distress-pattern eased off a lot while we chatted. Before I left, I promised to take her fishing that afternoon.

It is not easy to explain in words how to make intelligible thought-shapes. All of us had found out for ourselves; at first fumblingly, but gradually we developed greater power as we discovered and learnt from one another. With Petra it was different: already at six years old, she had a strength of projection that was overwhelming in its effect, and she had no idea how to control it.

I did my best, but at her age there was the difficulty that the words had to be simple, too. After an hour I had made very little headway, and she was becoming too bored to try to understand.

"All right," I said, despairingly. "Let's play a game. You shut your eyes. Keep them shut, and pretend you're looking down a deep, deep well. Nothing but dark. Don't think of anything but how dark it is, and how far, far away the bottom of the well is."

"Yes," she agreed, eyelids tightly clenched.

I thought a rabbit for her, and made it twitch its nose. She chuckled. Well, that was one good thing; at least, she could *receive*. I thought a puppy, some chickens, and a horse and cart, in quick succession. She opened her eyes, and looked bewildered.

"Where are they?" she asked, looking round for them.

"They were think-things," I told her. "Now I'll shut my eyes, too. We'll both look down the dark well and think of nothing but how dark it is. Then you make a picture of a think-thing at the bottom of the well so that I can see it."

I played my part conscientiously and opened my mind to its most sensitive. That was a mistake: there was a flash and a glare and a general feeling that I had been struck by a thunderbolt. I staggered in a mental daze, with no idea what her picture had been.

The others came in, protesting. I tried to explain.

"Well, you be careful. Don't let her do that again. I damn near put an axe through my foot," came aggrievedly from Michael.

"I've scalded myself on the kettle," from Katherine.

"Lull her. Soothe her down somehow," advised Rosalind. "And warn us next time, *before* she tries."

When I had pulled myself together: "Make," I told Petra, "make a little think-picture this time, a really little one ever so far away, in soft pretty colours, and do it slowly and gently, as if you were making it out of cobwebs."

Petra nodded, and closed her eyes again.

"Look out!" I warned the others, and waited, wishing it were the kind of thing one could dodge.

It was not much worse than a minor explosion this time. I was even able to catch the shape of it.

"A fish!" I told her, "a fish with a droopy tail."

She chuckled delightedly.

"Undoubtedly a fish," came from Michael. "You're doing fine. All you want now is to get her down to about one per cent of that power before she burns our brains out."

The next afternoon we had another session. It was a rather violent and exhausting business, but Petra was beginning to get some idea of forming thought-shapes. The main trouble was to keep the power down: when she became excited one was almost stunned by the impact. The others complained they could get no work done while it went on; it was like trying to ignore sudden hammer-bangs inside one's head. Towards the end I said to Petra, "Now I'm going to tell Rosalind to send you a think-picture. Shut your eyes like before. Ready?"

"Rosalind? Where is she?" Petra asked, looking round.

"That doesn't matter with think-pictures. Now just look at the dark, and think of nothing."

"And you others," I added for the benefit of the rest, "lay off, will you? Keep it all clear for Rosalind, and don't interrupt."

We sat silent and receptive . . .

Rosalind made a pond, with reeds round it. She filled it with ducks, friendly, humorous-looking ducks of all colours. One chunky, earnestly trying duck was always a little late and a little wrong. Petra loved it, she chuckled delightedly. Then suddenly she projected her delight, wiped out the whole thing, and dazed us all again. It was wearing, but there was progress.

In the fourth lesson she learnt the trick of clearing her mind without closing her eyes. By the end of the week we were really getting on. Her thought-shapes were crude and unstable, but would improve with practice; her reception of simple forms was good, though as yet she could catch little of our projections to one another.

"Too difficult and too quick," she said. "I can tell if it is you, or Rosalind, or one of the others doing it, but it goes so fast it all gets muddled. The other ones are much *more* muddled, though."

"What other ones—Sally, or Michael?" I asked.

"No. The other other ones. The long-way-away ones," she said impatiently.

I decided to take it calmly. "I don't think I know them. Who are they?" I asked her.

"I don't know," she said. "They're over there somewhere." She pointed to the south-west.

I thought that over for a moment. "Suppose you try to show me what they show you," I suggested.

She tried. There was something there; something which I had never received before, and which certainly did not come from any of us. It was quite blurry, perhaps because Petra was trying to relay something she did not understand herself. I could make nothing of it, and called Rosalind in. She found it no clearer than I had so we let it rest for a time.

At supper, some ten days after the loss of Petra's pony, Uncle Axel asked me to come and give him a hand with truing up a wheel while there was still light. Superficially the request was casual enough, but there was something in his eye that made me agree without hesitation. I joined him and we went over behind the rick where we should neither be seen nor overheard. He put a straw between his teeth, and looked at me seriously.

"You been careless, Davie boy?" he asked.

"I don't think so," I told him.

"One of the rest of you, maybe?" he suggested.

Again, I didn't think so.

"H'm," he said. "Then why, would you say, has Joe Darley been asking questions about you?"

"Just me—or the others as well?" I asked.

"You—and Rosalind Morton."

"Oh," I said uneasily. "Still, if it's only Joe Darley . . ."

"Joe," said my Uncle Axel, "Joe is a fellow that the Inspector has used before now, when he wants a few inquiries made without showing himself. I don't like it."

I did not care for it, either. However, I had managed to find out that we did not come within the Inspector's categories of Scheduled Deviations. I told him so, but he shook his head.

"Those lists are not exhaustive," he said. "You can't regulate for the million things that *may* happen. You've got to have test cases for new ones when they crop up."

"I've been thinking it over," I said. "They can't be clear what they're looking for. If there's any question, all we have to do is act bewildered, just as a norm would."

He didn't seem reassured by that.

"They'd not bring a charge at all if they weren't pretty damn sure," he said. "The Inspector wouldn't put himself in a weak spot with your father and Angus Morton. How do you reckon it could have started, anyway?"

I did not know for sure. The affair of Petra's pony seemed the most likely point, but I didn't want to tell him about that; it would have involved telling him about Petra herself, too. We had a tacit understanding that the less he knew, the less he'd have to hide.

We all conferred that night: not very satisfactorily. As Michael put it, "If you and Rosalind are quite certain that there's been nothing to start suspicion at your end, then it's very likely traceable to that man in the forest. What's his name, Sally?"

Knowing the thought-shape of him so well, we hadn't bothered about his name before. Sally spelt it out in letter-forms, "John Rawley."

"Well, if he's the source, he must have notified the Inspector of this district, and it will have been handed on to your Inspector. That'll mean that half a dozen or more people are wondering about it already, and there'll be questions going on here about Sally and Katherine. The devil of it is that everybody's twice as suspicious as usual because they're all panicked about trouble from the Fringes. I'll find out what I can tomorrow, and let you know."

"But what is it best to do?" Rosalind put in, worriedly.

"Nothing, for the moment," Michael said, "if we are right about the source. I'm still all right as he didn't see me. The rest of you are in two groups: Sally and Katherine; Rosalind, David, and Petra.

"Petra's the weak spot; she's too young to understand. If they start on her and trick her and trap her, it might end up in sterilization and the Fringes for all of us. That makes her the key point. They must not get hold of her. There may be no suspicion attaching to her yet—but she was there when the man Rawley saw you, so she is suspect. They must not be allowed to start on her, or they'll have it out of her somehow.

"This is where we'll depend on you, David. Your job is to

see that she is not taken for questioning. If you have to kill someone to prevent it, then you must. Remember, if they do move at all, it will be to exterminate us—by the slow method, if not by the fast.

"If you can't save Petra, then you must kill her. It will be more merciful than sterilization and banishment to the Fringes."

Their agreements came in.

Michael went on, "It might be best if the four of you, with Petra, made arrangements to run for it, if necessary."

