

still foraged—a ghost rummaging in the raped premises of his great-great-grandchildren.

Go rue the deserts man's already made!

Paul didn't come.

I read some poetry I could not understand in *Harper's*.

I got out the medical book on cancer and looked at throats for a while.

I took the Gideon Bible from the bureau drawer and read the Thirteenth Chapter of First Corinthians.

Then Psalms, awhile.

Then Luke, awhile.

I went into my bathroom and swallowed one of Tom's capsules.

8

It could have been morning; it could have been night; the light on the airfield was such as seeps across the northern pole in winter. Engines hiccupped and caught fire within themselves. Gouts of blue fire streamed from their steel nostrils and human figures warily aimed extinguishers as they crouched under the great wings. One B-29—a special craft—sucked up its ladder.

"Good luck!" a thin voice called.

The slam of a hatch replied. The plane snorted, belched, vibrated against its chocks, and lurched about. Like a house on casters—like a house-sized aluminum insect, it moved in the opalescent murk.

There was a pause.

At Flight Control, the ground officers of the Twentieth Air Force made a last check. It was not sergeant's work, or lieutenant's. Brass looked at the weather maps—high brass read the bulletins, squinted into the instruments, followed the meteorological balloons, talked through telephones. Anxious brass at the hangar interrogated the mechs—studied the quadruple checks, the four-colored V's ranged after a list of thirteen hundred and eleven critical parts of

a very heavy bomber. In the officers' mess, captains, young majors, young lieutenant colonels filled their trays, walked to the tables, sat, listened while the juke box sang—

My mammy done tole me—

Listened not to the song but to the quartet of motors on the gloomy, loud field.

Above the coughing and the clamor, the roar and thump of other engines—came the long run, tightening nerves.

"There she goes!"

"War's over."

"Shut up! And who told you, lieutenant, anyhow? And what?"

The ship—wider than she was long and just under a hundred feet from tailfin to bombardier's glass snout—gained altitude. Below, the island sank in the sea of air—palms, runways, warm, damp tropical odor of mold, hangars and administration buildings, flags.

There was now only the sky and the Pacific. . . .

They would—someday—laugh at the B-29 even while they admired her, and more especially, the men who flew her. Schoolkids in a museum of the far centuries—walking along plush ropes—examining the early aeronautical exhibits. "What a clumsy contraption! How dangerous! They used to explode in the air, you know. They could only fly about five thousand miles—bumped along at three hundred an hour. Hour, mind you! What on earth did they do to pass the time in such tight quarters? They fought with guns—yeah—those tubes. Central fire control, they called it—they could shoot eleven pairs at once. Shoot? A chemical explosion that pushed streamlined bits of metal from the tubes at low velocities—fast enough, though, to kill a man—or bring down such a crazy craft. Who'd think—one just like that—took the first real missile—?"

The bright kids-to-be, perhaps. Their galleons and triremes.

She took off—the then-perfect air-frame, slick and silver

—a multiplicity of engineering feats. She climbed. Five thousand. Eight.

"Okay. Pressurize."

The ears, hearts, lungs of sixteen men lost the feel of altitude and swiftly accepted the bubble of air that now flew in a metal skin.

Colonel Calm turned over the controls to Major Waite. The colonel's famous fighting smile flashed upon the proud navigator, the flight engineer, the idle bombardier, and the co-pilot. "You know the course, major."

The course, he meant, to the enemy.

The major had set plenty of cities on fire in his time. His brief time; he was twenty-six. Twenty-six years old and he'd flown courses that had burned out, smothered, smashed, and otherwise eliminated something on the order (he figured, being a man of mathematical bent) of three billion hours of human life. Expunged on that milk run. (You take the average life expectancy in enemy cities, multiply by days in a year and hours in a day, and multiply that by two further factors: average fatalities in a raid and number of raids led by Major Waite. Three billion man-woman-child hours, conservatively).

Colonel Calm glanced at Mr. Learned, the lone journalist permitted to go along—to write the eyewitness account. Mr. Learned sat on a parachute, his spectacles aslant, his hair awry, lost sleep whitewashed on his sharp countenance. His knees made a desk for an aluminum hospital chart board and on this, on yellow paper, using a pencil of a soft sort with which his pockets bulged, he scribbled. Once, he hitched at the collar of his unfamiliar uniform. A moment later, he glanced up. He smiled.

