The Roger Zelazny Collection
A Rose for Ecclesiastes, A Thing of Terrible Beauty, The Stainless Steel Leech, Mr. Fuller's Revolt, Horseman!
Illustrated

Horseman!

Fantastic, August 1962.

When he was thunder in the hills the villagers lay dreaming harvest behind shutters. When he was an avalanche of steel the cattle began to low, mournfully, deeply, and children cried out in their sleep.

He was an earthquake of hooves, his armor a dark tabletop of silver coins stolen from the night sky, when the villagers awakened with fragments of strange dreams in their heads. They rushed to the windows and flung their shutters wide.

And he entered the narrow streets, and no man saw the eyes behind his visor.

When he stopped so did time. There was no movement anywhere.

—Neither was there sleep, nor yet full wakefulness from the last strange dreams of stars, of blood…

Doors creaked on leather hinges. Oil lamps shivered, pulsated, then settled to a steady glowing.

The mayor wore his nightshirt and a baggy, tasseled cap. He held the lamp dangerously near his snowy whiskers, rotating a knuckle in his right eye.

The stranger did not dismount. He faced the doorway, holding a foreign instrument in one hand.

"Who are you, that comes at this hour?"

"I come at any hour—I want directions, I seek my companions."

The mayor eyed the beast he rode, whiter than his beard, whiter than snow, than a feather…

"What manner of animal is that?"

"He is a horse, he is the wind, he is the steady pounding of surf that wears away rocks. Where are my companions?"

"What is that tool you carry?"

"It is a sword. It eats flesh and drinks blood. It frees souls and cleaves bodies. Where are my companions?"

"That metal suit you wear, that mask…?"

"Armor and concealment, steel and anonymity—protection! Where are my companions?"

"Who are they that you seek, and where are you from?"

"I have ridden an inconceivable distance, past nebulae that are waterspouts in rivers of stars. I seek the others, like myself, who come this way. We have an appointment."

"I have never seen another like yourself, but there are many villages in the world. Another lies over those hills," he gestured in the direction of a distant range, "but it is two days travel."

"Thank you, man, I will be there shortly."

* * *

The horse reared and made a sound terrible to hear. A wave of heat, greater than the lamp's, enveloped the mayor, and a burst of wind raced by, bowing the golden blades of grass which had not already been trampled.

In the distance, thunder pealed on the slopes of the hills.

The horseman was gone, but his last words hung upon the wind:

"Look to the skies tonight!"

The next village was already lighted, like a cluster of awakened fireflies, when the hooves and steel grew silent before the door of its largest dwelling.

Heads appeared behind windows, and curious eyes appraised the giant astride his white beast.

This mayor, thin as the gatepost he leaned upon, blew his nose and held his lantern high.

"Who are you?"

"I have already wasted too much time with questions! Have others such as myself passed this way?"

"Yes. They said they would wait atop the highest hill, overlooking that plain." He pointed down a gentle slope which ran through miles of fields, stopping abruptly at the base of a black massif. It rose like a handless arm, turned to stone, gesturing anywhere.

“There were two,” he said. “One bore strange tools, as you do. The other,” he shuddered, “said, ‘Look to the skies, and sharpen your scythes. There will be signs, wonders, a call—and tonight the sky will fall.’”

* * *

The horseman had already become an after-image, haloed in the sparks thrown from struck cobblestones.

He drew rein atop the highest hill overlooking the plain, and turned to the rider of the black horse.

“Where is he?” he asked.

“He has not yet arrived.”

He regarded the skies and a star fell.

“He will be late.”

“Never.”

The falling star did not burn out. It grew to the size of a dinner plate, a house, and hung in the air, exhaling souls of suns. It dropped toward the plain.

A lightning-run of green crossed the moonless heavens, and the rider of the pale green horse, whose hooves make no sound, drew up beside them.

“You are on time.”

“Always,” he laughed, and it was the sound of a scythe mowing wheat.

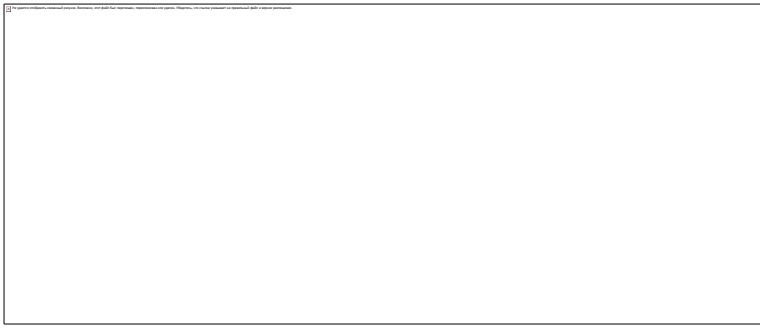
The ship from Earth settled upon the plain, and the wondering villagers watched.

Who or what did it bear? Why should they sharpen their scythes?

The four horsemen waited upon the hilltop.

A Word from Zelazny

According to Zelazny, this was his second professionally published story—but its appearance was nearly simultaneous with "Passion Play," a story that he'd written and sold first. The second story sold was actually "Passage to Dilfar," the first tale of Dilvish, but it would not appear until 1965. Selling these stories changed him. "It is a subtle phenomenon which can only be experienced. I suddenly felt like a writer. 'Confidence' is a cheap word for it, but I can't think of a better one. That seems the next phase in toughening one's writing—a kind of cockiness, an 'I've done it before' attitude. This feeling seems to feed something back into the act of composition itself, providing more than simple assurance. Actual changes in approach, structure, style, tone, began to occur for me almost of their own accord. Noting this, I began to do it intentionally."[1]



Cele Goldsmith (editor of *Amazing* and *Fantastic* at the time) purchased fourteen of the seventeen stories Zelazny sold that first year; it is appropriate to designate her as the editor who discovered him. Prior to buying "Passion Play" and "Horseman!", she began to add encouraging notes to the rejection slips that she sent to him. "It wasn't anything in particular that Cele said, so much as the fact that she treated me as a professional from the very beginning."[2]

Zelazny noted, "This story was suggested to me while driving south on Route 71 in Ohio, by a pre-storm cloud formation which resembled a group of horsemen."[3] Robert Silverberg later described that this story had "announced [Zelazny's] presence and defined his method…Vivid, immediate, idiosyncratic…A bold use of metaphor in an era when such flamboyance had become unfashionable."[4]

Notes

The *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* are traditionally named Pestilence, War, Famine, and Death. The first rider on a white horse bears a bow, wears a crown and represents conquest; the second rider on a red horse carries a sword and represents war, the third rider on black horse carries scales and represents injustice and famine, and the fourth rider on a pale horse is Death. In "Horseman!" we apparently first encounter War bearing a sword (although he is riding a white horse); he is late and has already been preceded by the first rider (Pestilence) and the third rider (Famine), and it is Death on the pale green horse who is the last to arrive—but on time.

A **massif** is a large elevated block of old complex rocks that is resistant to erosion.

A Rose for Ecclesiastes

The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction, November 1963. Hugo nominee 1964 (short story), #3 on 1999 *Locus* all-time poll (novelette), #5 on 1971 Astounding/Analog all-time poll (short fiction), #6 greatest SF story of all time in *The Science Fiction Hall of Fame, Volume One,* 1970.

I

I was busy translating one of my *Madrigals Macabre* into Martian on the morning I was found acceptable. The intercom had buzzed briefly, and I dropped my pencil and flipped on the toggle in a single motion.

"Mister G," piped Morton's youthful contralto, "the old man says I should 'get hold of that damned conceited rhymer' right away, and send him to his cabin. Since there's only one damned conceited rhymer…"

"Let not ambition mock thy useful toil." I cut him off.

So, the Martians had finally made up their minds! I knocked an inch and a half of ash from a smoldering butt, and took my first drag since I had lit it. The entire

month's anticipation tried hard to crowd itself into the moment, but could not quite make it. I was frightened to walk those forty feet and hear Emory say the words I already knew he would say; and that feeling elbowed the other one into the background.

So I finished the stanza I was translating before I got up.

It took only a moment to reach Emory's door. I knocked twice and opened it, just as he growled, "Come in."

"You wanted to see me?" I sat down quickly to save him the trouble of offering me a seat.

"That was fast. What did you do, run?"

I regarded his paternal discontent:

Little fatty flecks beneath pale eyes, thinning hair, and an Irish nose; a voice a decibel louder than anyone else's…

Hamlet to Claudius: "I was working."

"Hah!" he snorted. "Come off it. No one's ever seen you do any of that stuff."

I shrugged my shoulders and started to rise.

"If that's what you called me down here—"

"Sit down!"

He stood up. He walked around his desk. He hovered above me and glared down. (A hard trick, even when I'm in a low chair.)

"You are undoubtably the most antagonistic bastard I've ever had to work with!" he bellowed, like a belly-stung buffalo. "Why the hell don't you act like a human being sometime and surprise everybody? I'm willing to admit you're smart, maybe even a genius, but—oh, hell!" He made a heaving gesture with both hands and walked back to his chair.

"Betty has finally talked them into letting you go in." His voice was normal again. "They'll receive you this afternoon. Draw one of the jeepsters after lunch, and get down there."

"Okay," I said.

"That's all, then."

I nodded, got to my feet. My hand was on the doorknob when he said:

"I don't have to tell you how important this is. Don't treat them the way you treat us."

I closed the door behind me.

* * *

I don't remember what I had for lunch. I was nervous, but I knew instinctively that I wouldn't muff it. My Boston publishers expected a Martian Idyll, or at least a Saint-Exupéry job on space flight. The National Science Association wanted a complete report on the Rise and Fall of the Martian Empire.

They would both be pleased. I knew.

That's the reason everyone is jealous—why they hate me. I always come through, and I can come through better than anyone else.

I shoveled in a final anthill of slop, and made my way to our car barn. I drew one jeepster and headed it toward Tirellian.

Flames of sand, lousy with iron oxide, set fire to the buggy. They swarmed over the open top and bit through my scarf; they set to work pitting my goggles.

The jeepster, swaying and panting like a little donkey I once rode through the Himalayas, kept kicking me in the seat of the pants. The Mountains of Tirellian shuffled their feet and moved toward me at a cockeyed angle.

Suddenly I was heading uphill, and I shifted gears to accommodate the engine's braying. Not like Gobi, not like the Great Southwestern Desert, I mused. Just red, just dead…without even a cactus.

I reached the crest of the hill, but I had raised too much dust to see what was ahead. It didn't matter, though; I have a head full of maps. I bore to the left and downhill, adjusting the throttle. A crosswind and solid ground beat down the fires. I felt like Ulysses in Malebolge—with a terza-rima speech in one hand and an eye out for Dante.

I rounded a rock pagoda and arrived.

Betty waved as I crunched to a halt, then jumped down.

"Hi," I choked, unwinding my scarf and shaking out a pound and a half of grit. "Like, where do I go and who do I see?"

She permitted herself a brief Germanic giggle—more at my starting a sentence with "like" than at my discomfort—then she started talking. (She is a top linguist, so a word from the Village Idiom still tickles her!)

I appreciate her precise, furry talk; informational, and all that. I had enough in the way of social pleasantries before me to last at least the rest of my life. I looked at her chocolate-bar eyes and perfect teeth, at her sun-bleached hair, close-cropped to the head (I hate blondes!), and decided that she was in love with me.

"Mr. Gallinger, the Matriarch is waiting inside for you to be introduced. She has consented to open the Temple records for your study." She paused here to pat her hair and squirm a little. Did my gaze make her nervous?

"They are religious documents, as well as their only history," she continued, "sort of like the Mahābhārata. She expects you to observe certain rituals in handling them, like repeating the sacred words when you turn pages—she will teach you the system."

I nodded quickly, several times.

"Fine, let's go in."

"Uh—" She paused. "Do not forget their Eleven Forms of Politeness and Degree. They take matters of form quite seriously—and do not get into any discussions over the equality of the sexes—"

"I know all about their taboos," I broke in. "Don't worry. I've lived in the Orient, remember?"

She dropped her eyes and seized my hand. I almost jerked it away.

"It will look better if I enter leading you."

I swallowed my comments, and followed her, like Samson in Gaza.

* * *

Inside, my last thought met with a strange correspondence. The Matriarch's quarters were a rather abstract version of what I might imagine the tents of the tribes of Israel to have been like. Abstract, I say, because it was all frescoed brick, peaked like a huge tent, with animal-skin representations like gray-blue scars, that looked as if they had been laid on the walls with a palette knife.