He went on to explain in more detail. The overall plan was, I think, quite reasonable . . . Unfortunately, we had no means of knowing that events were already overtaking us

I went as far as to make some preparations before going to bed that night—at least, I put a bow and fifty arrows handy, also a sack with several loaves of bread and a cheese in it—I was still thinking of all sorts of desirable additions I would make next day when I fell asleep.

No more than a couple of hours could have passed before I was awakened by a small sound. There was no moon, but enough starlight came in to show a small white-nightgowned figure by the door. "David," she said, "Rosalind . . ."

But she did not need to tell me. Rosalind's thoughts had broken in already. "David," she urged me. "You must come at once. They've taken Sally and Katherine."

Michael crowded in. "Hurry, you two. It was a deliberate surprise. If they know anything much they'll have timed it to send a party for you too. Best be on the safe side and get out."

"Meet below the mill. Hurry," Rosalind added.

"Get dressed as fast as you can. Overalls. And be very quiet," I told Petra, in words.

Possibly she had not understood our thought-shapes in detail, but she had caught their urgency. She nodded and slipped back into the dark passage.

I pulled on my clothes as fast as I could, and rolled my blankets into a bundle. Groping in the shadows, I found the bow and the arrows and the bag of food, and made for the door. Petra was nearly dressed already. I grabbed an armful of clothes from her cupboard, and rolled them up in the blankets.

"Don't put on your shoes yet. Come on, tiptoe like a cat," I told her.

Outside the yard door I laid down the bundle and the sack, and we both put our shoes on. Petra started to speak, but I put my finger on my lips, and gave her a thought-shape of Rachel, the black mare. She nodded. I just had the stable door open when I caught a distant sound, and paused to listen.

"Horses," said Petra. Horses it was. Several sets of hoofs, and the jangle of bits.

There was no time to find the saddle and bridle for Rachel. We brought her out on the halter, and mounted from the block.

With all I was carrying, there was no room for Petra in front of me. She got up behind, and hung on round my waist. Then, quietly, we slipped out of the yard and down the path to the river bank while the hoofbeats on the upper track drew nearer to the house.

"Are you away?" I asked Rosalind, and let her know what was happening with us.

"I was away ten minutes ago. I had everything ready," she told me with reproof. "We'd all been trying to reach you for more than half an hour. Luckily Petra happened to wake up."

Petra caught her own thought-shape, and broke in excitedly to know what was happening. It was like a fountain of sparks.

"Gently, darling. Much more gently," protested Rosalind. "We'll tell you all about it soon." She paused to get over the blinding effect, then, "Sally . . . ? Katherine . . . ?" she asked.

They responded together. "We're being taken to the Inspector's. We're all innocent and bewildered. Is that best?"

Michael and Rosalind agreed that it was.

"We think," Sally went on, "that we ought to shut our minds. It will make it easier for us to act as normals if we don't know what is happening to you. So don't try to reach us, any of you."

"Very well—but we shall be open for you," Rosalind told her. She diverted to me. "Come along, David. There are lights up at the farm now."

"It's all right. We're coming," I told her. "It'll take them some time in the dark to find which way we've gone."

"They'll know by the stable warmth that you can't have got far yet." I looked back. Up by the house I could see a lantern swinging in someone's hand. We had reached the river bank now, and it was safe to urge Rachel into a trot. We kept that up until we came to the ford, and then for another half-mile until we were close by the mill. It seemed prudent to walk her past that, in case anyone should happen to be awake. Presently I caught Rosalind's feeling of relief coming from somewhere straight ahead.

We trotted again, and in a few moments I noticed a movement in the shadow of the trees to the left of the track. I turned the mare that way, and found Rosalind waiting—and not only Rosalind, but her father's pair of greathorses, that had caused trouble between the Inspector and my father, who had failed in his attempts to condemn them as monstrous deviations. Both the huge creatures were saddled and wearing pannier baskets. Rosalind sat in one of the baskets, waiting, her bow laid across it, ready to hand.

I helped Petra down, and then slid off the mare myself with my armful of gear. Rosalind leaned out of the basket and peered down to see what I had.

"Throw the blankets up here," she directed. "What's in the sack?" I told her. "Is that all?" she said disapprovingly.

She arranged the blankets to pad the saddle-board between the panniers. I hoisted Petra as high as I could. Rosalind leaned down and managed to reach her hand. With a heave from both of us, Petra scrambled up and perched herself on the blankets.

"You, too," Rosalind directed. "We'd better keep together. There's room in the other pannier." She flipped over a kind of miniature rope-ladder so that it hung down the greathorse's left shoulder.

I turned the mare's head for home, and gave her a smack on the flank to start her off. After I had handed up the rest of the things I scrambled into the other pannier. The moment my foot was clear of the mounting-rungs Rosalind pulled them up and hitched them.

She gave the reins a shake, and before I was well settled in the panner we were off, with the led horse following.

We trotted awhile, and then left the track for a stream. Where that was joined by another we branched up the lesser one. We left that and picked our way across boggy ground to another stream. We went down that a little, and turned onto another lot of marshy ground, which gradually became firmer until the hoofs were clinking against stones. We slowed still more as the greathorse picked its way among rocks. Evidently Rosalind had been doing some careful planning.

I must have projected that thought, for she came in with, "It's a pity that you didn't think more and sleep less."

"I made a start," I protested. "I was going to get everything fixed today. It didn't seem so urgent."

"So when I tried to consult you, you'd gone to sleep. My mother and I spent two solid hours packing these panniers and getting the saddles slung up ready for an emergency, while all you did was sleep."

"Your mother?" I asked, startled, "does she *know*?"

"She's known, or guessed something, for a long time. I don't know how much. Somehow I knew that she'd made up her mind to help me when the time came, and she did."

I thought that over. It made one wonder whether there might not be many mothers turning a blind eye to anything that did not actually infringe the definitions—and perhaps to things that did, if the Inspector could be dodged.

We went on by the erratic route that Rosalind had planned to hide the trail. There were more stony places and more streams until finally we urged the horses up a steep bank and into the woods. Before long we encountered a trackway running southwest, and kept along parallel with it until the sky began to show grey. Then we turned deeper into the woods, and found a glade where there was grass for the horses.

After our meal of bread and cheese Rosalind said, "Since you slept so well earlier on, you'd better take the first watch."

She and Petra settled themselves comfortably in blankets and soon dropped off. I sat with my bow across my knees, and half a dozen arrows stuck handy in the ground. There was nothing to be heard but the birds, an occasional small animal moving somewhere, and the munching sounds of the greathorses. Presently the sun gave more warmth. Every now and then I got up and

prowled silently round the glade, with an arrow nocked on the string. I found nothing, but it helped me to keep awake.

After a couple of hours or so Michael came through. "Where are you now?"

I explained as well as I knew.

"Where are you heading?" he wanted to know.

"South-west," I told him. "We're going to move by night, and lie up by day."

He approved of that, but, "The devil of it is that with this Fringes trouble there'll be a lot of patrols about. I don't know that Rosalind was very wise about those greathorses. If you're seen at all, word will go round like wildfire—even your tracks will be enough. There's hell to pay over this. They must have been much more certain and much more worried than we thought. They're going to send posses after you.

"I'm going to volunteer for one of them. Meanwhile, I'll plant a report of your having been seen making south-east. When that peters out we'll have another ready to take them north-west. If anyone sees you, do your best to stop him getting away. But don't shoot. There's an order out not to use guns except when necessary, and to investigate all gun shots."

I had deliberately decided against taking a gun, on account of the noise; besides, they are slow to load, and if you run out of powder they are useless. Arrows haven't the range, but are silent, and you can get a dozen of them off while a man is reloading a gun.

Everybody laid off projecting. I kept my watch for another hour, and then woke Rosalind for her turn. Petra did not stir. I lay down beside her, and was asleep in a couple of minutes.