Colonel Calm nodded and scrambled into the tunnel that ran to the rear of his ship.

It was a journey he detested.

The passageway—a straight, metal intestine lined with cloth—traversed the bomb bay and was of a diameter suffi-

cient to contain one crawling man. If a pressurized B-29 were hit badly—or if it blew a blister—a man in the tunnel would be rammed through it by compressed air like a projectile and hurled against a bulkhead—head first, or feet first—at the speed of a hundred and sixty miles an hour.

The colonel crawled—gnawed by claustrophobia. He pushed his chute ahead in the dim tube—because that was regulations. He wished he had chosen to drag it, instead. The thing stuck. He lunged up over it and his ribs came in contact with the curved top of the tunnel. He was half-jammed there. Sweat broke out on him—he tried to breathe—his ribs hurt. He could yell—they could get a rope around his foot and haul him back. He inched clear of the chute—pushed it forward, and went on more slowly, struggling now with the afreets of panic—putting them down like mutineers, savagely.

Now he thought of the bomb bay—the oblong maw atop which he fought his way. Big as a freight car. Big as two garages set end to end. Big enough to hold—how many horses? A dozen? And what did it contain?

His sweat dried up. His skin pimples. Coldness seemed to flush the tube as coldness flushes a belly into which ice water has been gulped. Was the air here invisibly alive? Did uranium exude invisible, lethal rays—like radium? Or did it lie inert—in uncritical masses of unknown sizes (but not big)—waiting for union?

He went on.

When, at last, his head appeared at the far end of the tunnel he wore, again, his placid fighting smile.

The top CFC man dawdled in his swivel chair. The two blister gunners nodded and looked back into the neutral nothing of their provinces. The third chap smiled softly.

Colonel Calm came down the ladder, stretched, picked up his chute familiarly, and went on to the radar room. It was, he thought, glancing back at the tunnel opening, hardly

bigger than a torpedo tube. The craft in many ways resembled a submarine, when you thought about it.

There were four men in the radar room. Two at tables. One squatting, rocking with the plane's slight motion; and one stretched on the Army cot. He saw the colonel.

"'Shun!" he bawled.

"At ease, for God's sake!" Colonel Calm went to an old man who stared into the hood of a scope with the fascinated pleasure of a child seeing his first stereopticon slides. "Well, doctor? How is it going?"

Sopho glanced up—and he smiled, too. That was the thing about the colonel's mouth and eyes: you saw and you also smiled. Even when the kamikaze had connected, when Number 3 engine was on fire—pluming smoke and the CO₂ wasn't making headway, when flak splashed black flowers on the morning, when tracers rose like tennis balls, the deck was slick with gunners' blood, and when the inadequate, high, freezing air whistled through the ship—scaling fast, bits of plexiglass. Even then, he smiled—and you smiled back—and went on.

"Wonderful gadget," Dr. Sopho said, pointing to the hood, within which the colonel could see a scanning light-streak and the radiant wake, following and fading perpetually. "After this trip," the scientist went on, "maybe we can go back to work. Real work. Maybe—" he pointed at the scope—"use that for saving a few lives, instead."

"Hope so." The colonel thought of his tedious wife—of weary years in Washington—desiccated military establishments in Texas—the drain and drag of peacetime. "Hope so," he lied. "Everything set?"

Sopho grinned. "Hope so."

"There's a chance of a dud—?"

"Some. Partial dud, anyhow."

The colonel seemed agitated. "In that case, wouldn't they get the secret?"

The old man had a goatee. He reached for it. "Yes. Yes,

they might. And spend the next twenty years trying to put one together."

Colonel Calm continued down a narrow passage and opened a small door. Freckles Mahoney was taking his ease at the breeches of his tail guns—rocked back—staring at the vault where the powdery light was least. Daydreaming of a gum-chewing, short-haired, underbreasted Kalamazoo High School babe—and keeping his eyes peeled.

The door shut.

The colonel nerved himself for the return passage. Worse than being born—so far as he could remember. Dragging a placenta of parachute and harness through an aluminum canal with an atomic bomb beneath. He gave the three gunners his smile and they did not know it was—this time—a smile of fighting himself. At any rate, he thought, after one more crawl through eternity he could stay in the control compartment, forward. Unless Sopho wanted him.

He took hold of the ladder, sighted through the black tube to freedom's eye at the far end—and his blood turned to water.