The Matriarch, M'Cwyie, was short, white-haired, fifty-ish, and dressed like a Gypsy queen. With her rainbow of voluminous skirts she looked like an inverted punch bowl set atop a cushion.

Accepting my obeisances, she regarded me as an owl might a rabbit. The lids of those black, black eyes jumped upwards as she discovered my perfect accent. — The tape recorder Betty had carried on her interviews had done its part, and I knew the language reports from the first two expeditions, verbatim. I'm all hell when it comes to picking up accents.

"You are the poet?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Recite one of your poems, please."

"I'm sorry, but nothing short of a thorough translating job would do justice to your language and my poetry, and I don't know enough of your language yet."

"Oh?"

"But I've been making such translations for my own amusement, as an exercise in grammar," I continued. "I'd be honored to bring a few of them along one of the times that I come here."

"Yes. Do so."

Score one for me!

She turned to Betty.

"You may go now."

Betty muttered the parting formalities, gave me a strange sideways look, and was gone. She apparently had expected to stay and "assist" me. She wanted a piece of the glory, like everyone else. But I was the Schliemann

at this Troy, and there would be only one name on the Association report!

M'Cwyie rose, and I noticed that she gained very little height by standing. But then I'm six-six and look like a poplar in October: thin, bright red on top, and towering above everyone else.

"Our records are very, very old," she began. "Betty says that your word for that age is 'millennia.'"

I nodded appreciatively.

"I'm very eager to see them."

"They are not here. We will have to go into the Temple—they may not be removed."

I was suddenly wary.

"You have no objections to my copying them, do you?"

"No. I see that you respect them, or your desire would not be so great."

"Excellent."

She seemed amused. I asked her what was so funny.

"The High Tongue may not be so easy for a foreigner to learn."

It came through fast.

No one on the first expedition had gotten this close. I had had no way of knowing that this was a double-language deal—a classical as well as a vulgar. I

knew some of their Prakrit, now I had to learn all their Sanskrit.

"Ouch! and damn!"

"Pardon, please?"

"It's non-translatable, M'Cwyie. But imagine yourself having to learn the High Tongue in a hurry, and you can guess at the sentiment."

She seemed amused again, and told me to remove my shoes.

She guided me through an alcove…

…and into a burst of Byzantine brilliance!

* * *

No Earthman had ever been in this room before, or I would have heard about it. Carter, the first expedition's linguist, with the help of one Mary Allen, M.D., had learned all the grammar and vocabulary that I knew while sitting cross-legged in the antechamber.

We had had no idea this existed. Greedily, I cast my eyes about. A highly sophisticated system of esthetics lay behind the decor. We would have to revise our entire estimation of Martian culture.

For one thing, the ceiling was vaulted and corbeled; for another, there were side-columns with reverse flutings; for another—oh hell! The place was

big. Posh. You could never have guessed it from the shaggy outsides.

I bent forward to study the gilt filigree on a ceremonial table. M'Cwyie seemed a bit smug at my intentness, but I'd still have hated to play poker with her.

The table was loaded with books.

With my toe, I traced a mosaic on the floor.

"Is your entire city within this one building?"

"Yes, it goes far back into the mountain."

"I see," I said, seeing nothing.

I couldn't ask her for a conducted tour, yet.

She moved to a small stool by the table.

"Shall we begin your friendship with the High Tongue?"

I was trying to photograph the hall with my eyes, knowing I would have to get a camera in here, somehow, sooner or later. I tore my gaze from a statuette and nodded, hard.

"Yes, introduce me."

I sat down.

For the next three weeks alphabet-bugs chased each other behind my eyelids whenever I tried to sleep. The sky was an unclouded pool of turquoise that rippled calligraphies whenever I swept my eyes across it. I drank quarts of coffee while I worked and mixed cocktails of Benzedrine and champagne for my coffee breaks.

M'Cwyie tutored me two hours every morning, and occasionally for another two in the evening. I spent an additional fourteen hours a day on my own, once I had gotten up sufficient momentum to go ahead alone.

And at night the elevator of time dropped me to its bottom floors…

* * *

I was six again, learning my Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and Aramaic. I was ten, sneaking peeks at the *Iliad*. When Daddy wasn't spreading hellfire, brimstone, and brotherly love, he was teaching me to dig the Word, like in the original.

Lord! There are so many originals and so *many* words! When I was twelve I started pointing out the little differences between what he was preaching and what I was reading.

The fundamentalist vigor of his reply brooked no debate. It was worse than any beating. I kept my mouth shut after that and learned to appreciate Old Testament poetry.

—Lord, I am sorry! Daddy—Sir—I am sorry! — It couldn't be! It couldn't be…

On the day the boy graduated from high school, with the French, German, Spanish, and Latin awards, Dad Gallinger had told his fourteen-year old, six-foot

scarecrow of a son that he wanted him to enter the ministry. I remember how his son was evasive:

"Sir," he had said, "I'd sort of like to study on my own for a year or so, and then take pre-theology courses at some liberal arts university. I feel I'm still sort of young to try a seminary, straight off."

The Voice of God: "But you have the gift of tongues, my son. You can preach the Gospel in all the lands of Babel. You were born to be a missionary. You say you are young, but time is rushing by you like a whirlwind. Start early, and you will enjoy added years of service."

The added years of service were so many added tails to the cat repeatedly laid on my back. I can't see his face now; I never can. Maybe it was because I was always afraid to look at it then.

And years later, when he was dead, and laid out, in black, amidst bouquets, amidst weeping congregationalists, amidst prayers, red faces, handkerchiefs, hands patting your shoulders, solemn faced comforters… I looked at him and did not recognize him.

We had met nine months before my birth, this stranger and I. He had never been cruel—stern, demanding, with contempt for everyone's shortcomings—but never cruel. He was also all that I had had of a mother. And brothers. And sisters. He had

tolerated my three years at St. John's, possibly because of its name, never knowing how liberal and delightful a place it really was.

But I never knew him, and the man atop the catafalque demanded nothing now; I was free not to preach the Word. But now I wanted to, in a different way. I wanted to preach a word that I never could have voiced while he lived.

I did not return for my senior year in the fall. I had a small inheritance coming, and a bit of trouble getting control of it, since I was still under eighteen. But I managed.

It was Greenwich Village I finally settled upon.

Not telling any well-meaning parishioners my new address, I entered into a daily routine of writing poetry and teaching myself Japanese and Hindustani. I grew a fiery beard, drank espresso, and learned to play chess. I wanted to try a couple of the other paths to salvation.

After that, it was two years in India with the Old Peace Corps—which broke me of my Buddhism, and gave me my *Pipes of Krishna* lyrics and the Pulitzer they deserved.

Then back to the States for my degree, grad work in linguistics, and more prizes.

Then one day a ship went to Mars. The vessel settling in its New Mexico nest of fires contained a new

language. —It was fantastic, exotic, and esthetically overpowering. After I had learned all there was to know about it, and written my book, I was famous in new circles:

"Go, Gallinger. Dip your bucket in the well, and bring us a drink of Mars. Go, learn another world—but remain aloof, rail at it gently like Auden—and hand us its soul in iambics."

And I came to the land where the sun is a tarnished penny, where the wind is a whip, where two moons play at hotrod games, and a hell of sand gives you the incendiary itches whenever you look at it.

* * *

I rose from my twistings on the bunk and crossed the darkened cabin to a port. The desert was a carpet of endless orange, bulging from the sweepings of centuries beneath it.

"I, a stranger, unafraid— This is the land— I've got it made!"

I laughed.

I had the High Tongue by the tail already—or the roots, if you want your puns anatomical, as well as correct.

The High and Low tongues were not so dissimilar as they had first seemed. I had enough of the

one to get me through the murkier parts of the other. I had the grammar and all the commoner irregular verbs down cold; the dictionary I was constructing grew by the day, like a tulip, and would bloom shortly. Every time I played the tapes the stem lengthened.

Now was the time to tax my ingenuity, to really drive the lessons home. I had purposely refrained from plunging into the major texts until I could do justice to them. I had been reading minor commentaries, bits of verse, fragments of history. And one thing had impressed me strongly in all that I read.

They wrote about concrete things: rock, sand, water, winds; and the tenor couched within these elemental symbols was fiercely pessimistic. It reminded me of some Buddhists texts, but even more so, I realized from my recent *recherches*, it was like parts of the Old Testament. Specifically, it reminded me of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

That, then, would be it. The sentiment, as well as the vocabulary, was so similar that it would be a perfect exercise. Like putting Poe into French. I would never be a convert to the Way of Malann, but I would show them that an Earthman had once thought the same thoughts, felt similarly.

I switched on my desk lamp and sought King James amidst my books.

Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man…

* * *

My progress seemed to startle M'Cwyie. She peered at me, like Sartre's Other, across the tabletop. I ran through a chapter in the Book of Locar. I didn't look up, but I could feel the tight net her eyes were working about my head, shoulders, and rapid hands. I turned another page.

Was she weighing the net, judging the size of the catch? And what for? The books said nothing of fishers on Mars. Especially of men. They said that some god named Malann had spat, or had done something disgusting (depending on the version you read), and that life had gotten underway as a disease in inorganic matter. They said that movement was its first law, its first law, and that the dance was the only legitimate reply to the inorganic…the dance's quality its justification,—fication…and love is a disease in organic matter—Inorganic matter?

I shook my head. I had almost been asleep.

"M'narra."

I stood and stretched. Her eyes outlined me greedily now. So I met them, and they dropped.

“I grow tired. I want to rest for awhile. I didn’t sleep much last night.”

She nodded, Earth’s shorthand for “yes,” as she had learned from me.

“You wish to relax, and see the explicitness of the doctrine of Locar in its fullness?”

“Pardon me?”

“You wish to see a Dance of Locar?”

“Oh.” Their damned circuits of form and periphrasis here ran worse than the Korean! “Yes. Surely. Any time it’s going to be done I’d be happy to watch.”

I continued, “In the meantime, I’ve been meaning to ask you whether I might take some pictures—”

“Now is the time. Sit down. Rest. I will call the musicians.”

She bustled out through a door I had never been past.

Well now, the dance was the highest art, according to Locar, not to mention Havelock Ellis, and I was about to see how their centuries-dead philosopher felt it should be conducted. I rubbed my eyes and snapped over, touching my toes a few times.

The blood began pounding in my head, and I sucked in a couple deep breaths. I bent again and there was a flurry of motion at the door.

To the trio who entered with M'Cwyie I must have looked as if I were searching for the marbles I had just lost, bent over like that.

I grinned weakly and straightened up, my face red from more than exertion. I hadn't expected them *that* quickly.

Suddenly I thought of Havelock Ellis again in his area of greatest popularity.

The little redheaded doll, wearing, sari-like, a diaphanous piece of the Martian sky, looked up in wonder—as a child at some colorful flag on a high pole.

"Hello," I said, or its equivalent.

She bowed before replying. Evidently I had been promoted in status.

"I shall dance," said the red wound in that pale, pale cameo, her face. Eyes, the color of dream and her dress, pulled away from mine.

She drifted to the center of the room.

Standing there, like a figure in an Etruscan frieze, she was either meditating or regarding the design on the floor.

Was the mosaic symbolic of something? I studied it. If it was, it eluded me; it would make an attractive bathroom floor or patio, but I couldn't see much in it beyond that.

The other two were paint-spattered sparrows like M'Cwyie, in their middle years. One settled to the floor

with a triple-stringed instrument faintly resembling a *samisen*. The other held a simple woodblock and two drumsticks.

M'Cwyie disdained her stool and was seated upon the floor before I realized it. I followed suit.

The *samisen* player was still tuning it up, so I leaned toward M'Cwyie.

"What is the dancer's name?"

"Braxa," she replied, without looking at me, and raised her left hand, slowly, which meant yes, and go ahead, and let it begin.

The stringed-thing throbbed like a toothache, and a tick-tocking, like ghosts of all the clocks they had never invented, sprang from the block.

Braxa was a statue, both hands raised to her face, elbows high and outspread.

The music became a metaphor for fire.

Crackle, purr, snap…

She did not move.

The hissing altered to splashes. The cadence slowed. It was water now, the most precious thing in the world, gurgling clear then green over mossy rocks.

Still she did not move.

Glissandos. A pause.