Perhaps I was sleeping uneasily, or perhaps it was just a coincidence that I woke to catch an anguished thought from Rosalind. "I've killed him, Michael. He's quite dead." And then a chaotic, panicky thought-shape.

Michael came in, steady and reassuring. "Don't be scared, Rosalind. You had to. This is war between our kind and theirs. You mustn't be frightened, Rosalind; it was necessary."

I looked round the glade. Petra lay still sleeping beside me; the greathorses were peacefully cropping the grass. Michael came in again. "Hide him, Rosalind. Find a hollow, and pile leaves over him."

A pause. Then Rosalind, without panic now, but deeply distressed, agreeing.

Presently she appeared among the bushes, walking slowly, cleaning an arrow on a tuft of grass as she came.

"What happened?" I asked.

She did not seem able to get a proper hold over her thought-shapes, she was distressed and chaotic. When she came nearer she used words instead, "It was a man. He had found the trail of the horses, and he was following them. I—I didn't want to, but what else could I do?"

She began to cry. I put my arm round her and tried to comfort

her. I could only back up Michael's assurances that she had done what was necessary.

The day wore on. Nothing came to us from Michael or any of the rest. Then, in the afternoon, something suddenly did come. It was not a thought-shape; it had no real form; it was simply distress, like a cry of agony. Petra gasped, and threw herself into Rosalind's arms. The impact was so sharp and yet formless that we did not know which of them it came from. Then there was a jumble of pain, shame, and an overriding desolation, with characteristics that were Katherine's.

Swiftly followed a wave of love and sympathy from Sally to her. Then, quickly, to all of us, "They've broken Katherine. You mustn't blame her, any of you. Don't blame her, please. They're torturing her. It might have been any of us. She's all clouded. She can't hear us . . ." Sally broke off, in great distress herself.

Presently there came Michael; unsteady at first, and then hardening into as rigid a form as I had ever received, "I shall kill that Inspector. I shall kill him for what he's done to Katherine."

After that, there was nothing for an hour or more. We did our best to soothe Petra. She understood little of it, but she had caught the intensity, and that had been enough to frighten her.

Then there was Sally again, dully, hopelessly forcing herself to it, "Katherine has confessed; admitted it. I have confirmed. They would have forced me to it, too, in the end. I—I couldn't face it. Not the hot iron; not once she had told them. Forgive me, all of you. Forgive us both . . ."

Then Michael, trembling a little, "Sally dear, we're not blaming you—either of you. But what have you admitted? How much?"

"About thought-shapes—and David and Rosalind."

"Petra, too?"

"Yes . . . Oh, oh, oh!" There was an unshaped surge of anguish. "We had to—poor little Petra—but they were almost sure, you see, because she went with David and Rosalind. There was no other reason for her to go with them. No lie would cover it."

"Anyone else?"

"No. We've told them there isn't anyone else. I hope they believe that. They are still asking questions, trying to understand about it. They want to know how we make thought-shapes, and what the range is. We're telling them lies. Not more than about five miles, we're saying, and pretending it is only vague and indefinite at that distance. Katherine's barely conscious. She can't send to you. But they keep on asking questions, on and on. If you could see what they've done. Oh Katherine, darling . . . Her feet—oh, her feet . . ." Sally's patterns clouded into anguish, and then faded away. We were afraid something queer must have happened to her mind. We heard no more from either of them.

Nobody else came in. I think we were all too deeply shocked. Words must be chosen and interpreted: thought-shapes, you *feel*.

The sun was lowering, and we were beginning to pack up when Michael made contact again.

"Now, listen to me," he told us, "this really is serious. They are badly alarmed over us. Usually if a Deviation gets clear of a district they let him go—he can't settle anywhere else without proofs of identity and an inspection, so he's pretty well bound to end up in the Fringes. But what they particularly don't like about us is that nothing shows. We could pass for normal anywhere. So a proclamation's gone out, describing the three of you and announcing that you have officially been posted as blasphemous deviations. Therefore you are non-human and not entitled to any of the rights or protections of human society.

"In effect, you are outlaws. Anyone may shoot you on sight, without penalty. There's a small reward if your deaths are reported and confirmed; but there is a much larger reward if you are taken alive.

"They're afraid of us. It isn't just a question of the true image—though they put it that way. We could be superior to them, dangerous to them—that's what they've seen. Imagine a number of us able to think-together and plan and co-ordinate without all their machinery of words and messages: we could outwit them all. They've seen that. So we are to be stamped out before there can be any more of us. It is what I told you: a war between our kind and theirs."

"Are they going to kill Sally and Katherine?"

That was an incautious question from Rosalind. We waited for any response from either. There was none. We couldn't tell what that meant; they might have closed their minds again, or be exhausted, or perhaps dead already . . .

Presently Michael asked, "Which way are you going?"

"South-west," I told him. "We thought of stopping in Wild Country, but if any hunter is licensed to shoot us, we must go on into the Fringes, I think."

"That'd be best. When the first panic is over we must see if we can't fake your deaths. I'll try to think of a way of doing that. Tomorrow I shall be with a search-party moving south-east. I'll let you know how it goes. Meanwhile, be sure that you shoot first."

On that, we broke off. Rosalind finished packing up the gear, and made the panniers more comfortable than before. We climbed up, I on the left, the other two together on the right. Rosalind reached out and gave a thump on the huge flank, and we moved ponderously on again. At once, Petra, who had been unusually subdued during the preparations, burst into tears, and radiated distress-thoughts again.

She did not, it emerged through her snuffles, want to go to the Fringes. Nor did we. It is hard to lose childhood associations, and it becomes harder still when you have nothing to put in their place. The children in Waknuk are brought up in nervous awe of the Fringes. Mothers silence troublesome infants by threatening,

"Be good, now. If you're not, I'll fetch Hairy Jack from the Fringes to you. He's got four eyes to watch you with, and four arms to smack you with. So you be careful."

Even when one had outgrown the tales and inquired what the Fringes were really like, the answers were usually unsatisfactory. My father's, for example, "The Fringes, my boy? An evil place, a place of abominations; a region of sin where the Devil struts his wider estates, and the laws of God are mocked!" was impressive, rather than informative.

Michael began to tell Petra how the Fringes weren't really the boggy place that people talked about. Most of the people who lived there had been turned out of their homes and sent away just because they didn't look like ordinary people. We might ourselves have had extra fingers or toes by mistake, and if we had, we should have been sent to the Fringes—although we should be just the same people inside as we were now . . .

But at this stage Petra interrupted him. "Who is the other one?" she asked.

"What other one? What do you mean?" he asked.

"Somebody else making think-pictures mixed up with yours," she told him.

There was a pause. I couldn't detect any thought-shapes at all; then, "I don't get anything," came from Michael.

There was a sharp, strong sign from Petra. In words, it would have been an impatient "Shut up!" We subsided, and waited. I glanced across at the other panner. Rosalind had one arm round Petra, and was looking down at her attentively. Petra herself had her eyes open, but unseeing, as though all her attention were on listening. Presently she relaxed a little.

"What is it?" Rosalind asked her.

Petra's reply was puzzled, and not very clearly shaped.

"Somebody asking. She's a long, long way away, I think. She says she's had my afraid-thought before. She wants to know who I am, and where I am. Shall I tell her?"

There was a moment's consideration, then Michael inquired whether we were all agreed that Petra should try. His touch of excitement must have been shared by us all.

"All right, Petra. Go ahead and tell her."

"I shall have to be very loud," Petra warned us. "She's such a long way away." It was as well she told us that. If she had gone ahead while our minds were still wide open, she'd have blistered them. I closed mine, and tried to concentrate my attention on the way ahead of us. It was not an effective defence, though it helped. Petra's thought-shapes were simple, as one would expect at her age, but they came with such violence and brilliance that they left me feeling dazzled and deafened.

When it was over, Michael inquired, "Where is she?"

"Over there," replied Petra.

"She's pointing south-west," I explained.

"Did you ask her the name of the place?" inquired Rosalind.