Three men besides the gunners?

He felt horror between his shoulder blades—gun, knife, and worse. He checked crew and passengers.

He pretended to be untangling his chute straps, preparing to go through the round-eyed hell. Jordan on the top blister. Smith left, here. White right—and the unknown man beside him. No visible rank. Coveralls—insignia worn or torn off. Bearded like a submariner or the men he had relieved on Guadal. Hawk nose, brown eyes—extraordinarily intelligent, too—firm mouth, a gentle, definitely civilian look. Never saw him before.

This, the colonel realized, was obviously impossible.

He'd trained the crew, himself—picked each man, with special help from Headquarters—and met all the passengers weeks ago—old Sopho last—but, still—weeks ago.

Each member of the company—cleared, checked, quad-

ruple-checked, traced by G2 back through every childhood peccadillo, back through generations. Truman himself couldn't have got a man on board without the colonel's okay—his invitation and acquaintance.

He felt sick and feeble; he clung to the ladder under the tunnel mouth and staggered as the B-29 dived ponderously through a downdraft. Some last-minute thing, he decided; certainly the impossible passenger did not appear to be dangerous. One could not look at him and think of sabotage at the same time. These bloody, accursed, God-damned scientists! Very Important Person—he looked every inch a VIP—a VIP in science, not military affairs. No bearing to speak of—and that kindly smile at the corners of that mouth.

Last-minute stuff.

It would be assumed the colonel knew—but his four-way check had slipped.

When he returned to base—chevrons would fall. Lieutenants, captains, majors would drop back a grade.

See who he is.

The colonel went over to Smith, squatted.

"Skipper!" Smith said, returning the smile, the Air Force treasure.

The ship thrummed. Buzzed. Hummed. Ate air. Hurried toward the enemy islands.

Colonel Calm feigned to look from the blister. He supposed he saw, in the gray below, the corrugations of the Pacific, and above, the pearly heavens, the solid stretch of wing, the streamlined engine-housing. They were there, at least.

"The man with White. His name. Can't think of it."

"Chris."

"Chris what?"

Smith seemed embarrassed. "All I know. He came through the tunnel half an hour ago. 'Call me Chris,' he said. And he said, 'Mind if I sit?'"

The smile was a mask. He could keep it on his face even now. Eyes lighted up by the battery of will, corners crinkled, lips relaxed, a human twitch of the nose—man-loving, disdainful of blood and death, enemy and calamity. He could.

Came through the tunnel.

The man had not been in the control cabin, to begin with.

No bearded man.

No—Chris.

The colonel turned on his bent toes, the stranger watching.

Should he jump the guy?

Tell Smith to dive in with him?

Go back for a pistol and shoot from the tunnel?

The man smiled pleasantly.

Colonel Calm stood up, went round the post and track—the high barber's chair—and the gear and machinery that subtended the gunner in the top blister.

"Hi," the colonel said.

"Wonderful—a ship like this!"

"I've forgotten your last name."

"Chris."

"Oh. I don't believe I've had the pleasure—?"

The man held out his hand. "We've met. It was long ago, though."

Colonel Calm had the momentary sensation of remembering. Seen him somewhere—that's a fact.

Chris was smiling. "My being along was arranged late."

"I see."

"You'll want to look over my papers, perhaps? My orders, I should say."

"Yeah. White House stuff?"

The man shrugged. "Pretty high up, I'll admit." He began unbuttoning his coveralls.

The colonel wished the man would stop looking so

directly at him. Powerful eyes—like a lot of those scientific birds. They could, with a glance, give you an impotent sensation—a feeling that you weren't in command at all. A feeling that they commanded a force which could outlast you and would defeat you in the end. They made you feel—Christ bite them!—like a tin soldier, sometimes. And yet—high up. VIP. This was a trick mission—the trickiest of the war. You couldn't afford to make a fool of yourself. "Never mind," the colonel said. "My major probably checked you in—and forgot to mention it. The strain—"

"I know your major, yes. Sad."

"Sad? Greatest flying officer who ever took a plane off a base!"

"Cold-blooded."

"Right! Veins full of liquid helium. Have to be!"

"Have to be? Perhaps. I always hesitated—though—to think of men as numbers."