Then, so faint I could hardly be sure at first, the tremble of the winds began. Softly, gently, sighing and

halting, uncertain. A pause, a sob, then a repetition of the first statement, only louder.

Were my eyes completely bugged from my reading, or was Braxa actually trembling, all over, head to foot?

She was.

She began a microscopic swaying. A fraction of an inch right, then left. Her fingers opened like the petals of a flower, and I could see that her eyes were closed.

Her eyes opened. They were distant, glassy, looking through me and the walls. Her swaying became more pronounced, merged with the beat.

The wind was sweeping in from the desert now, falling against Tirellian like waves on a dike. Her fingers moved, they were the gusts. Her arms, slow pendulums, descended, began a counter-movement.

The gale was coming now. She began an axial movement and her hands caught up with the rest of her body, only now her shoulders commenced to writhe out a figure-eight.

The wind! The wind, I say. O wild, enigmatic! O muse of St.-John Perse!

The cyclone was twisting around those eyes, its still center. Her head was thrown back, but I knew there was no ceiling between her gaze, passive as Buddha's, and the unchanging skies. Only the two moons, perhaps,

interrupted their slumber in that elemental Nirvana of uninhabited turquoise.

Years ago, I had seen the Devadasis in India, the street-dancers, spinning their colorful webs, drawing in the male insect. But Braxa was more than this: she was a Ramadjany, like those votaries of Rama, incarnation of Vishnu, who had given the dance to man: the sacred dancers.

The clicking was monotonously steady now; the whine of the strings made me think of the stinging rays of the sun, their heat stolen by the wind's halations; the blue was Sarasvati and Mary, and a girl named Laura. I heard a sitar from somewhere, watched this statue come to life, and inhaled a divine afflatus.

I was again Rimbaud with his hashish, Baudelaire with his laudanum, Poe, De Quincy, Wilde, Mallarme and Aleister Crowley. I was, for a fleeting second, my father in his dark pulpit and darker suit, the hymns and the organ's wheeze transmuted to bright wind.

She was a spun weather vane, a feathered crucifix hovering in the air, a clothes-line holding one bright garment lashed parallel to the ground. Her shoulder was bare now, and her right breast moved up and down like a moon in the sky, its red nipple appearing momentarily above a fold and vanishing again. The music was as formal as Job's argument with God. Her dance was God's reply.

The music slowed, settled; it had been met, matched, answered. Her garment, as if alive, crept back into the more sedate folds it originally held.

She dropped low, lower, to the floor. Her head fell upon her raised knees. She did not move.

There was silence.

* * *

I realized, from the ache across my shoulders, how tensely I had been sitting. My armpits were wet. Rivulets had been running down my sides. What did one do now? Applaud?

I sought M'Cwyie from the corner of my eye. She raised her right hand.

As if by telepathy the girl shuddered all over and stood. The musicians also rose. So did M'Cwyie.

I got to my feet, with a charley horse in my left leg, and said, "It was beautiful," inane as that sounds.

I received three different High Forms of "thank you."

There was a flurry of color and I was alone again with M'Cwyie.

"That is the one hundred-seventeenth of the two thousand, two hundred-twenty-four dances of Locar."

I looked down at her.

"Whether Locar was right or wrong, he worked out a fine reply to the inorganic."

She smiled.

"Are the dances of your world like this?"

"Some of them are similar. I was reminded of them as I watched Braxa—but I've never seen anything exactly like hers."

"She is good," M'Cwyie said. "She knows all the dances."

A hint of her earlier expression which had troubled me…

It was gone in an instant.

"I must tend my duties now." She moved to the table and closed the books. "M'narra."

"Good-bye." I slipped into my boots.

"Good-bye, Gallinger."

I walked out the door, mounted the jeepster, and roared across the evening into night, my wings of risen desert flapping slowly behind me.

II

I had just closed the door behind Betty, after a brief grammar session, when I heard the voices in the hall. My vent was opened a fraction, so I stood there and eavesdropped:

Morton's fruity treble: "Guess what? He said 'hello' to me awhile ago."

"Hmmph!" Emory's elephant lungs exploded. "Either he's slipping, or you were standing in his way and he wanted you to move."

"Probably didn't recognize me. I don't think he sleeps any more, now he has that language to play with. I had night watch last week, and every night I passed his door at 0300—I always heard that recorder going. At 0500 when I got off, he was still at it."

"The guy *is* working hard," Emory admitted, grudgingly. "In fact, I think he's taking some kind of dope to keep awake. He looks sort of glassy-eyed these days. Maybe that's natural for a poet, though."

Betty had been standing there, because she broke in then:

"Regardless of what you think of him, it's going to take me at least a year to learn what he's picked up in three weeks. And I'm just a linguist, not a poet."

Morton must have been nursing a crush on her bovine charms. It's the only reason I can think of for his dropping his guns to say what he did.

"I took a course in modern poetry when I was back at the university," he began. "We read six authors—Yeats, Pound, Eliot, Crane, Stevens, and Gallinger—and on the last day of the semester, when the prof was feeling a little rhetorical, he said, 'These six

names are written on the century, and all the gates of criticism and hell shall not prevail on them.'

"Myself," he continued, "I thought his *Pipes of Krishna* and his *Madrigals* were great. I was honored to be chosen for an expedition he was going on.

"I think he's spoken two dozen words to me since I met him," he finished.

The Defense: "Did it ever occur to you," Betty said, "that he might be tremendously self-conscious about his appearance? He was also a precocious child, and probably never even had school friends. He's sensitive and very introverted."

"Sensitive? Self-conscious?" Emory choked and gagged. "The man is as proud as Lucifer, and he's a walking insult machine. You press a button like 'Hello' or 'Nice day' and he thumbs his nose at you. He's got it down to a reflex."

They muttered a few other pleasantries and drifted away.

Well bless you, Morton boy. You little pimple-faced, Ivy-bred connoisseur! I've never taken a course in my poetry, but I'm glad someone said that. The Gates of Hell. Well now! Maybe Daddy's prayers got heard somewhere, and I am a missionary, after all!

Only…

…Only a missionary needs something to convert people *to*. I have my private system of esthetics, and I

suppose it oozes an ethical by-product somewhere. But if I ever had anything to preach, really, even in my poems, I wouldn't care to preach it to such lowlifes as you. If you think I'm a slob, I'm also a snob, and there's no room for you in my Heaven—it's a private place, where Swift, Shaw, and Petronius Arbiter come to dinner.

And oh, the feasts we have! The Trimalchios, the Emorys we dissect!

We finish you with the soup, Morton!

* * *

I turned and settled at my desk. I wanted to write something. Ecclesiastes could take a night off. I wanted to write a poem, a poem about the one hundred-seventeenth dance of Locar; about a rose following the light, traced by the wind, sick, like Blake's rose, dying…

I found a pencil and began.

When I had finished I was pleased. It wasn't great—at least, it was no greater than it needed to be—High Martian not being my strongest tongue. I groped, and put it into English, with partial rhymes. Maybe I'd stick it in my next book. I called it *Braxa:*

In a land of wind and red,

where the icy evening of Time
freezes milk in the breasts of Life,
as two moons overhead—
cat and dog in alleyways of dream—
scratch and scramble agelessly my flight…
This final flower turns a burning head.

I put it away and found some phenobarbitol. I was suddenly tired.

* * *

When I showed my poem to M'Cwyie the next day, she read it through several times, very slowly.

"It is lovely," she said. "But you used three words from your own language. 'Cat' and 'dog', I assume, are two small animals with a hereditary hatred for one another. But what is 'flower'?"

"Oh," I said. "I've never come across your word for 'flower,' but I was actually thinking of an Earth flower, the rose."

"What is it like?"

"Well, its petals are generally bright red. That's what I meant, on one level, by 'burning heads.' I also wanted it to imply fever, though, and red hair, and the

fire of life. The rose, itself, has a thorny stem, green leaves, and a distinct, pleasing aroma."

"I wish I could see one."

"I suppose it could be arranged. I'll check."

"Do it, please. You are a—" She used the word for "prophet," or religious poet, like Isaias or Locar. "—and your poem is inspired. I shall tell Braxa of it."

I declined the nomination, but felt flattered.

This, then, I decided, was the strategic day, the day on which to ask whether I might bring in the microfilm machine and the camera. I wanted to copy all their texts, I explained, and I couldn't write fast enough to do it.

She surprised me by agreeing immediately. But she bowled me over with her invitation.

"Would you like to come and stay here while you do this thing? Then you can work day and night, any time you want—except when the Temple is being used, of course."

I bowed.

"I should be honored."

"Good. Bring your machines when you want, and I will show you a room."

"Will this afternoon be all right?"

"Certainly."

"Then I will go now and get things ready. Until this afternoon…"

"Good-bye."

* * *

I anticipated a little trouble from Emory, but not much. Everyone back at the ship was anxious to see the Martians, poke needles in the Martians, ask them about Martian climate, diseases, soil chemistry, politics, and mushrooms (our botanist was a fungus nut, but a reasonably good guy)—and only four or five had actually gotten to see them. The crew had been spending most of its time excavating dead cities and their acropolises. We played the game by strict rules, and the natives were as fiercely insular as the nineteenth-century Japanese. I figured I would meet with little resistance, and I figured right.

In fact, I got the distinct impression that everyone was happy to see me move out.

I stopped in the hydroponics room to speak with our mushroom master.

"Hi, Kane. Grow any toadstools in the sand yet?"

He sniffed. He always sniffs. Maybe he's allergic to plants.

"Hello, Gallinger. No, I haven't had any success with toadstools, but look behind the car barn next time you're out there. I've got a few cacti going."

"Great," I observed. Doc Kane was about my only friend aboard, not counting Betty.

"Say, I came down to ask you a favor."

"Name it."

"I want a rose."

"A what?"

"A rose. You know, a nice red American Beauty job—thorns, pretty smelling—"

"I don't think it will take in this soil. *Sniff, sniff.* "

"No, you don't understand. I don't want to plant it, I just want the flower."

"I'd have to use the tanks." He scratched his hairless dome. "It would take at least three months to get you flowers, even under forced growth."

"Will you do it?"

"Sure, if you don't mind the wait."

"Not at all. In fact, three months will just make it before we leave." I looked about at the pools of crawling slime, at the trays of shoots. "—I'm moving up to Tirellian today, but I'll be in and out all the time. I'll be here when it blooms."

"Moving up there, eh? Moore said they're an in-group."

"I guess I'm 'in' then."

"Looks that way—I still don't see how you learned their language, though. Of course, I had trouble with French and German for my Ph.D, but last week I heard Betty demonstrate it at lunch. It just sounds like a lot of weird noises. She says speaking it is like working a *Times* crossword and trying to imitate birdcalls at the same time."

I laughed, and took the cigarette he offered me.

"It's complicated," I acknowledged. "But, well, it's as if you suddenly came across a whole new class of mycetae here—you'd dream about it at night."

His eyes were gleaming.

"Wouldn't that be something! I might, yet, you know."

"Maybe you will."

He chuckled as we walked to the door.

"I'll start your roses tonight. Take it easy down there."

"You bet. Thanks."

Like I said, a fungus nut, but a fairly good guy.

* * *

My quarters in the Citadel of Tirellian were directly adjacent to the Temple, on the inward side and slightly to the left. They were a considerable

improvement over my cramped cabin, and I was pleased that Martian culture had progressed sufficiently to discover the desirability of the mattress over the pallet. Also, the bed was long enough to accommodate me, which was surprising.

So I unpacked and took sixteen 35 mm. shots of the Temple, before starting on the books.

I took 'stats until I was sick of turning pages without knowing what they said. So I started translating a work of history.

"Lo. In the thirty-seventh year of the Process of Cillen the rains came, which gave way to rejoicing, for it was a rare and untoward occurrence, and commonly construed a blessing.

"But it was not the life-giving semen of Malann which fell from the heavens. It was the blood of the universe, spurting from an artery. And the last days were upon us. The final dance was to begin.

"The rains brought the plague that does not kill, and the last passes of Locar began with their drumming…"

I asked myself what the hell Tamur meant, for he was an historian and supposedly committed to fact. This was not their Apocalypse.

Unless they could be one and the same…?

Why not? I mused. Tirellian's handful of people were the remnant of what had obviously once been a

highly developed culture. They had had wars, but no holocausts; science, but little technology. A plague, a plague that did not kill…? Could that have done it? How, if it wasn't fatal?

I read on, but the nature of the plague was not discussed. I turned pages, skipped ahead, and drew a blank.