"Yes. But it didn't mean anything, except that there were two of it, and a lot of water," said Petra, obscurely, and in words. "She doesn't understand where I am, either. I have tried to tell her we are at Waknuk in Labrador."

"Tell her to spell in letter-shapes," suggested Rosalind.

"But I can't read letters," Petra objected tearfully.

"Oh dear," said Rosalind. "But at least we can send. If I give you the letter-shapes one by one, you can think them to her. How about that?" Doubtfully, Petra agreed to try.

Rosalind pictured an L. Petra relayed it with devastating force. Rosalind followed with an A, and so on until the word was complete. Then Petra told us, "She understands, but she doesn't know where Labrador is. She says she'll try to find out. She wants to send me her letter-shapes, but I told her it's no good."

"But it is, darling. You get her letter-shapes, then you let us have them—only *gently*, so that we can read them."

Presently we got the first one. It was Z. We were disappointed. "She's got it back to front. It must be S," Michael decided.

We built up the rest of the word.

"Well, the others are proper letters," Michael admitted. "SEALAND—it must—"

All was blotted out by Petra conversing indignantly with the unknown. She finished this with the triumphant announcement: "It is Z. She says it's different from S: like the noise a bee makes."

"All right," said Michael. "But ask her if there is a lot of sea there."

Petra came back shortly with, "Yes. There's sea all round. And from where she is now you can see the sun shining on it for miles and miles and it's all blue—"

"She's crazy," objected Michael. "It's the middle of the night."

"It isn't where she is," said Petra. "And there are lots and lots of houses, different from Waknuk, and much, much bigger, and there are funny things running along the road, without horses. And things in the air with whizzing things on top of them—"

"Sort of fish-shaped things, Petra?" I asked, with a sudden feeling of excitement.

"Yes," she agreed.

The more she told me, the more excited I became. Almost everything fitted in with the dreams I used to have when I was small. It was like a sudden inspiration to realize that all this existed now somewhere in the world, and it was not simply the ways of the Old People that I had been dreaming about. However, Petra was tired, and it would keep, so presently she and Rosalind lay down to sleep.

Just after the sun had risen Michael came through in some agitation. "They've picked up your trail, David. That man Rosalind shot. His dog found him, and then they found the greathorse tracks. Our lot is turning back to the south-west to join the hunt. You'd better push on. Where are you now?"

The best I could tell him was that we had calculated that we must be within a few miles of Wild Country now.

"Then get moving," he advised. "The longer you wait, the more time they have to get round and cut you off."

I woke Rosalind and explained. Ten minutes later we were on our way again, with Petra still half asleep. Now that speed was more important than concealment, we kept to the first southward track we found, and urged the greathorses to a ponderous trot.

A couple of miles on, the stretch of woods came to an abrupt end and we found ourselves facing another shallow, cultivated valley, about a mile and a half across to where the trees began again on the farther side. Most of the land was grazing, with a few sheep and cattle scattered about behind rail and post fences. One of the few arable fields lay to our immediate left. The young crop in it looked as if it might be meant for oats, but it deviated to an extent that would have caused it to be burnt long ago at home.

We found it an encouraging sight; it could only mean that we had reached a region where the stock could not be kept pure.

We passed a farm that was little better than a cluster of sheds, where four or five men and a couple of women were gathered. One glanced our way, and the rest turned to stare. I don't think they can ever have seen a greathorse before; the sight of two cantering towards them with a thunderous rumble of hoofbeats struck them rigid with amazement. There was no need for us to shoot. The whole group ran for shelter, and we pounded by, unmolested.

At the edge of the forest I looked back. The people had emerged from their shelter and were standing in a little group, staring after us.

After two or three miles we left the trees again and came out into more open country, dotted not only with bushes, but with grass thickets. Nearly all the grass was very coarse and large-leaved, but in some places it grew in enormous tufts with the sharp blades standing eight or ten feet high. Among them we wound our way for an hour or more until we came to a copse of queer, but fair-sized trees. It offered shelter and hiding, and inside it we found a glade with a more ordinary kind of grass that the greathorses could eat, so we decided to halt there and sleep.

I hobbled the horses while Rosalind unrolled the blankets, and presently we were all hungrily eating our bread and cheese. It was pleasantly peaceful until Petra put out one of her blinding communications, so suddenly that I bit my tongue.

"For heaven's sake, child!" protested Rosalind, putting her hand to her head.

"Sorry. I forgot," said Petra perfunctorily. Then she told us, "She wants to talk to one of you. She says, will you all try to hear her while she thinks her loudest."

"All right," we agreed, "but you keep quiet, or you'll blind us."

I, certainly, tried very hard, but there was nothing—or as near nothing as the shimmer of a heat-haze.

We relaxed again. "No good," I said. "You'll have to tell her we can't reach her, Petra."

We damped out the exchange that followed as much as possible, then Petra reduced the force of her thoughts so that they did not dazzle us, and started to relay the thoughts she was receiving. They had to be very simple so that she could copy them even though she did not understand them, and they came to us rather like baby-talk, with many repeats to make sure we understood.

The main, urgent emphasis was on importance—the importance of Petra. At all costs she must be protected. Such a power of projection as hers was unheard of without special training—it was a very valuable discovery indeed. Help was already on the way to us. But until it came, we must play for time and safety—Petra's safety, not, apparently, our own—at all costs.

"Did you get that?" I asked the others.

They had. Michael said, "She finds Petra's ability particularly surprising among 'backward and primitive people.' Who is she meaning—not us, surely?"

"Certainly it was us," responded Rosalind. "Not a shadow of doubt about that."

"There must be something wrong," I put in. "She must be thinking we are Fringes people. And as for help . . . She's somewhere south-west, and everybody knows that there are miles and miles of Badlands that way. I don't see how she can possibly help."

Petra emerged from her contemplations to add conversationally, "Zealand must be a funny place. Everybody there can make think-pictures—well, nearly everybody—and nobody wants to hurt them for it. They aren't all very good at it, though—most of them are more like you and David," she told us. "*She's* much better than most of them, and she's got two babies she thinks will be good at it. She doesn't think they'll be as good as me, though. She says I can make stronger think-pictures than anybody at all," she added complacently.

"That doesn't surprise me a bit," said Rosalind deflatingly. "The next thing you want to learn is to make *good* think-pictures, not just noisy ones."

Petra remained unabashed. "*She* says people who can only talk with words can never understand one another much; so they're not a lot of good compared with think-picture people."

We let her prattle on. But one thing stood out clearly—these Zealanders thought very well of themselves, and it looked as if Rosalind had been right when she said that "primitive" had meant ordinary Labrador people.

When it was clear starlight we began to pack up. I had crossed the glade, and was stooping to unhobble one of the greathorses when there was a sudden command in my mind.

"Don't move!"

It was a rough, uncouth thought-shape, not made by anyone I knew, but it was plain and threatening.

I straightened up slowly. My bow was back with Rosalind and Petra. Rosalind had caught the order too.

"Who is it?" she was asking. Then there was a sudden flash of alarm.

"What's that?" I asked her.

"I was reaching for the bow. An arrow struck just by my hand."

"Better stay still," came the rough thought-shape, warningly. I looked at the trees round the glade, but could see nothing in the shadow. Then, to the left, I saw a movement out of the corner of my eye.

Four men came out into the dim starlight, all with bows drawn and arrows aimed; two at me, two at Rosalind and Petra.

"Who are you?" Rosalind and I sent to them simultaneously. Whether there was any reply or not we couldn't tell, for at that moment Petra set up the alarm-pattern, and blotted everything.

The party of four split up. Soon I could see that the two who came my way were dressed in rags. I knew that they must be Fringes people.

I looked at them harder as they came close, but if there was anything visible amiss with them, there was too little light for me to see it. One of them stopped a few yards away, keeping his arrow trained on me; the other came round behind me and patted my waist and pockets. He discovered my knife and transferred it into his own pocket. That done, they allowed their caution to relax, and studied the greathorses with astonishment.