The colonel felt relieved. Major Waite's discussion of flight plans—his harangues in the briefing rooms—sometimes left the colonel a little chilled. Emptied-out. Obviously this Chris knew the major. He wasn't—fantastically—impossibly—an agent of the enemy. Now the colonel gestured toward the bomb bay—the radioactive uterus of the plane. "You—helped put it together?"

The man seemed to grow pale. His smile disappeared. "No."

"Then what—? In God's name what—?"

"I am here," Chris said in so low a tone his voice scarcely carried through the pulsing air, "because I promised."

"Promised? Promised who—when—?"

"Because I said it. Lo, I shall be with you always, even unto the end of the world."

The colonel stared—and remembered. He turned the color of ashes. His right hand, ungoverned, made upon

brow, shoulders and chest the sign of the Cross. His knees bent tremblingly.

But before he could genuflect the man called Chris touched his arm. "Don't, colonel!"

The officer, in his distraction, was muttering a woman's name, over and over.

Chris smiled painfully. "I am here." He glanced, then, at the watching gunners.

The colonel looked that way, too, and recovered something of his fighting smile. They were—after all—his command. It wouldn't do to let them see him prostrate. The gunners responded to the direct glance—and the return of the smile—by a brightening of their eyes and a faint curving of the corners of their mouths; their attention went back to duty—the duty of scanning the void outside the domes of plexiglass.

"My Lord—" the colonel all but whispered—"what shall we do?"

"Return."

The soldier's eyes faltered. "Abort the mission!"

"I hoped I might persuade you."

"Another would merely follow—!"

"And them."

"But—duty!"

"To whom is duty?"

A head appeared in the round mouth of the tunnel. Learned, the journalist, grinned like an imp. "Nasty crawl," he yelled. "Hope they've got that thing well insulated. Otherwise—I'm unsexed—or hotter than radium myself!" He saw the stranger, and halfway down on the ladder stood still. His eyes, ordinarily shrewd and compassionate, showed first a little amazement—and then twinkled. "A ringer! You would pull one like that, colonel! The American press wants to know who he is!" Learned chuckled and dropped to the metal floor. Strode the two steps forward. Gave his name.

Held out his hand. Explained himself. "You're a physicist, I take it?"

"My name is Chris." The dark eyes were luminous and kind.

"Chris who?"

The colonel took the journalist's arm in a hand like steel and whispered.

Learned, also, grew pale. He stared first at the colonel and then, uneasily, he eyed the stranger. Twice, the gleam of sardonic doubt shone. And twice, with all his will and concentration, he endeavored to make some satirical reply: to say, skeptically, that this would be the greatest interview in two millenniums.

Or to ask how things were in the Blue Up Yonder.

He failed. He—too—abruptly knew. The resources of his training abandoned him—left but the residue of naked personality. His tongue circled his lips. He gave the stranger another uncertain glance, a hopeful glance—and suddenly, on the impulse, took out his cigarettes and offered them.

Chris shook his head. "Thanks, Learned."

"Do you mind—"

"Of course not."

Now the journalist and the colonel shakily fumbled with cigarettes and the wavering flame of a match.

Chris had turned. He was looking expectantly toward the narrow door that led to the radar room and from it, presently, Sopho came. "Thought I'd run a counter through the tunnel," he began. "Check things." He saw Chris. "Hello! Didn't realize I hadn't met the ship's full complement."

The colonel and the reporter watched.

"My name is Chris, doctor."

"Can't place you. The Chicago Group, perhaps. I didn't meet them all."

"No."

"Army, then? White House? OSS? I'm a physicist. Sopho's the name."

"This man," said Learned, in a hoarse, uneven voice his ears had never heard before, "comes from—another place." He told the physicist.

Dr. Sopho's right thumb and forefinger touched his small beard. Across the back of his hand—tanned to leather by his long residence in the desert—skin pimpled and the reddish hairs rose. The tiny phenomenon passed—passed like the eddy of air that dimples still water and disappears. His great head with the thin nose and the straight, exaggerate brow bent forward attentively. He was searching the stranger for obvious signs of madness. It became apparent that he found none.

"Incredible," he murmured.

"You do not believe me?"

The scientist shook his head. "My dear fellow—I do not even believe *in* you. So—naturally—" He turned with abruptness to the colonel. "How did he get aboard? His papers?" He now saw the colonel's frantic, imploring eyes. "Great God, man—you don't accept—?"

"It's the truth," Colonel Calm responded.