M'Cwyie! M'Cwyie! When I want to question you most, you are not around!

Would it be a *faux pas* to go looking for her? Yes, I decided. I was restricted to the rooms I had been shown, that had been an implicit understanding. I would have to wait to find out.

So I cursed long and loud, in many languages, doubtless burning Malann's sacred ears, there in his Temple.

He did not see fit to strike me dead, so I decided to call it a day and hit the sack.

* * *

I must have been asleep for several hours when Braxa entered my room with a tiny lamp. She dragged me awake by tugging at my pajama sleeve.

I said hello. Thinking back, there is not much else I could have said.

"Hello."

"I have come," she said, "to hear the poem."

"What poem?"

"Yours."

"Oh."

I yawned, sat up, and did things people usually do when awakened in the middle of the night to read poetry.

"That is very kind of you, but isn't the hour a trifle awkward?"

"I don't mind," she said.

Someday I am going to write an article for the *Journal of Semantics*, called "Tone of Voice: An Insufficient Vehicle for Irony."

However, I was awake, so I grabbed my robe.

"What sort of animal is that? she asked, pointing at the silk dragon on my lapel.

"Mythical," I replied. "Now look, it's late. I am tired. I have much to do in the morning. And M'Cwyie just might get the wrong idea if she learns you were here."

"Wrong idea?"

"You know damned well what I mean!" It was the first time I had had an opportunity to use Martian profanity, and it failed.

"No," she said, "I do not know."

She seemed frightened, like a puppy dog being scolded without knowing what it has done wrong.

I softened. Her red cloak matched her hair and lips so perfectly, and those lips were trembling.

"Here now, I didn't mean to upset you. On my world there are certain, uh, mores, concerning people of different sex alone together in bedrooms, and not allied by marriage…Um, I mean, you see what I mean?"

"No."

They were jade, her eyes.

"Well, it's sort of…Well, it's sex, that's what it is."

A light switched on in those jade lamps.

"Oh, you mean having children!"

"Yes. That's it! Exactly!"

She laughed. It was the first time I had heard laughter in Tirellian. It sounded like a violinist striking his high strings with the bow, in short little chops. It was not an altogether pleasant thing to hear, especially because she laughed too long.

When she had finished she moved closer.

"I remember, now," she said. "We used to have such rules. Half a Process ago, when I was a child, we had such rules. But"—she looked as if she were ready to laugh again—"there is no need for them now."

My mind moved like a tape recorder playing at triple speed.

Half a Process! HalfaProcessa—ProcessaProcess! No! Yes! Half a Process was two hundred-forty-three years, roughly speaking!

—Time enough to learn the 2224 dances of Locar.

—Time enough to grow old, if you were human.

—Earth-style human, I mean.

I looked at her again, pale as the white queen in an ivory chess set.

She was human, I'd stake my soul—alive, normal, healthy. I'd stake my life—woman, my body…

But she was two and a half centuries old, which made M'Cwyie Methuselah's grandma. It flattered me to think of their repeated complimenting of my skills, as linguist, as poet. These superior beings!

But what did she mean "there is no such need for them now"? Why the near-hysteria? Why all those funny looks I'd been getting from M'Cwyie?

I suddenly knew I was close to something important, besides a beautiful girl.

"Tell me," I said, in my Casual Voice, "did it have anything to do with 'the plague that does not kill,' of which Tamur wrote?"

"Yes," she replied, "the children born after the Rains could have no children of their own, and—"

"And what?" I was leaning forward, memory set at "record."

"—and the men had no desire to get any."

I sagged backward against the bedpost. Racial sterility, masculine impotence, following phenomenal weather. Had some vagabond cloud of radioactive junk from God knows where penetrated their weak atmosphere one day? One day long before Schiaparelli saw the canals, mythical as my dragon, before those "canals" had given rise to some correct guesses for all the wrong reasons, had Braxa been alive, dancing, here—damned in the womb since blind Milton had written of another paradise, equally lost?

I found a cigarette. Good thing I had thought to bring ashtrays. Mars had never had a tobacco industry either. Or booze. The ascetics I had met in India had been Dionysiac compared to this.

"What is that tube of fire?"

"A cigarette. Want one?"

"Yes, please."

She sat beside me, and I lighted it for her.

"It irritates the nose."

"Yes. Draw some into your lungs, hold it there, and exhale."

A moment passed.

"Ooh," she said.

A pause, then, "Is it sacred?"

"No, it's nicotine," I answered, "a very *ersatz* form of divinity."

Another pause.

"Please don't ask me to translate 'ersatz'."

"I won't. I get this feeling sometimes when I dance."

"It will pass in a moment."

"Tell me your poem now."

An idea hit me.

"Wait a minute," I said; "I may have something better."

I got up and rummaged through my notebooks, then I returned and sat beside her.

"These are the first three chapters of the Book of Ecclesiastes," I explained. "It is very similar to your own sacred books."

I started reading.

I got through eleven verses before she cried out, "Please don't read that! Tell me one of yours!"

I stopped and tossed the notebook onto a nearby table. She was shaking, not as she had quivered that day she danced as the wind, but with the jitter of unshed tears. She held her cigarette awkwardly, like a pencil. Clumsily, I put my arm about her shoulders.

"He is so sad," she said, "like all the others."

So I twisted my mind like a bright ribbon, folded it, and tied the crazy Christmas knots I love so well. From German to Martian, with love, I did an impromptu

paraphrasal of a poem about a Spanish dancer. I thought it would please her. I was right.

"Ooh," she said again. "Did you write that?"

"No, it's by a better man than I."

"I don't believe it. You wrote it."

"No, a man named Rilke did."

"But you brought it across to my language. Light another match, so I can see how she danced."

I did.

"The fires of forever," she mused, "and she stamped them out, 'with small, firm feet.' I wish I could dance like that."

"You're better than any Gypsy," I laughed, blowing it out.

"No, I'm not. I couldn't do that."

Her cigarette was burning down, so I removed it from her fingers and put it out, along with my own.

"Do you want me to dance for you?"

"No," I said. "Go to bed."

She smiled, and before I realized it, had unclasped the fold of red at her shoulder.

And everything fell away.

And I swallowed, with some difficulty.

"All right," she said.

So I kissed her, as the breath of fallen cloth extinguished the lamp.

III

The days were like Shelley's leaves: yellow, red, brown, whipped in bright gusts by the west wind. They swirled past me with the rattle of microfilm. Almost all the books were recorded now. It would take scholars years to get through them, to properly assess their value. Mars was locked in my desk.

Ecclesiastes, abandoned and returned to a dozen times, was almost ready to speak in the High Tongue.

I whistled when I wasn't in the Temple. I wrote reams of poetry I would have been ashamed of before. Evenings I would walk with Braxa, across the dunes or up into the mountains. Sometimes she would dance for me; and I would read something long, and in dactylic hexameter. She still thought I was Rilke, and I almost kidded myself into believing it. Here I was, staying at the Castle Duino, writing his *Elegies*.

> *…It is strange to inhabit the Earth no more,*
> *to use no longer customs scarce acquired,*
> *nor interpret roses…*

No! Never interpret roses! Don't. Smell them (sniff, Kane!), pick them, enjoy them. Live in the

moment. Hold to it tightly, but charge not the gods to explain. So fast the leaves go by, are blown…

And no one ever noticed us. Or cared.

Laura. Laura and Braxa. They rhyme, you know, with a bit of clash. Tall, cool, and blonde was she (I hate blondes!), and Daddy had turned me inside out, like a pocket, and I thought she could fill me again. But the big, beat word-slinger, with Judas-beard and dog-trust in his eyes, oh, he had been a fine decoration at her parties. And that was all.

How the machine cursed me in the Temple! It blasphemed Malann and Gallinger. And the wild west wind went by and something was not far behind.

The last days were upon us.

* * *

A day went by and I did not see Braxa, and a night.

And a second. And a third.

I was half-mad. I hadn't realized how close we had become, how important she had been. With the dumb assurance of presence, I had fought against questioning roses.

I had to ask. I didn't want to, but I had no choice.

"Where is she, M'Cwyie? Where is Braxa?"

"She is gone," she said.

"Where?"

"I do not know."

I looked at those devil-bird eyes. Anathema maranatha rose to my lips.

"I must know."

She looked through me.

"She has left us. She is gone. Up into the hills, I suppose. Or the desert. It does not matter. What does anything matter? The dance draws to a close. The Temple will soon be empty."

"Why? Why did she leave?"

"I do not know."

"I must see her again. We lift off in a matter of days."

"I am sorry, Gallinger."

"So am I," I said, and slammed shut a book without saying "M'narra."

I stood up.

"I will find her."

I left the Temple. M'Cwyie was a seated statue. My boots were still where I had left them.

* * *

All day I roared up and down the dunes, going nowhere. To the crew of the *Aspic* I must have looked

like a sandstorm, all by myself. Finally, I had to return for more fuel.

Emory came stalking out.

"Okay, make it good. You look like the abominable dust man. Why the rodeo?"

"Why, I, uh, lost something."

"In the middle of the desert? Was it one of your sonnets? They're the only thing I can think of that you'd make such a fuss over."

"No, dammit! It was something personal."

George had finished filling the tank. I started to mount the jeepster again.

"Hold on there!" he grabbed my arm.

"You're not going back until you tell me what this is all about."

I could have broken his grip, but then he could order me dragged back by the heels, and quite a few people would enjoy doing the dragging. So I forced myself to speak slowly, softly:

"It's simply that I lost my watch. My mother gave it to me and it's a family heirloom. I want to find it before we leave."

"You sure it's not in your cabin, or down in Tirellian?"

"I've already checked."

"Maybe somebody hid it to irritate you. You know you're not the most popular guy around."

I shook my head.

"I thought of that. But I always carry it in my right pocket. I think it might have bounced out going over the dunes."

He narrowed his eyes.

"I remember reading on a book jacket that your mother died when you were born."

"That's right," I said, biting my tongue. "The watch belonged to her father and she wanted me to have it. My father kept it for me."

"Hmph!" he snorted. "That's a pretty strange way to look for a watch, riding up and down in a jeepster."

"I could see the light shining off it that way," I offered, lamely.

"Well, it's starting to get dark," he observed. "No sense looking any more today.

"Throw a dust sheet over the jeepster," he directed a mechanic.

He patted my arm.

"Come on in and get a shower, and something to eat. You look as if you could use both."

Little fatty flecks beneath pale eyes, thinning hair, and an Irish nose; a voice a decibel louder than anyone else's…

His only qualification for leadership!

I stood there, hating him. Claudius! If only this were the fifth act!

But suddenly the idea of a shower, and food, came through to me. I could use both badly. If I insisted on hurrying back immediately I might arouse more suspicion.

So I brushed some sand from my sleeve.

"You're right. That sounds like a good idea."

"Come on, we'll eat in my cabin."

The shower was a blessing, clean khakis were the grace of God, and the food smelled like Heaven.

"Smells pretty good," I said.

We hacked up our steaks in silence. When we got to the dessert and coffee he suggested:

"Why don't you take the night off? Stay here and get some sleep."

I shook my head.

"I'm pretty busy. Finishing up. There's not much time left."

"A couple of days ago you said you were almost finished."

"Almost, but not quite."

"You also said they'll be holding a service in the Temple tonight."

"That's right. I'm going to work in my room."

He shrugged his shoulders.

Finally, he said, “Gallinger,” and I looked up because my name means trouble.

“It shouldn’t be any of my business,” he said, “but it is. Betty says you have a girl down there.”

There was no question mark. It was a statement hanging in the air. Waiting.

Betty, you’re a bitch. You’re a cow and a bitch. And a jealous one, at that. Why didn’t you keep your nose where it belonged, shut your eyes? Your mouth?

“So?” I said, a statement with a question mark.

“So,” he answered it, “it is my duty, as head of this expedition, to see that relations with the natives are carried on in a friendly, and diplomatic, manner.”

“You speak of them,” I said, “as though they are aborigines. Nothing could be further from the truth.”

I rose.

“When my papers are published everyone on Earth will know that truth. I’ll tell them things Doctor Moore never even guessed at. I’ll tell the tragedy of a doomed race, waiting for death, resigned and disinterested. I’ll tell why, and it will break hard, scholarly hearts. I’ll write about it, and they will give me more prizes, and this time I won’t want them.

“My God!” I exclaimed. “They had a culture when our ancestors were clubbing the saber-tooth and finding out how fire works!”