Petra's alarm diminished. I was able to get through to Rosalind. She told me, "He's telling Petra it's all right, and nobody's going to hurt her."

"Who?" put in Michael. "What on earth's going on? What was Petra howling about?"

A roughly shaped, weakly projected thought cut in, "No need to be scared. Just do as we tell you."

"What was that?" asked Michael, startled. "Something just outside my range . . ."

I explained, as far as I could. The other two men came across, helping Rosalind and Petra to carry our possessions. One of them said, "How do you get up on these brutes?"

Presently we moved off. Rosalind and Petra were in their former pannier, but they had one of the men in the other, and another on the saddle-board between them. I was in the left-hand pannier of the led horse, with the other two men similarly disposed. All four men were holding their bows ready.

As we came out of the copse into the coarse-grass country again I caught a clumsy thought-shape, "If you make any noise, you'll bring *them* after us."

This time I managed to place it as coming from the man on the saddle-board beside me. I asked him who he was, and where he was taking us, but there was no response. In a low voice, in words, I asked, "Can't you reach me?"

He understood what I meant, for he shook his head. "No, but I can get the little girl sometimes—that's how we picked you up. Who is it she talks to?"

I told him that it was someone far away that the rest of us couldn't reach. He understood that, too.

"Queer thing, this," he said. "Different strengths, and different kinds, too. Better not to talk now. It isn't safe round here."

For the next couple of miles we went on in silence except for the thumping tread of the greathorses' hoofs and some creaking from the panniers. A few small creatures scuttled out of our way, but we met no large animals. Then there was a line of deeper darkness ahead, and an edge of the forest loomed up like a black wall across our path. We held straight on, and had come within a hundred yards of it when, without warning, a gun fired somewhere to our right, and shot whistled past us.

Both horses were startled, and plunged. I was almost flung out of my pannier. How the man on the saddle-board held on I don't know. The one between the panniers on the leading horse did not: he sailed through the air as if in flight. The rearing horse pulled away, and the lead rope parted with a snap. The other horse bolted towards the forest, then changed its mind, and swerved to the left. Ours pelted after it. There was nothing to be done but wedge oneself in the pannier and hang on. The man on the saddle-board above me still contrived to keep his seat, holding on grimly in a rain of clods and stones thrown up by the hoofs of the lead horse.

Somewhere behind us a gun fired again, and we speeded up even more.

For a mile or so, we covered the ground at a ponderous, earth-shaking gallop. Then I caught sight of a flash ahead and half left. At the sound of the shot, our horse, almost level with the other now, sprang sideways in mid stride, and swerved to the right. It was too abrupt for the man on our saddle-board. He suddenly wasn't there any more, and we were racing towards the forest again. I crouched low as we crashed among the trees.

By luck alone, we entered at a point where the bigger trunks were well spaced; but, for all that, it was a nightmare ride, with saplings and branches slapping and dragging at the baskets. One could do nothing but keep crouched in order to avoid being knocked out of them. The greathorse simply ploughed ahead, avoiding the larger trees, thrusting through the rest, smashing its way by sheer weight while branches cracked and snapped before and beneath it. If we had not lost the man on the saddle-board before, he would certainly have been swept away then.

The horse was forced to slow down, but its panic determination to get away from the guns abated very little. I braced with arms and legs and my whole body to avoid being battered about in the pannier, scarcely daring to raise my head for a quick look. It was impossible to tell whether there was any pursuit, but it seemed improbable in the dark. A horse of ordinary size would most

likely have disembowelled itself in trying to follow over the snapped-off stems that must have been standing up like stakes behind us.

The pace and the violence eased a little. I sought anxiously for Rosalind. She came in from somewhere close by, on the right. She and Petra had managed to wedge and pack themselves in with blankets, and seemed less shaken than I was. I suggested that if they had control of their horse, they should pull over to the left and try to converge with us.

Our animal had a halter but no bridle, so that we could do nothing with it; the best hope seemed to be that if we could get together, it would follow the other out of habit when it was calmer. Presently, however, the trees thinned and we came out into starlight. Our horse caught sight of the other, whinnied, and trotted up to it. In a moment or two we had the lead rope joined. The two remaining men consulted briefly, and then we were off again, headed once more to the south-west.

The steady plod was soothing. Presently I let it lull me to sleep. There was nothing one could do by keeping awake, and Rosalind and I had quite a loss of sleep to make up. Petra, who had slept half the previous day, started to converse with her distant friend, but soon even that couldn't keep me awake.

When I did become conscious again the sky was showing grey, and there was Michael agitating somewhere directly behind us.

"Was it you they fired at last night?" he was asking.

There was a sense of disappointment when I told him it was. "I hoped they'd made a mistake and were off on a false trail," he said. "We've all been called together. They think it's too risky to come farther into the Fringes in small groups. We're supposed to be assembled and ready to move off in two or three hours. Round about a hundred, I'd say. They reckon that if we do meet any Fringes people it'll kill two birds with one stone if we give 'em a good hiding. You'd better get rid of those greathorses now—we'll never lose your trail while you're on them."

"That's not in our hands," I told him, and explained the situation.

"Well, at least persuade them to keep on going, then," he advised.

Petra broke in, "The Zealand people are coming to help. They're much nearer now."

Michael received that sceptically. "That'll be nice—if they can. The wisest thing you can do is get rid of those horses quickly and let them lay a false trail."

As it grew lighter I was able to see our surroundings better. My father had evidently been right about normality being mocked in those parts. I could scarcely recognize a single tree—there were familiar trunks, but with the wrong kinds of leaves; there were familiar branches, growing out of the wrong kinds of bark, and here and there fantastic fences of immense brambles.

Once there was a stretch of open ground that looked like a dried river-bed covered with pebbles, but the pebbles turned out

to be white balls of fungi set as close as they could grow. There were some trees with trunks too soft to stand upright, so that they grew along the ground, and quite often there were patches of miniature trees, shrunk and gnarled, and looking centuries old.

I glanced cautiously at the man in the other pannier, but I couldn't see anything wrong with him except that he was very dirty, as were the ragged clothes and battered hat that he wore. He caught my look quite amiably.

"You've never been in the Fringes before, boy?" he asked.

"No," I told him. "Is it all like this?"

He grinned, and shook his head. "None of it's like any other part," he said. "Nothing grows true to stock yet."

"Yet?" I repeated.

"Sure. It'll settle down in time. The Wild Country was Fringes once, but it's settling down, and some of your parts were once Wild Country, but they've settled down more. I reckon God has a pattern for it all, but He does take His time."

"God?" I said. "They've always taught me that the Devil rules the Fringes."

He shook his head. "That's what they would tell you, of course. But it isn't so, boy. It's your parts where the Devil is. Where men are arrogant and self-satisfied. That's why God sent Tribulation."

"Oh," I said cautiously. It did not seem wise in the circumstances to argue. Besides, with everybody else always knowing so much about God's intentions, I was at a disadvantage.

Luckily Rosalind woke up just then, and came in asking what had happened. I handed on what Michael had told me, and asked whether she thought we should tell the two men about the intended pursuit. We decided we would.

The man in the other pannier was quite unsurprised.

"Sure," he said. "That's what we want." But he did not explain further, and we plodded steadily on.

Petra began to converse with her mysterious friend again, and there was no doubt that she was closer. For the first time I began to catch the other side of their exchange, and Petra herself did not have to use such disturbing force to reach her. Rosalind caught it, too. She put out a question as strongly as she could. The answer came back clearly; pleased to have made contact, and anxious to know more than Petra could tell.

Between us, we explained what we could of our present situation. The answer came cautiously, "Be careful. Be emphatic about the danger you are in from your own people. Some deviational tribes detest anyone without visible deviations."

We could only tell her that the men with us *looked* normal.