Sopho looked quickly at Learned—who glanced away.

The scientist seemed, for the first time, alarmed. Not alarmed at the statement made by the man but at its effect upon two persons whom he had considered impervious to wild suggestion. Obviously, it was up to him to break the lunatic's spell. Some fabulous stowaway—and the journalist and the soldier—drawn overfine by the magnitude of this mission—had become prey to imagination.

One humors the mad—at any rate, to begin with. "I see," said Sopho.

He now faced the stranger—who stood in their midst. "Tell me. Just why did you decide to accompany this particular raid?"

Chris, still smiling, repeated his words about his promise—and after that, the promise.

"End of the world, eh?" Sopho chuckled. "You sure?"

"Your world—perhaps."

"You want us to give it up? The mission?" Sopho pointed at the bomb bay. "That?"

Chris looked steadily at him. "If I remember rightly, doctor, you began the preparation of—that—" he, also, pointed—"not to use against men, but to have on hand if your other enemy employed such instruments. He did not. He lies defeated."

Sopho nodded. "Right. Now we are using it to shorten the war. Save lives."

"Save lives?"

"By shortening the war, man! Simple arithmetic—!"

"What about—the next war? And the next? The wars beyond that?"

"This weapon should—and in my opinion will—put an end to war."

Slowly, Chris shook his head. "Strange reasoning. A *weapon* will put an end to war."

"An absolute weapon, man! The world will never again risk going to war. Never again dare take the risk!"

"It will fear too much, you think?"

"Precisely."

"But isn't it fear, doctor, that has always caused men to wage war? Fear in this form today—tomorrow in that form—?"

"Can you think of a better means of ending wars—foolish wastes!—than an absolute weapon? We have changed the whole picture of war!"

"But not changed men!"

There ensued a moment without talk.

Chris presently said, "This weapon. Where it falls, the genes of men will be broken. Perhaps their children—perhaps their grandchildren—will carry the heritage. Headless

bodies. Eyeless faces. There—teeth everywhere. And yonder—no voice. Generation after generation, for a thousand years—this great invention will go on waging your present war, doctor, against the unborn.”

The colonel grabbed the scientist's arm. “Is that true?”

Sopho shrugged. “In a certain per cent of cases, where radiation is extreme but not fatal—naturally, the reproductive capacity will display unpredictable, permanent damage. Recessive damage. When, however, two persons mate who exhibit matching gene deterioration—then—as this man says—”

The colonel's hand dropped. “I didn't know,” he murmured. “Not certainly. I didn't even know that you men were sure.”

Learned spoke. “War against the generations! Good—!” He checked himself.

Chris said, “Have you that right?”

Sopho replied angrily, “That's a right implicit in any war! If you kill a soldier—you destroy *all* his potential progeny—not simply endanger a few of them. The same fact applies to civilians.”

“You do not,” Chris answered, “corrupt the children of the survivors for centuries to come. No.” He meditated a moment. “If the salt of the earth shall lose its savor, where-with shall ye resavor it?”

Sopho said, “If changing man's environment will not change the evil of war—”

“Evil?” Chris repeated questioningly. “But does not man always believe his wars are just? Whatever cause—whichever side?”

Sopho ignored the inquiry. “—how do we change man?”

“Love one another,” Chris said.

A slow smile came upon the physicist's face. “We should have loved the Nazis? And love the Jap who lies ahead?”

“Of course.” Chris nodded soberly. “If you had loved them, you would never have let them sink into the pit of

their despair—arm—turn upon yourselves. Had you loved them, you would have assisted them—before you were compelled to restrain them by such violence.”

“The rights of nations—” Sopho began.

“—exist in the minds of men. You did not love them. You loved yourselves. You saw torment born in them all, and saw it grow, and feared it—and stood, like any Pharisee, reciting your virtues but not lifting a finger to assist them.”

“He's right.” Learned shook his head ruefully. “How right he is!”

“Love!” Sopho said the word scornfully. “Little you know of Nature. Little of love you'll see there!”

“It's strange,” Chris answered, “that I see in Nature nothing *else* but love. Pain—yes. Sorrow—yes. Tragedy—yes. To every individual. Yet—in the sum of Nature—only love.”

Sopho's eyebrows arched skeptically. “Do you really believe that the primitive phrases of a man who possibly existed—some two thousand years ago—could fix the attention of a modern scientist?”