“*Do* you have a girl down there?”

"Yes!" I said. *Yes, Claudius! Yes, Daddy! Yes, Emory!* "I do. But I'm going to let you in on a scholarly scoop now. They're already dead. They're sterile. In one more generation there won't be any Martians."

I paused, then added, "Except in my papers, except on a few pieces of microfilm and tape. And in some poems, about a girl who did give a damn and could only bitch about the unfairness of it all by dancing."

"Oh," he said.

After awhile:

"You *have* been behaving differently these past couple months. You've even been downright civil on occasion, you know. I couldn't help wondering what was happening. I didn't know anything mattered that strongly to you."

I bowed my head.

"Is she the reason you were racing around the desert?"

I nodded.

"Why?"

I looked up.

"Because she's out there, somewhere. I don't know where, or why. And I've got to find her before we go."

"Oh," he said again.

Then he leaned back, opened a drawer, and took out something wrapped in a towel. He unwound it. A framed photo of a woman lay on the table.

"My wife," he said.

It was an attractive face, with big, almond eyes.

"I'm a Navy man, you know," he began. "Young officer once. Met her in Japan.

"Where I come from it wasn't considered right to marry into another race, so we never did. But she was my wife. When she died I was on the other side of the world. They took my children, and I've never seen them since. I couldn't learn what orphanage, what home, they were put into. That was long ago. Very few people know about it."

"I'm sorry," I said.

"Don't be. Forget it. But"—he shifted in his chair and looked at me—"if you do want to take her back with you—do it. It'll mean my neck, but I'm too old to ever head another expedition like this one. So go ahead."

He gulped cold coffee.

"Get your jeepster."

He swiveled the chair around.

I tried to say "thank you" twice, but I couldn't. So I got up and walked out.

"*Sayonara*, and all that," he muttered behind me.

* * *

"Here it is, Gallinger!" I heard a shout.

I turned on my heel and looked back up the ramp.

"Kane!"

He was limned in the port, shadow against light, but I had heard him sniff.

I returned the few steps.

"Here what is?"

"Your rose."

He produced a plastic container, divided internally. The lower half was filled with liquid. The stem ran down into it. The other half, a glass of claret in this horrible night, was a large, newly opened rose.

"Thank you," I said, tucking it in my jacket.

"Going back to Tirellian, eh?"

"Yes."

"I saw you come aboard, so I got it ready. Just missed you at the Captain's cabin. He was busy. Hollered out that I could catch you at the barns."

"Thanks again."

"It's chemically treated. It will stay in bloom for weeks."

I nodded. I was gone.

* * *

Up into the mountains now. Far. Far. The sky was a bucket of ice in which no moons floated. The going became steeper, and the little donkey protested. I whipped him with the throttle and went on. Up. Up. I spotted a green, unwinking star, and felt a lump in my throat. The encased rose beat against my chest like an extra heart. The donkey brayed, long and loudly, then began to cough. I lashed him some more and he died.

I threw the emergency brake on and got out. I began to walk.

So cold, so cold it grows. Up here. At night? Why? Why did she do it? Why flee the campfire when night comes on?

And I was up, down, around, and through every chasm, gorge, and pass, with my long-legged strides and an ease of movement never known on Earth.

Barely two days remain, my love, and thou hast forsaken me. Why?

I crawled under overhangs. I leaped over ridges. I scraped my knees, an elbow. I heard my jacket tear.

No answer, Malann? Do you really hate your people this much? Then I'll try someone else. Vishnu, you're the Preserver. Preserve her, please! Let me find her.

Jehovah?

Adonis? Osiris? Thammuz? Manitou? Legba? Where is she?

I ranged far and high, and I slipped.

Stones ground underfoot and I dangled over an edge. My fingers so cold. It was hard to grip the rock.

I looked down.

Twelve feet or so. I let go and dropped, landed rolling.

Then I heard her scream.

* * *

I lay there, not moving, looking up. Against the night, above, she called.

"Gallinger!"

I lay still.

"Gallinger!"

And she was gone.

I heard stones rattle and knew she was coming down some path to the right of me.

I jumped up and ducked into the shadow of a boulder.

She rounded a cut-off, and picked her way, uncertainly, through the stones.

"Gallinger?"

I stepped out and seized her by the shoulders.

"Braxa."

She screamed again, then began to cry, crowding against me. It was the first time I had ever heard her cry.

"Why?" I asked. "Why?"

But she only clung to me and sobbed.

Finally, "I thought you had killed yourself."

"Maybe I would have," I said. "Why did you leave Tirellian? And me?"

"Didn't M'Cwyie tell you? Didn't you guess?"

"I didn't guess, and M'Cwyie said she didn't know."

"Then she lied. She knows."

"What? What is it she knows?"

She shook all over, then was silent for a long time. I realized suddenly that she was wearing only her flimsy dancer's costume. I pushed her from me, took off my jacket, and put it about her shoulders.

"Great Malann!" I cried. "You'll freeze to death!"

"No," she said, "I won't."

I was transferring the rose-case to my pocket.

"What is that?" she asked.

"A rose," I answered. "You can't make it out in the dark. I once compared you to one. Remember?"

"Ye-Yes. May I carry it?"

"Sure." I stuck it in the jacket pocket.

"Well? I'm still waiting for an explanation."

"You really do not know?" she asked.

"No!"

"When the Rains came," she said, "apparently only our men were affected, which was enough…because I–wasn't–affected–apparently—"

"Oh," I said. "Oh."

We stood there, and I thought.

"Well, why did you run? What's wrong with being pregnant on Mars? Tamur was mistaken. Your people can live again."

She laughed, again that wild violin played by a Paganini gone mad.

I stopped her before it went too far.

"How?" she finally asked, rubbing her cheek.

"Your people can live longer than ours. If our child is normal it will mean our races can intermarry. There must still be other fertile women of your race. Why not?"

"You have read the Book of Locar," she said, "and yet you ask me that? Death was decided, voted upon, and passed, shortly after it appeared in this form. But long before, before the followers of Locar knew. They decided it long ago. 'We have done all things,' they said, 'we have seen all things, we have heard and felt all things. The dance was good. Now let it end.'"

"You can't believe that."

"What I believe does not matter," she replied. "M'Cwyie and the Mothers have decided we must die. Their very title is now a mockery, but their decisions will be upheld. There is only one prophecy left, and it is mistaken. We will die."

"No," I said.

"What, then?"

"Come back with me, to Earth."

"No."

"All right, then. Come with me now."

"Where?"

"Back to Tirellian. I'm going to talk to the Mothers."

"You can't! There is a Ceremony tonight!"

I laughed.

"A Ceremony for a god who knocks you down, and then kicks you in the teeth?"

"He is still Malann," she answered. "We are still his people."

"You and my father would have gotten along fine," I snarled. "But I am going, and you are coming with me, even if I have to carry you—and I'm bigger than you are."

"But you are not bigger than Ontro."

"Who the hell is Ontro?"

"He will stop you, Gallinger. He is the Fist of Malann."

IV

I scudded the jeepster to a halt in front of the only entrance I knew, M'Cwyie's. Braxa, who had seen the rose in a headlamp, now cradled it in her lap, like our child, and said nothing. There was a passive, lovely look on her face.

"Are they in the Temple now?" I wanted to know.

The Madonna-expression did not change. I repeated the question. She stirred.

"Yes," she said, from a distance, "but you cannot go in."

"We'll see."

I circled and helped her down.

I led her by the hand, and she moved as if in a trance. In the light of the new-risen moon, her eyes looked as they had the day I had met her, when she had danced. I snapped my fingers. Nothing happened.

So I pushed the door open and led her in. The room was half-lighted.

And she screamed for the third time that evening:

"Do not harm him, Ontro! It is Gallinger!"

I had never seen a Martian man before, only women. So I had no way of knowing whether he was a freak, though I suspected it strongly.

I looked up at him.

His half-naked body was covered with moles and swellings. Gland trouble, I guessed.

I had thought I was the tallest man on the planet, but he was seven feet tall and overweight. Now I knew where my giant bed had come from!

"Go back," he said. "She may enter. You may not."

"I must get my books and things."

He raised a huge left arm. I followed it. All my belonging lay neatly stacked in the corner.

"I must go in. I must talk with M'Cwyie and the Mothers."

"You may not."

"The lives of your people depend on it."

"Go back," he boomed. "Go home to *your* people, Gallinger. Leave *us!* "

My name sounded so different on his lips, like someone else's. How old was he? I wondered. Three hundred? Four? Had he been a Temple guardian all his life? Why? Who was there to guard against? I didn't like the way he moved. I had seen men who moved like that before.

"Go back," he repeated.

If they had refined their martial arts as far as they had their dances, or worse yet, if their fighting arts were a part of the dance, I was in for trouble.

"Go on in," I said to Braxa. "Give the rose to M'Cwyie. Tell her that I sent it. Tell her I'll be there shortly."

"I will do as you ask. Remember me on Earth, Gallinger. Good-bye."

I did not answer her, and she walked past Ontro and into the next room, bearing her rose.

"Now will you leave?" he asked. "If you like, I will tell her that we fought and you almost beat me, but I knocked you unconscious and carried you back to your ship."

"No," I said, "either I go around you or go over you, but I am going through."

He dropped into a crouch, arms extended.

"It is a sin to lay hands on a holy man," he rumbled, "but I will stop you, Gallinger."

My memory was a fogged window, suddenly exposed to fresh air. Things cleared. I looked back six years.

I was a student of the Oriental Languages at the University of Tokyo. It was my twice-weekly night of recreation. I stood in a thirty-foot circle in the Kodokan, the *judogi* lashed about my high hips by a brown belt. I was *Ik-kyu*, one notch below the lowest degree of expert. A brown diamond above my right breast said "*Jiu-Jitsu*" in Japanese, and it meant *atemiwaza*, really, because of

the one striking-technique I had worked out, found unbelievably suitable to my size, and won matches with.

But I had never used it on a man, and it was five years since I had practiced. I was out of shape, I knew, but I tried hard to force my mind *tsuki no kokoro*, like the moon, reflecting the all of Ontro.

Somewhere, out of the past, a voice said "*Hajime*, let it begin."

I snapped into my *neko-ashi-dachi* cat-stance, and his eyes burned strangely. He hurried to correct his own position—and I threw it at him!

My one trick!

My long left leg lashed up like a broken spring. Seven feet off the ground my foot connected with his jaw as he tried to leap backward.

His head snapped back and he fell. A soft moan escaped his lips.

That's all there is to it, I thought. Sorry, old fellow.

And as I stepped over him, somehow, groggily, he tripped me, and I fell across his body. I couldn't believe he had strength enough to remain conscious after that blow, let alone move. I hated to punish him any more.

But he found my throat and slipped a forearm across it before I realized there was a purpose to his action.

No! Don't let it end like this!

It was a bar of steel across my windpipe, my carotids. Then I realized that he was still unconscious, and that this was a reflex instilled by countless years of training. I had seen it happen once, in *shiai*. The man had died because he had been choked unconscious and still fought on, and his opponent thought he had not been applying the choke properly. He tried harder.

But it was rare, so very rare!

I jammed my elbow into his ribs and threw my head back in his face. The grip eased, but not enough. I hated to do it, but I reached up and broke his little finger.

The arm went loose and I twisted free.

He lay there panting, face contorted. My heart went out to the fallen giant, defending his people, his religion, following his orders. I cursed myself as I had never cursed before, for walking over him, instead of around.

I staggered across the room to my little heap of possessions. I sat on the projector case and lit a cigarette.

I couldn't go into the Temple until I got my breath back, until I thought of something to say.

How do you talk a race out of killing itself?

Suddenly—

—Could it happen? Would it work that way? If I read them the Book of Ecclesiastes—if I read them a greater piece of literature than any Locar ever wrote—

and as somber—and as pessimistic—and showed them that our race had gone on despite one man's condemning all of life in the highest poetry—showed them that the vanity he had mocked had borne us to the Heavens—would they believe it?—would they change their minds?

I ground out my cigarette on the beautiful floor, and found my notebook. A strange fury rose within me as I stood.

And I walked into the Temple to preach the Black Gospel according to Gallinger, from the Book of Life.

* * *

There was silence all about me.

M'Cwyie had been reading Locar, the rose set at her right hand, target of all eyes.

Until I entered.

Hundreds of people were seated on the floor, barefoot. The few men were as small as the women, I noted.