"Be careful," she repeated. "The really important thing is the little girl. Keep her safe at all costs. We have never known such a power of projection in one so young. What is her name?"

Rosalind spelt it out in letter-forms. Then she added, "But who are you? What is this Zealand?"

"We are the New People—so are you. The people who can think-together. We're the people who are going to build a new world—a different world from the Old People's and the savages'."

"The kind of people that God intended?" I suggested, with a feeling of being on familiar ground.

"I don't know about that. But we do know that we can make a better world than the Old People. They were savages, half men. Shut off from one another, with only inadequate words to link them; tribes shut off by different languages; minds shut off by different religions. There was never any unity in them.

"Individually, some of them could think: collectively, they could not. The more complex they made their world, the less capable they were of dealing with it. They had no means of consensus. They could co-operate constructively in small units, but only destructively in large ones. They aspired greedily, and then refused the responsibilities they had created. With one hand they grasped reason, with the other they rejected it. Singly, some of them tried to be men; in groups, they remained primitive. There was, you see, no real communication between them: the system of words could work at all only where individuals were very similar: applied to large numbers, it broke down.

"They brought down Tribulation, which all but destroyed them. They were inadequate."

Brought up as I had been, with a reverence for the Old People, and the belief that they were the true image, I found this both difficult to accept and shocking. While I was still wrestling with it, Rosalind asked, "But you? where do you come from?"

"Our ancestors had the luck to live on an island—or rather two islands. They did not escape Tribulation altogether, but it was less bad here. However, they were cut off from the rest of the world and became almost barbaric again. Then, somehow, the strain of people who could think-together began. Soon, those who were best at it began to find other people who could do it a little, and to teach them to do it better. And of course, the people who could do it preferred to marry others who could do it, and the strain became stronger.

"Later on, when they started to find that there were thought-shape-makers in other places too, they realized how lucky they had been that there was so little deviation in Zealand, and so little feeling about it. It was not like that in most places. Even where they don't take much notice of physical deviations they are usually superstitiously afraid of people who can think-together.

"For a long time nothing could be done to help the same kind of people in other places—though some who were not too far away sailed to Zealand in canoes; but later on, when we had machines again, we were able to fetch them into safety. We try to do that wherever we can make contact with them—but we have never before made a contact at anything like the distance away that you are. The little girl is unique, and tremendously important. Petra must be protected at all costs."

The greathorses clumped steadily on. Presently we came into more open country; a wind was blowing that we had not noticed among the trees. A sudden gust snatched off the man's hat, and we stopped for him to retrieve it. As he climbed down, I saw for the first time why he was a dweller in the Fringes. In the top of his head was set a third eye. It was closed.

Half an hour later we arrived on the bank of a small river—at least our side was a steep bank; the other was a line of low reddish cliffs. We turned downstream and kept along the bank until we came to a very deviational tree which looked like a huge pear and had all its branches growing in one big tuft at the top. At that point a runnel cut back into the bank, and it was possible for the horses to get down. We forded the river obliquely, making for a gap in the opposite cliffs. It was a narrow passage, only just wide enough in some places to let us through, so that the panniers scraped and bumped on the rocky walls. After a hundred yards or so, it widened out and we began to climb up to normal ground level.

Where it finished stood seven or eight men, with bows in their hands. They gaped unbelievably at the greathorses, and looked half inclined to run. We stopped.

“Down you get,” instructed the man in the other pannier.

Petra and Rosalind were climbing down, too. The men dropped some of our blankets and bags to us, and then the greathorses moved on. Petra clasped my hand apprehensively, but for the moment the bowmen remained more interested in the horses than in us.

There was nothing immediately alarming about the men. One of the hands that held a bow had six fingers, and one man's head looked like a polished brown egg, without a hair on it, or on his face. Another had grotesquely huge feet and hands, but whatever was wrong with the rest of them was hidden under their rags.

Rosalind and I shared a feeling of relief. Petra, also, was encouraged by finding that none of them answered to the description of Hairy Jack. Presently, when the horses had disappeared up a path into the forest, their attention returned to us. A couple of them helped to pick up the bundles, and told us to come along.

A well-used path led us into the woods for a couple of hundred yards or more, and then gave on to a clearing. There may have been a natural glade there, but it had been enlarged, and quite recently. Most of it was now covered with huts and tents, with a few men and rather more women moving about among them. We wound our way towards one of the largest tents, a framework of poles supporting what looked like an old rick-cover. Just inside it, sitting on a roughly made stool, was a figure that I recognized with a shock: the same spider-man whom I had seen as a captive at Waknuk seven years before.

He lifted his head and glanced at the three of us. Then he studied me more carefully. He nodded, as if satisfied. “Remember me?” he asked.

"Yes," I said.

"Know who I am?"

"I think so. I think I found out," I told him.

He looked at me questioningly.

"My father had an elder brother," I said. "He was thought to be normal until he was about three years old. Then his certificate from the Inspector was revoked, and he was sent away."

He nodded slowly. "Not quite right," he said. "When they came to take him away he was already missing—but they'd hush that up, of course."

He paused reflectively, then he added, "The eldest son. Waknuk should be mine. It is not—just because of *this*." He stretched out his long arm, and regarded it. "Do you know what the length of a man's arm should be?"

"No," I admitted.

"Nor do I. But somebody in Rigo does, some expert on the true image—so I must live like a savage among savages. Are you the eldest son?"

"The only son," I told him. "There was a younger one, but . . ."

"No certificate, eh?"

I nodded.

"So you, too, have lost Waknuk!"

That was an aspect which had not troubled me. I do not think I had ever had any real expectation of inheriting it. There had always been the sense of insecurity—the feeling, knowledge almost, that some day, sooner or later, I should be discovered. It had been too near the inevitable for me to feel the resentment that embittered him.

After gazing at me thoughtfully a moment, he turned his attention to Rosalind and Petra. I explained who they were.

"But what I don't quite understand," he said, "is why they are after you in such strength."

"I think," I told him, "that we trouble them more than ordinary deviations because they've no way of identifying us. Also, I think they suspect that there may be a lot more of us that they don't know about, and they want to make us tell."

"An extra-good reason for not being caught," he said.

I was aware that Michael had come in, and that Rosalind was answering him, but I could not pay attention to two things at once, so I left that to her.

"They are coming right into the Fringes after you. How many of them?" asked the man.

"I'm not sure," I said, wondering how to play it to the best advantage.

"You can find out," he said flatly.

I wondered how much he knew about us, and whether he knew about Michael, too. He looked me straight in the eye, and went on, "It'll be better for you to co-operate with us fully. It's you they're after, and it would be quite simple for us to leave you

where they can find you. Why should we care what happens to you unless you help us?"

Petra caught the implication of that, and panicked. "Almost a hundred men," she told him.

He looked at her, considering for a moment. "So there is one of you with them." He nodded thoughtfully again. "A hundred is a great many men to send after just you three. Too many . . . I see." He turned back to me. "There have been rumours of trouble working up in the Fringes?"

"Yes," I admitted.

He grinned. "So for the first time they decide to take the initiative and invade us—and pick you up, too, of course. They'll be following your trail. How far have they got?"

I consulted Michael. I learnt that they had passed the place where our bolting greathorses had taken to the forest, but I couldn't find any way of conveying to the man their exact situation.

"Is your father with them?" he asked.

It was a question I had been careful not to put to Michael before, and I didn't put it now. I simply paused, and then told him no. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed Petra about to speak, and Rosalind checking her.

"A pity," said the man. "I've been wanting to meet your father on equal terms for a long time now. Maybe he's not such a champion of the true image as I've heard, after all." He went on looking at me with a steady, penetrating gaze. I could feel Rosalind's sympathy like a clasp of the hand.

Presently the man unfolded himself, and went out with a queer, gangling walk, and we were left in his tent, with a man on guard. Rosalind got out a loaf and what was left of the cheese, and found a pot of water. It was a considerable time since we had eaten, but, for all that, I did not feel very hungry.