I had my boots on.

Go all the way, I figured. You either lose or you win—everything!

A dozen crones sat in a semicircle behind M'Cwyie. The Mothers.

The barren earth, the dry wombs, the fire-touched.

I moved to the table.

"Dying yourselves, you would condemn your people," I addressed them, "that they may not know the life you have known—the joys, the sorrows, the fullness. —But it is not true that you all must die." I addressed the multitude now. "Those who say this lie. Braxa knows, for she will bear a child—"

They sat there, like rows of Buddhas. M'Cwyie drew back into the semicircle.

"—my child!" I continued, wondering what my father would have thought of this sermon.

"…And all the women young enough may bear children. It is only your men who are sterile. —And if you permit the doctors of the next expedition to examine you, perhaps even the men may be helped. But if they cannot, you can mate with the men of Earth.

"And ours is not an insignificant people, an insignificant place," I went on. "Thousands of years ago, the Locar of our world wrote a book saying that it was. He spoke as Locar did, but we did not lie down, despite plagues, wars, and famines. We did not die. One by one we beat down the diseases, we fed the hungry, we fought the wars, and, recently, have gone a long time without them. We may finally have conquered them. I do not know.

"But we have crossed millions of miles of nothingness. We have visited another world. And our Locar had said 'Why bother? What is the worth of it? It is all vanity, anyhow.'

"And the secret is," I lowered my voice, as at a poetry reading, "he was right! It *is* vanity, it *is* pride! It is the hybris of rationalism to always attack the prophet, the mystic, the god. It is our blasphemy which has made us great, and will sustain us, and which the gods secretly admire in us. —All the truly sacred names of God are blasphemous things to speak!"

I was working up a sweat. I paused dizzily.

"Here is the Book of Ecclesiastes," I announced, and began:

"'Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man…'"

I spotted Braxa in the back, mute, rapt.

I wondered what she was thinking.

And I wound the hours of the night about me, like black thread on a spool.

* * *

Oh, it was late! I had spoken till day came, and still I spoke. I finished Ecclesiastes and continued Gallinger.

And when I finished there was still only a silence.

The Buddhas, all in a row, had not stirred through the night. And after a long while M'Cwyie raised her right hand. One by one the Mothers did the same.

And I knew what that meant.

It meant, no, do not, cease, and stop.

It meant that I had failed.

I walked slowly from the room and slumped beside my baggage.

Ontro was gone. Good that I had not killed him…

After a thousand years M'Cwyie entered.

She said, "Your job is finished."

I did not move.

"The prophecy is fulfilled," she said. "My people are rejoicing. You have won, holy man. Now leave us quickly."

My mind was a deflated balloon. I pumped a little air back into it.

"I'm not a holy man," I said, "just a second-rate poet with a bad case of hybris."

I lit my last cigarette.

Finally, "All right, what prophecy?"

"The Promise of Locar," she replied, as though the explaining were unnecessary, "that a holy man would come from the Heavens to save us in our last hours, if all the dances of Locar were completed. He would defeat the Fist of Malann and bring us life."

"How?"

"As with Braxa, and as the example in the Temple."

"Example?"

"You read us his words, as great as Locar's. You read to us how there is 'nothing new under the sun.' And you mocked his words as you read them—showing us a new thing.

"There has never been a flower on Mars," she said, "but we will learn to grow them.

"You are the Sacred Scoffer," she finished. "He-Who-Must-Mock-in-the-Temple—you go shod on holy ground."

"But you voted 'no'," I said.

"I voted not to carry out our original plan, and to let Braxa's child live instead."

"Oh." The cigarette fell from my fingers. How close it had been! How little I had known!

"And Braxa?"

"She was chosen half a Process ago to do the dances—to wait for you."

"But she said that Ontro would stop me."

M'Cwyie stood there for a long time.

"She had never believed the prophecy herself. Things are not well with her now. She ran away, fearing it was true. When you completed it, and we voted, she knew."

"Then she does not love me? Never did?"

"I am sorry, Gallinger. It was the one part of her duty she never managed."

"Duty," I said flatly…Dutydutyduty! Tra-la!

"She has said good-bye; she does not wish to see you again.

"…and we will never forget your teachings," she added.

"Don't," I said automatically, suddenly knowing the great paradox which lies at the heart of all miracles. I did not believe a word of my own gospel, never had.

I stood, like a drunken man, and muttered "M'narra."

I went outside, into my last day on Mars.

I have conquered thee, Malann—and the victory is thine! Rest easy on thy starry bed. God damned!

I left the jeepster there and walked back to the *Aspic*, leaving the burden of life so many footsteps behind me. I went to my cabin, locked the door, and took forty-four sleeping pills.

* * *

But when I awakened I was in the dispensary, and alive.

I felt the throb of engines as I slowly stood up and somehow made it to the port.

Blurred Mars hung like a swollen belly above me, until it dissolved, brimmed over, and streamed down my face.

A Word from Zelazny

"I had a strong sentimental attachment to what is now called 'space opera.' …I had long wanted to do something of that sort. When I began selling fiction in the sixties it was too late—almost. The space program had already invalidated the Mars and Venus of Edgar Rice Burroughs—almost… If I wanted to do homage…I would have to act quickly and do my best. I knew that I would only be allowed one shot at each world, and then I would have to leave the solar system. 'A Rose For Ecclesiastes' was my only word on Mars. 'The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth' all that I would have to say on Venus. So I did it. I wrote them both and got in under the wire."[5]

Zelazny usually gave noncommittal answers when asked if the poet Gallinger had any resemblance to Zelazny himself, but he did give a very personal response to letter writer Clara on this very subject: "You ask me why I hated Gallinger so in 'A Rose For Ecclesiastes.' The answer is that I hated him because he was me. Once in my life I let a beautiful thing die, and now it can never be. Details are not important, in that

they would add nothing. The story says what it must and stands or falls on its own merits. But you're right in your observation that it's a sad story, despite the fact that you felt crushed and even cheated. Life is full of these things, and one of them motivated this tale. I didn't want it to end that way, but it had to, because he was me. I felt pain along with him. He was a better linguist than I, and a better poet. He was a very good, misunderstood man. There is a sequel to the story which I will never write, where he goes back to Mars some years later. It is much sadder, believe me, and he doesn't deserve to be put through those paces. He's suffered enough. But sometimes things happen this way, and all that you can say is, 'Look. This is the way things are.' That's all."[6] Zelazny was alluding to events that caused the breakup of his six month engagement to Hedy West; he wrote this story shortly after.

This story was actually written in October 1961, five months prior to "Passion Play," but Zelazny had declined to submit it then because he knew that the Mars depicted within the story had lost all credibility by 1962. Critics and other authors greeted the story enthusiastically, assuming it reflected rapid maturation in his writing. In fact, he wrote it before his earlier published works.[7] It is unclear whether he'd revised it at all before submitting it.

Consistent with his intention to follow Hemingway's dictum to leave certain things unsaid,

Zelazny did not reveal Gallinger's first name, Michael, in the story. "It wasn't important; I had no reason for using his first name… If the writer sees more of the story than he actually tells, it adds strength to the story. It makes the character seem more real."[8]

Notes

Theodore Sturgeon enthused that "'A Rose for Ecclesiastes' is one of the most important stories I have ever read—perhaps I should say it is one of the most memorable experiences I have ever had…as objective as I can be, which isn't very, I still feel safe in stating that it is one of the most beautifully written, skillfully composed and passionately expressed works of art to appear anywhere, ever."[9]

Fittingly, this story was included as one of the classic stories of "Martian literature" in the *Visions of Mars: First Library on Mars* silica glass mini-DVD that traveled to the Martian surface on May 25, 2008, aboard the lander *Phoenix*.

"A Rose for Ecclesiastes" appeared in *The Science Fiction Hall of Fame, Volume One*, ranked sixth among the 26 best stories from 1929–1964 (prior to the institution of the Nebula Awards), elected by the writers themselves.

The cover painting for this story was one of the very last works of Hannes Bok, and Zelazny later purchased the original painting.

The many references and allusions that enrich the text may benefit from identification or explanation. A **madrigal** is a musical form of secular text composed for two voices, often in Italian. **Macabre** implies a grim or ghastly atmosphere with an emphasis on death. **"Let not ambition mock thy useful toil"** is a line from the poem "The Cotter's Saturday Night" by Robert Burns. **Hamlet** and his stepfather, King **Claudius**, despised and mistrusted each other. **Antoine de Saint-Exupéry** was a writer and aviator who published several prominent novels pertaining to flight and is best known for the novel *The Little Prince*. **Malebolge** is the eighth circle of hell in Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, within which **Dante** discovers **Ulysses** standing in flames, doomed for three sins, but still capable of making a speech about his adventures. **Terza-rima** is a rhyming in triplets, specifically the style used in *The Divine Comedy.* The **Mahābhārata** is a lengthy Sanskrit epic of ancient India.

Samson was the Israelite whose immense strength lay in his uncut hair; his lover Delilah cut it off, the Philistines blinded him and imprisoned him in Gaza—but his hair grew again, and he pulled down the pillars of the temple, destroying himself and many Philistines. **Heinrich Schliemann** was a German

treasure hunter who discovered and excavated Troy and fought with archaeologist Frank Calvert over it. In ancient India, **Prakrit** was the ordinary or vernacular speech while **Sanskrit** was the liturgical or high speech. **Vaulted and corbeled** means that the high ceiling is supported by projections from the walls. **Benzedrine** is a brand of amphetamine.

The ***Iliad*** by Homer describes the Trojan War and how Achilles killed Hector. **Added tails to the cat repeatedly laid on my back** suggests a cat-o'-nine-tails, a rope whip with nine knotted cords, formerly used to flog offenders (Gallinger must be speaking figuratively, not literally, because he later states that his father did not resort to physical punishment). A **catafalque** is a raised platform on which a dead body is carried or lies in state. **Greenwich Village** played an important role in the development of folk music in the 1960s (Dylan; Simon and Garfunkle; Peter, Paul and Mary, etc.) and was where Zelazny met his first fiancée, folk musician Hedy West. W. H. **Auden** was one of Zelazny's favorite poets. **Iambics** are meters in poetry consisting of one short (or unstressed) syllable followed by one long (or stressed) syllable.

I, a stranger, unafraid alludes to A. E. Housman's *Last Poems*, and the line "I, a stranger and afraid || in a world I never made"—except that Gallinger reverses it into a boast. **This is the land** likely refers to Emily Dickinson's poem "This is the land the sunset

washes." ***Recherches*** is French for researches. **Edgar Allan Poe** wrote poetry and horror stories such as "The Tell-Tale Heart." ***Vanity of vanities…*** is a quote from the Book of Ecclesiastes in the **King James** version of the Bible. **Jean-Paul Sartre** was an existentialist who dealt with the nature of human life and the structures of consciousness; **the Other** deals with the philosophical concept of how one consciousness deals with the existence of other minds. **Periphrasis** is the use of indirect and circumlocutory speech or writing.

Henry Havelock Ellis was a British doctor and sexual psychologist whose book *The Dance of Life* described that dancing and architecture are the two primary and essential arts. According to Ellis, dancing is the source of all arts that express themselves inside the person, and it came first; architecture is the beginning of all the arts that lie outside the person.

A **sari** is a garment worn by Hindu women, consisting of a long piece of cotton or silk wrapped around the body. An **Etruscan frieze** is a horizontal band of sculpted or painted decoration on a wall near the ceiling. The Etruscan civilization flourished circa 500 BC. The ***samisen*** is a Japanese three-stringed musical instrument played with a plectrum called a bachi. A **glissando** is a rapid slide through a series of scales on a musical instrument. **Saint-John Perse** was the pseudonym of a French poet who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1960. **Devadasis** or "servants of

God" were girls "married" to a deity or temple in a Hindu practice and who learned a sacred dance termed the Bharatanatyam. **Ramadjany** were sacred dancers.

Rama refers to any one of the three avatars of Vishnu, those being Balarama, Parashurama, or Ramachandra; **Vishnu** or "the Preserver" is the second member of the Trimurti, along with Brahma the Creator and Shiva the Destroyer. **Sarasvati** is the Hindu goddess of learning and the arts. The **sitar** is a large, long-necked Indian lute with movable frets, played with a wire pick. **Afflatus** is a divine creative impulse or inspiration.

Arthur Rimbaud, Charles Baudelaire, Edgar Allan Poe, Thomas De Quincy, Oscar Wilde, Stéphane Mallarme and Aleister Crowley were respected authors and poets. **Job** argued with God because conventional wisdom said that his suffering must be the just punishment for his sins, but he knew himself to be innocent of any crimes, and he wanted to meet God face to face rather than accept platitudes which he knew were untrue. A **charley horse** is localized pain or muscle stiffness following contusion or bruising of a muscle, or localized electrolyte imbalance.

William Butler Yeats, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Hart Crane, and Wallace Stevens were real poets whose work Zelazny admired, and Michael **Gallinger** is the protagonist and poet of this story. **Jonathan Swift** was an Irish poet and satirist best known for *Gulliver's Travels*, a satire on human society in the form of a

fantastic tale of travels in imaginary lands. **George Bernard Shaw** was an Irish playwright whose plays (including *Pygmalion*, *Man and Superman*) combined comedy and an examination of conventional morals and thought. **Petronius Arbiter** was the author of *The Satyricon*, a work in prose and verse satirizing the excesses of Roman society. In *The Satyricon*, **Trimalchio** was a character known for throwing lavish dinner parties.

Blake's rose refers to "The Sick Rose," a poem by William Blake that begins "Oh Rose, thou art sick!" **Isaias** [variant of Isaiah] was a major prophet of Judah in the 8 century BC; the book of the Bible entitled *Isaiah* contains his prophecies. **Mycetae** are fungi. **Mores** are customs, practices, or ways of life in a culture. **Methuselah** was the grandfather of Noah and was said to have lived almost 1,000 years; the term also means a long-lived or immortal man.

Giovanni Schiaparelli was an Italian astronomer who famously described the markings on Mars as canali (channels)—but this was mistranslated as "canals" and taken to mean evidence of a civilization on Mars. **John Milton** wrote *Paradise Lost* after he had gone blind. **Dionysiac** means sensual, spontaneous, and emotional. **Spanish Dancer** was a poem by German poet Rainer Maria **Rilke**. **Shelley's leaves** refers to Percy Shelley's poem "Ode to the West Wind." **Dactylic** refers to a metrical foot in poetry that consists of one stressed

syllable followed by two unstressed syllables; **hexameter** means that each line contains six metrical feet.

Castle Duino sits on the rocky Carso high above the Gulf of Trieste and was frequented by Rilke; the quote ending "**nor interpret roses**" [not to give a meaning of human futurity to roses] is from the "First Elegy" within the Rilke's "Duino Elegies." **Anathema maranatha** is a curse for anyone who does not want to be saved because the Lord is coming. **Aspic** is an archaic word for *asp*, the Egyptian cobra; the usage may indicate that ship and crew were a snake in a Martian Eden.

Claudius! If only this were the fifth act! refers to the denouement of the play *Hamlet* in which Claudius and Hamlet are both killed. ***Sayonara*** is Japanese for goodbye. **Limned** means suffused or highlighted with a bright color.

After receiving no aid from the fictional Martian god Malann, Gallinger calls on deities from various religions and mythologies—Hinduism (**Vishnu**), Christianity and Judaism (**Jehovah**), Greek (**Adonis**), Egyptian (**Osiris**), Sumerian (**Thammuz**), Algonquian (**Manitou**), and Haitian Vodou (**Legba**). **Niccolò Paganini** was an Italian violinist, violist and composer.

Kodokan ("A place for study and promotion of the way") is the headquarters of Japanese style judo. The ***judogi*** is the traditional uniform used for judo practice and competition. ***Ik-kyu*** is senior brown belt in judo.

Jiu-Jitsu is a Japanese martial art. ***Atemi-waza*** are striking techniques rarely used at full force in judo because of the harm that they can inflict. ***Tsuki no kokoro*** ("A Mind Like the Moon") refers to the need to be constantly aware of the totality of the opponent and his or her movements, just as moonlight shines equally on everything in its range. ***Hajime*** means threshold or beginning. ***Neko-ashi-dachi*** ("Cat Stance") is a classic initial pose in judo and is often depicted in motion pictures. ***Shiai*** is a judo competition for a prize. **Hybris** is an alternate spelling for hubris, pride and arrogance.

A Thing Of Terrible Beauty

I rather liked this one when I wrote it, but I don't remember why or how I came to write it. Perhaps Harrison Denmark had taken on a life of his own. Perhaps he's that gentleman I see walking along Bishop's Lodge Road every day, sometimes in both directions....

How like a god of the Epicureans is the audience, at a time like this! Powerless to alter the course of events, yet better informed than the characters, they might rise to their feet and cry out, "Do not!"-but the blinding of Oedipus would still ensue, and the inevitable knot in Jocasta's scarlet would stop her breathing still.

But no one rises, of course. They know better. They, too, are inevitably secured by the strange bonds of

the tragedy. The gods can only observe and know, they cannot alter circumstance, nor wrestle with ananke.

My host is already anticipating the thing he calls "catharsis." My search has carried me far, and my choice was a good one. Phillip Devers lives in the theater like a worm lives in an apple, a paralytic in an iron lung. It is his world.

And I live in Phillip Devers.

For ten years his ears and eyes have been my ears and eyes. For ten years I have tasted the sensitive preceptions of a great critic of the drama, and he has never known it

He has come close-his mind is agile, his imagination vivid-but his classically trained intellect is too strong, his familiarity with psychopathology too intimate to permit that final leap from logic to intuition, and an admission of my existence. At times, before he drops off to sleep, he toys with the thought of attempting communication, but the next morning he always rejects it-which is well. What could we possibly have to say to one another?

-Now that inchoate scream from the dawn of time, and Oedipus stalks the stage in murky terror!

How exquisite!

I wish that I could know the other half. Devers says there are two things in a complete experience-a moving toward, called pity, and a moving away from,

called terror. It is the latter which I feel, which I have always sought; I do not understand the other, even when my host quivers and his vision goes moistly dim.

I should like very much to cultivate the total response. Unfortunately, my time here is limited. I have hounded beauty through a thousand stellar cells, and here I learned mat a man named Aristotle defined it. It is unfortunate that I must leave without knowing the entire experience.

But I am the last. The others have gone. The stars move still, time runs, and the clock will strike ...

The ovation is enormous. The resurrected Jocasta bows beside her red-socketted king, smiling. Hand in hand, they dine upon our applause-but even pale Tiresias does not see what I have seen. It is very unfortunate.

And now the taxi home. What time is it in Thebes?

Devers is mixing us a strong drink, which he generally does not do. I shall appreciate these final moments all the more, seen through the prism of his soaring fancy.

His mood is a strange one. It is almost as if he knows what is to occur at one o'clock-almost as if he knows what will happen when the atom expands its fleecy chest, shouldering aside an army of Titans, and the Mediterranean rushes to dip its wine-dark muzzle into the vacant Sahara.

But he could not know, without knowing me, and this time he will be a character, not an observer, when the thing of terrible beauty occurs.

We both watch the pale gray eyes on the sliding panel. He takes aspirins in advance whea he drinks, which means he will be mixing us more.

But his hand ... It stops short of the medicine chest Framed in the tile and stainless steel, we both regard reflections of a stranger.

"Good evening."

After .ten years, those two words, and on the eve of the last performance!

Activating his voice to reply would be rather silly, even if I could manage it, and it would doubtless be upsetting.

I waited, and so did he.

Finally, like an organ player, I pedalled and chorded the necessary synapses:

Good evening. Please go ahead and take your aspirins.

He did. Then he picked up his drink from the ledge, "I hope you enjoy Martinis."

I do. Very much. Please drink more.

He smirked at us and returned to the living room.

"What are you? A psychosis? A dybbuk?"

Oh, no! Nothing like that-Just a member of the audience.

"I don't recall selling you a ticket"

You did not exactly invite me, but I didn't think you would mind, if I kept quiet. .. .

"Very decent of you."

He mixed another drink, then looked out at the building across the way. It had two lighted windows, on different floors, like misplaced eyes.

"Mind if I ask why?"

Not at all. Perhaps you can even help me. I am an itinerant esthetician. I have to borrow bodies on the worlds I visit-preferably those of beings with similar interests.

"I see-you're a gate-crasher."

Sort of, I guess. I try not to cause any trouble, though. Generally, my host never even learns of my existence. But I have to leave soon, and something has been troubling me for the past several years. . . . Since you have guessed at my existence and managed to maintain your stability, I've decided to ask you to resolve it.

"Ask away." He was suddenly bitter and very offended. I saw the reason in an instant

Do not think, I told him, that I have influenced anything you have thought or done. I am only an observer. My sole function is to appreciate beauty.

"How interesting!" he sneered. "How soon is it going to happen?"

What?

"The thing that is causing you to leave."

Oh, that...

I was not certain what to tell him. What could he do, anyhow? Suffer a little more, perhaps.

"Well?"

My time is up, I told him.

"I see flashes," he said. "Sand and smoke, and a flaming baseball."

He was too sensitive. I thought I had covered those thoughts.

Well. . . The world is going to end at one o'clock,. ...

"That's good to know. How?"

There is a substratum of fissionable material, which Project Eden is going to detonate. This will produce an enormous chain reaction....

"Can't you do something to stop it?*'

I don't know how. I don't know what could stop it. My knowledge is limited to the arts and the life-sciences.-You broke your leg when you were skiing in Vermont last winter. You never knew. Things like that, I can manage. ...

"And the horn blows at midnight," he observed.

One o'clock, I corrected. Eastern Standard Time.

"Might as well have another drink," he said, looking at his watch. "It's going on twelve."

My question ... I cleared an imaginary throat.

"Oh, yes, what did you want to know?"

-The other half of the tragic response. I've watched you go through it many times, but I can't get at it. I feel the terror part, but the pity-the pity always eludes me.

"Anyone can be afraid," he said, "that part is easy. But you have to be able to get inside people-not exactly the way you do-and feel everything they feel, just before they go smash-so that it feels you're going smash along with them-and you can't do a damn thing about it, and you wish you could-that's pity."

Oh? And being afraid, too?

"-and being afraid. Together, they equal the grand catharsis of true tragedy."

He hiccupped.

And the tragic figure, for whom you feel these things? He must be great and noble, mustn't he?

"True," he nodded, as though I were seated across the room from him, "and in the last moment when the unalterable jungle law is about to prevail,, he must stare into the faceless mask; of God, and bear himself, for that brief moment, above the pleas of his nature and the course of events."

We both looked at his watch.

"What time will you be leaving?"

In about fifteen minutes.

"Good. You have time to listen to a record while I dress."

He switched on his stereo and selected an album.

I shifted uneasily.

If it isn't too long....

He regarded the jacket.

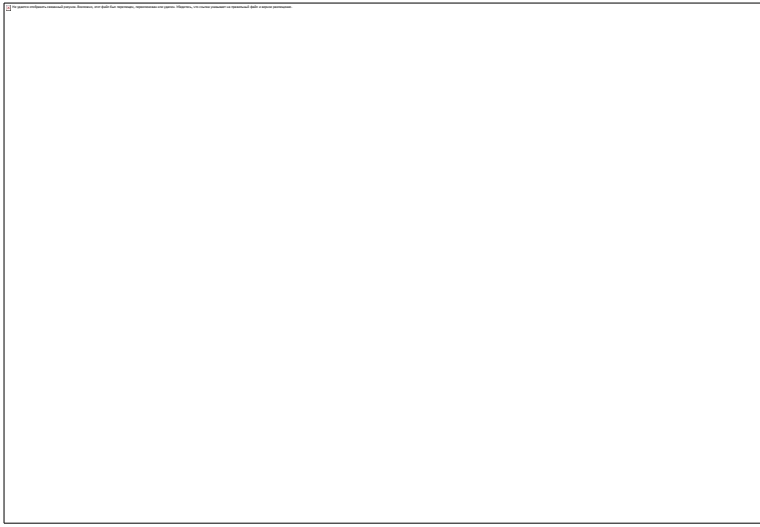
"Five minutes and eight seconds. I've always maintained that it is music for the last hour of Earth."

He placed it on the turntable and set the arm.

"If Gabriel doesn't show up, this will do."

He reached for his tie as the first notes of Miles Davis' Saefa limped through the room, like a wounded thing climbing a hill.