Petra again began to converse with her Zealand friends, and seemed to be promoting confusion there. Rosalind broke in to straighten that out and explain what had happened. For the first time they sounded dismayed when they answered. It was with awe that they told us, "This is dreadful country. None of us has ever seen anything as bad as this. There are miles and miles where it looks as if all the ground has been fused into black glass. Then stretches of Badlands, then more rough black glass. It goes on and on. If we did not know that you were on the other side of it we should have turned back."

Petra caught the thought of turning back, and began to blot out everything with distress. Rosalind put an arm round her and soothed her. When we had quietened Petra so that the Zealand woman could get through again, Rosalind asked, "When will you come? What are we to do?"

There was a pause, as if for consultation, then the Zealand woman told her, "We'll come as fast as we can, but you mustn't reckon on anything less than three hours—perhaps a little more."

"Michael," asked Rosalind, "are you in the front of the party?"

"Fairly well up," he told her. "Why?"

"I think you should drop back if you can manage it," she told him. "Have trouble with a girth, or something. It looks as if there is a trap planned by the Fringes people, some kind of ambush. Isn't it possible for you to drop out and then work round and join us here?"

Michael considered. "But I don't see how that could be done. The Fringes people must be out to get us. A straggler would be picked off before he'd any chance to explain."

There was a pause while we tried to think of some way round the difficulty. While we were still at it, Petra chipped in, "Michael, is Father there?"

She took him off guard. I caught his yes before his quick effort to suppress it. I looked at Petra . . .

Rosalind moved beside me and took my hand. Her mind was full of sympathy, but mine was filled with bitterness. I could hear my father's voice, "A baby which . . . would grow to breed, and, breeding, spread pollution until all round us there would be mutants and abominations. That has happened in places where the will and faith were weak, but here it shall *never* happen."

And then my Aunt Harriet's words to my father, "I shall pray God to send charity into this hideous world . . ."

"She was right," I told myself. "The world *is* hideous."

Rosalind's hand tightened on mine. "No, David, no," she said. "You mustn't be blind—like *them*."

"What am I supposed to do?" I asked, looking at Petra. "He is our father. Do I forgive him? Agree with him? Try to kill him?"

Petra's Zealand friend came in suddenly and strongly, "Leave him—that is all. Your father is part of the old world. He thinks he is the lord of creation. Change is his enemy. He does not want life. A living creature defies evolution at its peril; for if it cannot adapt, it will be broken. He is one of the Old People. He will go the way of the dinosaurs, and find his static world among the fossils."

"And you?" I asked.

"Us? Oh, we—and you, too—are just beginning. We are the chrysalis of the future, of a new world. We can think-together and understand one another; we can share. We don't have to try to cramp life into cages of words; we don't need laws that treat living forms as if they were bricks; we could never think of trying to mint ourselves and our children into equality and identity like stamped coins. We don't try to hammer life into geometrical shapes: life is evolution, and we are part of it."

There I am brought up against that very barrier of words, for what I was receiving was an impression, a view, an attitude, but ordinary words still have to serve, however inadequately, for its permanent expression and preservation, until somebody can invent a device that records and conveys thought. Above all, the impression we were receiving was of freshness and confidence; the shaking-

off of old habits. If we could not grasp the whole pattern of thought at first, we could feel: there was the sensation that a strong fresh wind had been blowing through one's mind, cleaning up the staleness, the frustrations, and the hatreds.

I looked at Rosalind. We smiled at one another.

"That's better, you two. That's much better," a thought approved.

"I don't understand much," came from Michael, "but I feel as if a prison door were opening." And from far away came one of the others, faintly echoing him.

At that moment the spider-man returned. He stood in the tent entrance, surveying us.

"I ought to put you three out of the way," he said. "Have you been warning the one of you who's with them?"

"They're watching for an ambush, anyway," I told him. "Besides, how could he hand on a warning without giving himself away?"

"That's why you're still alive," he said briefly. "How far away are they now?"

I consulted Michael. "They're just clear of the forest, and surprised to have got through it without an ambush," I told him.

"So maybe a bit careless. Good," he said. "Better tell your friend to get himself lost, and turn back," he suggested as he left us again.

I put that to Michael, but he said he had missed his chance;

the country was too open now. I went over the route in my mind. Since the ambush had been left so long, there was obviously one place for it. "Don't cross the river," I told him. "Fall off, and get carried away downstream."

All was quiet for nearly half an hour. Then the Zealand woman came in again, "Where are you? We want your direction."

Petra responded energetically. Twenty minutes or so after that, Michael reported, "The Fringes people have muffed it. We've spotted one of them moving on the top of the cliffs—and that cleft was too obviously a trap, anyway. We're splitting into two crossings, upstream and downstream, and we're going to pincer in on the far bank, beyond the defile."

The camp was no great distance behind the cliffs. It looked as if we should be caught within the pincers. I told the man who had been left to guard us, "Fetch the tall man quickly. It's important."

He gave a grin, full of oafish cunning, and shook his head. He was not going to be caught that way. I tried to persuade him to take us to the man, but he was just as sure that he knew the catch there too. When I went closer to the tent entrance to argue with him, he swung a knobbed stick expertly within an inch of my head, driving me back. I retreated, and for some minutes we all sat and fretted while the man grinned at us, pleased with himself.

After a while Rosalind came through. "Try to draw him down to the left side of the entrance, David. Be ready to jump in when I distract him."

I stepped forward, trying again to persuade him. He kept on grinning, and swinging his stick to hold me at a distance. Rosalind made her "distraction." A stool flew past me and clipped him on the side of the head. My jump was superfluous. I simply went down on top of him as he folded up, but I acquired a useful knobbed stick.

"What's going on?" inquired Michael, anxiously.

"We're going to try to get out before your pincers close. We'll make due west, away from the cliffs," I told him.

"Better hurry," he advised. "We're over the river downstream from you."

We made off through the litter of tents and hovels, towards the trees. We had covered about two-thirds of the distance when there was a shout behind us. We speeded up, but a moment later an arrow struck the ground just in front of our feet. We stopped. At the edge of the trees we saw a man whose big body was supported on short bow-legs. He already had a fresh arrow on the string. "Get back!" he ordered, with a jerk of his head.

There was nothing else to be done. We turned round and faced two men who had come running after us. I dropped my stick pacifically and tried again to explain about the impending attack. The men were interested only in hustling us back to the tent we had left. We had barely reached it when a gun went off among the trees, somewhere on the left. There were three or four more shots, then silence, then another two shots.

A few moments later a crowd of ragged men, and quite a number of women with them came pouring out of the woods, making away from the scene of the intended ambush, and towards the firing. A few were obvious deviations, but most of them, at a distance and seen only briefly, looked normal. They were armed with bows and spears, with only two or three guns among them. I saw the spider-man, standing taller than the rest, and called to him, but he was too busy to notice. Nobody was paying any attention to us any longer. We could have run, had we known which was the safe way to run.

"What's happening?" I asked Michael. "Was that your lot shooting?"

"No, that was the other party. They're trying to draw the Fringes people across so that we can come in from the opposite side and take them in the rear."

"They're succeeding," I told him.

I explained that we were beside the biggest tent, near the middle of the clearing.

"I'll try to join you there, and we'll make a break for it," he said.

There was a sound of more firing from the same direction as before. A clamour and shouting broke out. A few spent arrows dropped into the clearing.

Suddenly, there was a strong, clear question: "Are you still safe?"

Petra loosed off a blindingly urgent reply.

"Steady, child, steady! We're coming," the Zealand woman told her.

More arrows started to fall into the left side of the clearing. A few ragged men appeared, retreating out of the trees. More followed them quickly. They dodged, and took cover behind the tents and hovels. Still more came running back out of the woods, arrows spitting after them.