He hummed along with it as he reknotted his tie and combed his hair. Davis talked through an Easter my with a tongue of brass, and the procession moved before us:



Oedipus and blind Gloucester stumbled by, led by Antigone and Edgar-Prince Hamlet gave a fencer's salute and plunged forward, while black Othello lumbered on behind-Hippolytus, all in white, and the Duchess of Malfi, sad, paraded through memory on a thousand stages.

Phillip buttoned his jacket as the final notes sounded, and shut down the player. Carefully rejacketting the record, he placed it among his others.

What are you going to do?

"Say good-bye. There's a party up the street I hadn't planned on attending. I believe I'll stop in for a drink."

Good-bye to you also.

"By the way," he asked, "what is your name? I've known you for a long time, I ought to call you something now."

He suggested one, half-consciously. I had never really had a name before, so I took it.

Adrastea, I told him.

He smirked again.

"No thought is safe from you, is it? Good-bye."

Good-bye.

He closed the door behind him, and I passed through the ceilings and floors of the apartments overhead, then up, and into the night above the city. One eye in the building across the street winked out; as I watched, the other did the same.

Bodiless again, I fled upward wishing there was something I could feel.

The Stainless Steel Leech

They're really afraid of this place.

During the day they'll clank around the headstones, if they're ordered to, but even Central can't

make the search at night, despite the ultras and the infras - and they'll never enter the mausoleum.

Which makes things nice for me.

They're superstitious: it's part of the circuitry. They were designed to serve man, and during his brief time on earth, awe and devotion, as well as dread, were automatic things. Even the last man, dead Kennington, commanded every robot in existence while he lived. His person was a thing of veneration, and all his orders were obeyed.

And a man is a man, alive or dead - which is why the graveyards are a combination of hell, heaven, and strange feedback, and will remain apart from the cities so long as the earth endures.

But even as I mock them they are looking behind the stones and peering into the gullies. They are searching for - and afraid they might find - me.

I, the unjunked, am legend. Once out of a million assemblies a defective such as I might appear and go undetected, until too late.

At will, I could cut the circuit that connected me with Central Control, and be a free `bot, and master of my own movements. I liked to visit the cemeteries, because they were quiet and different from the maddening stamp-stamp of the presses and the clanking of the crowds; I liked to look at the green and red and yellow and blue things that grew about the graves. And

I did not fear these places, for that circuit, too, was defective. So when I was discovered they removed my vite-box and threw me on the junk heap.

But the next day I was gone, and their fear was great.

I no longer possess a self-contained power unit, but the freak coils within my chest act as storage batteries. They require frequent recharging, however, and there is only one way to do that.

The werebot is the most frightful legend whispered among the gleaming steel towers, when the night wind sighs with its burden of fears out of the past, from days when non-metal beings walked the earth. The half-lifes; the preyers upon order, still cry darkness within the vite-box of every `bot.

I, the discontent, the unjunked, live here in Rosewood Park, among the dogwood and myrtle, the headstones and broken angels, with Fritz - another legend - in our deep and peaceful mausoleum.

Fritz is a vampire, which is a terrible and tragic thing. He is so undernourished that he can no longer move about, but he cannot die either, so he lies in his casket and dreams of times gone by. One day, he will ask me to carry him outside into the sunlight, and I will watch him shrivel and dim into peace and nothingness and dust. I hope he doesn't ask me soon.

We talk. At night, when the moon is full and he feels strong enough, he tells me of his better days, in places called Austria and Hungary, where he, too, was feared and hunted.

".. But only a stainless steel leech can get blood out of a stone - or a robot," he said last night. "It is a proud and lonely thing to be a stainless steel leech - you are possibly the only one of your kind in existence. Live up to your reputation! Hound them! Drain them! Leave your mark on a thousand steel throats!"

And he was right. He is always right. And he knows more about these things than I.

"Kennington!" his this, bloodless lips smiled. "Oh, what a duel we fought! He was the last man on earth, and I the last vampire. For ten years I tried to drain him. I got at him twice, but he was from the Old Country and knew what precautions to take. Once he learned of my existence, he issued a wooden stake to every robot - but I had forty-two graves in those days and they never found me. They did come close, though..

"But at night, ah, at night!" he chuckled. "Then things were reversed! I was the hunter and he the prey!

"I remember his frantic questing after the last few sprays of garlic and wolfsbane on earth, the crucifix assembly lines he kept in operation around the clock - irreligious soul that he was! I was genuinely sorry when he died, in peace. Not so much because I hadn't gotten to

drain him properly, but because he was a worthy opponent and a suitable antagonist. What a game we played!"

His husky voice weakened.

"He sleeps a scant three hundred paces from here, bleaching and dry. His is the great marble tomb by the gate. Please gather roses tomorrow and place them upon it."

I agreed that I would, for there is a closer kinship between the two of us than between myself and any `bot, despite the dictates of resemblance. And I must keep my word, before this day passes into evening and although there are searchers above, for such is the law of my nature.

* * *

"Damn them! (He taught me that word.) Damn them!" I say. "I'm coming up! Beware, gentle `bots! I shall walk among you and you shall not know me. I shall join in the search, and you will think I am one of you. I shall gather the red flowers for dead Kennington, rubbing shoulders with you, and Fritz will smile at the joke."

I climb the cracked and hollow steps, the east already spilling twilight, and the sun half-lidded in the west.

I emerge.

The roses live on the wall across the road. From great twisting tubes of vine, with heads brighter than any rust, they burn like danger lights on a control panel, but moistly.

One, two, three roses for Kennington. Four, five .

"What are you doing, `bot?"

"Gathering roses."

"You are supposed to be searching for the werebot. Has something damaged you?"

"No, I'm all right," I say, and I fix him where he stands, by bumping against his shoulder. The circuit completed, I drain his vite-box until I am filled.

"You are the werebot!" he intones weakly.

He falls with a crash.

.Six, seven, eight roses for Kennington, dead Kennington, dead as the `bot at my feet - more dead - for he once lived a full organic life, neared to Fritz's or my own than to theirs.

"What happened here, `bot?"

"He is stopped, and I am picking roses," I tell them.

There are four `bots and an Over.

"It is time you left this place," I say. "Shortly it will be night and there werebot will walk. Leave, or he will end you."

"You stopped him!" says the Over. "You are the werebot!"

I bunch all the flowers against my chest with one arm and turn to face them. The Over, a large special-order `bot, moves toward me. Others are approaching from all directions. He had sent out a call.

"You are a strange and terrible thing," he is saying, "and you must be junked, for the sake of the community."

He seizes me and I drop my Kennington's flowers.

I cannot drain him. My coils are already loaded near their capacity, and he is specially insulated.

There are dozens around me now, fearing and hating. They will junk me and I will lie beside Kennington.

"Rust in peace," they will say.. I am sorry that I cannot keep my promise to Fritz.

"Release him!"

No!

It is shrouded and moldering Fritz in the doorway of the mausoleum, swaying, clutching at the stone. He always knows..

"Release him! I, a human, order it."

He is ashen and gasping, and the sunlight is doing awful things to him.

--The ancient circuits click and suddenly I am free.

"Yes, master," says the Over. "We did not know."

"Seize that robot!"

He points a shaking emaciated finger at him.

"He is the werebot," he gasps. "Destroy him! The one gathering flowers was obeying my orders. Leave him here with me."

He falls to his knees and the final darts of day pierce his flesh.

"And go! All the rest of you! Quickly! It is my order that no robot ever enter another graveyard again!"

He collapses within and I know that now there are only bones and bits of rotted shroud on the doorstep of our home.

Fritz has had his final joke - a human masquerade.

I take the roses to Kennington, as the silent `bots file out through the gate forever, bearing the unprotesting Overbot with them. I place the roses at the foot of the monument - Kennington's and Fritz's - the monument of the last, strange, truly living ones.

Now only I remain unjunked.

In the final light of the sun I see them drive a stake through the Over's vite-box and bury him at the crossroads.

Then they hurry back toward their towers of steel, of plastic.

I gather up what remains of Fritz and carry him down to his box. The bones are brittle and silent.

It is a very proud and very lonely thing to be a stainless steel leech.

Mr. Fuller's Revolt

Eucuyo, 1954.

"Good morning, Mr. Fuller," said the attendant, smoothing his white smock and smiling.

"Good morning, George. What's on the schedule for today?"

"Schedule, Mr. Fuller?" answered the attendant. "You know that there never…"

"Skip it," sighed Mr. Fuller, an average-looking man in his middle thirties. "I just thought that maybe…Oh well."

"Anything you want, sir?" the attendant inquired eagerly.

"Nothing. I think I'll take a walk." He turned and left the old attendant.

It was a beautiful day, he mused, but then they all were. He followed the winding road down into the valley and stopped at the orchard. Not bothering to examine it, he picked an apple from one of the trees and lay down in the shade munching it.

It was a perfect apple of course, they always were; in fact everything about this place was perfect. You could just lie back and relax, and everything would be taken care of for you. He sighed again and watched a dust devil spin idly across the road. You should be immensely happy when free to do anything you want to. There was only one catch, there was nothing to do here.

Mr. Fuller realized that he was unhappy.

He threw the apple remainder against a nearby tree trunk.

Splat!

Just like that, he thought. Just crossing the street when some crazy driver crashed the light.

There was a grill and bumper coming toward him and the tortured screaming of tires. They screamed louder and louder.

Splat!

And here he was. He stood up and yawned. He brushed some dust from his smock. Maybe there was something he could do. Where is that blasted attendant?

"Did you call?" questioned George, stepping from behind a large tree, smiling.

"Uh-huh," he answered. "How's chances of us finding some more guys and getting up a softball game?"

"I'm afraid not. Strenuous sports are prohibited here, you know."

"Just trying," he shrugged, and turned down the road again. There had to be something worth doing!

The attendant fell in step alongside him. "There's an excellent view of the waterfall down the road a way, and there's a pear orchard, too."

Mr. Fuller was silent.

They saw the waterfall and he ate half a dozen perfect pears. He didn't get a stomach ache though; he never got them anymore.

But there was something inside him, gnawing and craving to be let out. He longed to express himself in some way.

Finally he spoke. "George."

The attendant looked at him, smiling. He always smiled.

"George, there are many beautiful things here," he began. "And you've been very nice to me. But there's nothing to do here. You've given me a Utopia and an empty life! This is a place of idleness!"

Indignation began to boil within Mr. Fuller as he went on. "There's absolutely positively nothing here to hold my attention! Maybe I'm not cut out for this sort of

thing, but if this is what Heaven is like, I'd sooner have Hell!"

There was a twinkle in the attendant's eyes as he smiled more broadly than usual. "Is that so?" he asked. "Just where do you think you are, anyway, sir?"

A Word from Zelazny

Among the few surviving stories written during his teens, this one represents the first time that Zelazny ever received payment for a short story—$25 (about $190 in 2008 dollars)—and had it professionally published.[10] It was first published in the Euclid Junior High School literary magazine *Eucuyo*. He submitted it to a National Scholastic high school story contest—the same contest that Harlan Ellison won in his time—and earned the $25 plus the distinction of having it printed in the national magazine *Literary Cavalcade* Vol. 7 No. 1, October 1954. That milestone "inspired me to go out and write another hundred short stories. They were all rejected, but occasionally I'd get a little nice note. I had a sentence from Fletcher Pratt once, saying 'try again.' Ray Palmer dropped me a couple of notes saying 'Comes close this time,' 'Didn't quite make it.' Then I went to college and stopped writing altogether; I had too many courses even to read science fiction."[11]

Zelazny later had this story reprinted in the chapbook *And the Darkness Is Harsh*, where he remarked "I don't know where [this] piece came from."[12] Critics later cited recurring themes in Zelazny's work including death, immortality, suicide, automobile accidents—and it is noteworthy that some of these themes date back to this early published work.

Notes

Sir Thomas More coined the phrase "**utopia**" (a perfect place) for his 1516 book of the same name.

Footnotes

1

The Last Defender of Camelot*, 1980.*

2

Roger Zelazny: A Primary and Secondary Bibliography*, 1980.*

3

The Last Defender of Camelot*, 1980.*

4

This Immortal, Easton Press, 1986.

5

Amber Dreams*, 1983.*

6

No-Eyed Monster Summer 1968 #14, p 21–22.

7

Algol 13(2):9–14. Summer 1976.

8

Roger Zelazny, Theodore Krulik, 1986.

9

Four for Tomorrow*, 1967.*

10

Roger Zelazny: A Primary and Secondary Bibliography*, 1980.*

11

If, January 1969.

12

And the Darkness Is Harsh*, 1994.*