Presently, more arrows began to fall in from the other side of the clearing. The ragged men and women made the discovery that they were between two fires, and started to panic. Horsemen appeared, riding out from the trees on the right.

"What's that?" asked Petra suddenly. "What's that noise?"

Quickly the Zealand woman came in: "Don't be frightened. We're coming now. Stay where you are."

I, too, could hear the noise now; a strange drumming sound that gradually swelled.

One of the horsemen reined in abruptly. He pointed upwards, and shouted.

I looked up, too. There was something above us like a bank of mist, but shot with quick, iridescent flashes.

Above it I could make out, as if through a gauze, one of the strange flying craft that I had dreamt of as a child. The white, fishlike body was glistening through the veil, with something half invisible whizzing round above it. It grew bigger, and the noise grew louder, as it dropped towards us.

A few weaving threads, like blown cobwebs, came drifting down. Higher up, there were more of them, giving sudden gleams as they twisted and caught the light.

The shooting and the combat fell away. All over the clearing, men lowered their weapons and goggled upwards. Some of the horses whinnied with fright, and swerved to bolt. In a few seconds the whole place was a chaos of running men and plunging horses.

I noticed one man raise his hand to brush off a strand of web that had settled across his face, but he never completed the movement. His hand seemed to stick to it, and he swore in a high, panicky voice.

The Zealand woman came in, steadily directing us: "Don't run. If it touches you, don't struggle. Lie down, so that it can't get round you. Keep calm. Don't move. Just wait."

She was confident and forceful. We moved back into the entrance of the tent. All over the clearing now there were men clawing at themselves, trying to get rid of the stuff, but it stuck to their hands and their clothes, and they struggled with it like flies in treacle while, all the time, more strands floated down on them.

Mostly, they fought it for a few seconds, and then tried to run for the shelter of the trees. They'd manage about three or four steps before their feet stuck together and they pitched to the ground, to be trapped more securely by the threads already lying there. Still more threads settled lightly on them as they struggled until, presently, they could struggle no more.

The horses were no better off. I saw one back into a small bush. When it moved forward, the bush tore out by the roots so that it swung round and touched the other hind leg. The legs became inseparable. The horse overbalanced, and lay kicking out with both legs for a while. A gust of wind swept the clearing as the machine came lower. It sent floating strands eddying into the tent towards us. Quickly we lay down as the woman had told us.

It took a lot of resolution to keep still while the threads settled on us. Behind me, Petra complained that they tickled, and Rosalind firmly told her to keep still. I was still able to turn my head and, looking up, I could see the white shape close overhead now, blowing the threads into a foggy whirl as it settled towards us. Then a gossamer touch on my face made me blink, and when I tried to open my eyes again, I found that the lids were stuck down.

The sound of the machine sank to a lower note; after a time it slowed, and stopped. I could hear a few muffled cries, some snorts and squeals from horses, but soon these subsided into a silence which became uncannily complete. Even the rustle of leaves was missing. The stuff across my face and hands no longer felt feathery; it had tightened, and was like a mesh of fine cords pressing into the skin.

I sought anxiously for Michael. "I'm all right," he assured me. "I got her warning, and kept under the trees."

The Zealand woman came in. "Stay there," she told him.

"Don't move until it has dried. You others," she went on to the rest of us, "start counting slowly so that I can locate you."

I had scarcely got to picturing double figures before I heard steps close beside me. Then there was a hissing sound. Dampness fell on my face and hands, and my skin began to lose the puckered feeling. Something wiped across my eyelids, and I was able to raise them, stickily. A figure, completely hidden in a shiny white suit, was bending over me. In one gloved hand it held a swab of cloth, in the other, a metal bottle that was emitting a fine spray. The woman played the spray up and down me once more, and then turned her attention to Rosalind and Petra.

I sat up. There were still a few filaments adrift, but when they settled where the spray had fallen, they glistened for a moment and then began to dissolve. The clearing looked as if a fantastic number of spiders had spun there with all their might. The whole place, and the trees about it were cocooned in threads which had turned more white than glossy now.

The silence was broken by a sharp cracking on the right. I looked quickly, in time to see a young tree break off a foot from the ground, and fall. Near it, a bush leaned over and pulled free of the ground. One of the shacks crumpled in on itself, and collapsed; a tent suddenly went flat; another shack crackled and gave way. It was uncanny and alarming. Behind me I heard a sigh of relief from Rosalind. Presently Petra remarked, with a subdued, somewhat reproving air, "That was *very* horrid."

I went over and helped them up. The woman waited a moment, then she told us, "Follow me!"

"But there's still Michael! Michael, are you all right?"

"Yes," he came back. "Still under the trees."

"Don't move yet," the Zealand woman told him. "It will be quite harmless in half an hour."

"What's happened to the rest? They look—they—they're not all dead, are they?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied. Then, catching his feeling of shock, she added, "The threads contract as they dry. It is more merciful than your arrows and spears and clubs." She turned again towards the machine, and started to spray ahead of her.

"But Michael—" I protested, once more. She understood.

She broke it to me sympathetically, but the answer was decisive.

"There is a very long way to go. We could not carry four of you all that distance. Michael is the one who is still safe here. He has not been discovered. You could not go back to your homes, but he can. Perhaps, one day, we shall be able to come again."

It is bare in words, but it was comprehensive in thought. She displayed the whole situation swiftly, and where words might have left chinks for protests, she left none. All of us understood the position, and that there was nothing to do but accept it.

"Michael—" I began again.

He cut me short. "You heard her. There's nothing else for it, David. I'll—I'll be all right . . ."

The fish-shaped craft stood waiting in the middle of the clearing: a door in its side was open, ready for us. The white-suited figure began to spray a path towards it. And we followed.

The city was just as I had seen it in my dreams. A brighter sun than Waknuk ever knew poured down upon the wide blue bay, and the lines of breakers crawling slowly to the beaches. Clustered along the shore, and thinning as they stretched back towards the hills, were white buildings embedded in green parks and gardens. I could make out tiny vehicles sliding along tree-bordered avenues. A little inland, beside a level square of green, a bright light blinked from a tower, and close to it a fish-shaped machine like the one we were in was sinking slowly to earth.

It was all so familiar that for a moment I imagined I should wake up to find myself back in my bed in Waknuk. I took hold of Rosalind's hand to reassure myself.

"It is real, isn't it? You *do* see it, too?" I asked her.

"It's real—and it's beautiful, David. I never thought there could be anywhere so lovely . . . And there's something else, too, that you never told me about."

"What?" I asked.

"Listen! Can't you feel it? Open your mind more—Petra darling, if you could stop bubbling over for a few minutes . . ."

I did as she told me. I was aware of the engineer in our machine communicating with someone below, but behind that, as a background to it, there was something new and unknown to me. In terms of sound it could be not unlike the buzzing of a hive of bees; in terms of light, a kind of suffused glow.

"What is it?" I asked, puzzled.

"Can't you guess, David? It's people. Lots and lots of our kind of people." I realized she must be right, and I listened. We were over the land now, looking down at the city as it came slowly up to meet us. "I'm beginning to believe it's real and true at last," I said. "You were never with me those other times."

Rosalind turned to me. "This time, David—" she began, but then she was blotted out. Petra's excitement had got the better of her. Anguished protests came from all directions.

"Oh, sorry," Petra apologized to the ship's crew, and to the city in general, "but it *is* awfully exciting."

We watched the buildings and the towers grow from pictures into solid realities as we dropped towards them. In the composite murmur and glow, we caught thought-patterns of welcome coming up to meet us. It was like coming home at last. Rosalind's hand caught mine again, and pressed it.

"You're right, darling," she said to Petra. "It *is* exciting. It is the most wonderfully exciting thing that could ever happen to people like us."

★ *The First Part of "Storm," a gripping new sea story by P. Fitzgerald O'Connor, appears in next month's Argosy on sale October 7th.*