“Evidently they do not.” Chris bent and peered through the round, bowed window of the ship as if he could orient himself even among the traceless clouds. He looked at them again. “I talked in very simple words, doctor, to very simple people. The extreme simplicity of the formulations should—I thought—make the concepts increasingly understandable, as men pursued truth. I advised them, remember, to know the truth. I meant all of truth. I warned them that an excessive fascination with worldly goods—to the exclusion of inner goodness—would undo all peace of mind—”

Sopho chuckled. “Surely—we've pursued truth? What we carry today represents a great accumulation of truth! And I'll also agree that most men who merely amass worldly goods—the rich—aren't greatly interested in science. In truth. In anything but money. Still—”

Chris had raised his hand. "This ship—the bomb it carries—all the equipment and paraphernalia of the universities which lie behind it—the projects undertaken and achieved there—what are they, too, doctor—if not worldly goods?"

"Then you would have us put science aside? Stop seeking such truth—?"

"Seek truth in two ways, doctor. Within—and without." He drew a breath, frowned and spoke again. "Love—in man—takes various forms. Love of self. Love of woman. Love of other men. Love of cosmos. Each is an altruism so designed that, through love, man shall preserve himself in dignity, procreate, and preserve all others even at the cost of his own life. Greater love hath no man than this last. Not one of these altruisms can be peacefully maintained unless the others also are given their proportionate due. The conscience of a man rises from the relatedness of these loves and is his power to interpret how valuable, relatively, each one is—not to him alone, but to all men, as each man is beholden to all. To reason only in the mind is to express the love of worldly goods, alone. Have you ever reasoned in your heart, doctor?"

"Irrational emotions! Reason has no place there!"

"But it has. As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. You scientists refuse to study how your hearts think. Repent, I said. Confess, the churches say—and worldliness encompasses them! Join, they say. But I say, when you have yielded up your vanity you will contain the immortal love. My time is short, gentlemen. I thought to remind you."

"I remember—!" the colonel's lips pronounced the inaudible words.

Learned looked at the floor. "How do you tell them—now?"

Sopho said disgustedly, "Metaphysics!"

"Light was the symbol I tried to give them," Chris went on gently. "The Cross was the symbol they adopted.

The pain of self-sacrifice was obvious to them. The subjective reward—incomprehensible. Thus they changed it all. I told them of many mansions. They chose this mansion or that—and scoured each other off the earth, to set one heaven in place of the heaven of those they defeated. Holy wars! Is such a thing conceivable to God as a holy war? Alas. The words—the images—the effort is still uncomprehended. I said Light. I said Truth. I said Freedom. I meant enlightenment. Yet nearly every church that uses my name is a wall against light and a rampart against enlightenment, using fear, not love, to chain the generations in terror and pain and ignorance." He pointed again. "And now—this is called civilization, and in my name, also! Enlightenment! Knowledge!" He fell silent; but at last, smiled a little. "A few knew. A few will always know. Francis of Assisi—he guessed. Thomas à Kempis. Most who knew were church heretics in their day—as I was in mine. And what I say is still heresy."

He became silent again. He looked from face to face. "Colonel. You are a soldier. You are ready by your profession to die for other men. It is a noble readiness. Will you turn back?"

The colonel retreated a step and leaned against the riveted bulkhead. Sweat once more broke upon his countenance, poured down; he crossed himself again and Chris sadly shook his head.

Finally the colonel could speak. "You ask me to be disloyal."

"I ask you—only to decide in your own self—what loyalty is."

"I cannot turn, then."

"Learned?"

The journalist's eyes were steady—and tragic. "Nothing would be gained. Others would merely follow in place of us."

"I but asked you to decide for yourself—not for them."

The journalist flushed. "In my profession we do not even agree to stand ready to die for other men. I am here not to determine, but merely to report."

"Sopho?"

The physicist's eyes blazed suddenly. "Yes," he said. "I'll go back! I was never certain. I am always ready to re-study a problem!"

Chris put his arm around the old man. "*You!*"

But the scientist pulled away. "On one condition."

"And that?"

"Prove yourself!"

"But, doctor, it is you who must provide the testimony—!"

"Empirical evidence is my condition. Something measurable. Suspend, for one moment, one natural principle—"

Ruefully, Chris laughed. "To simple men—fishermen, farmers, tax collectors—the power of any genuine conviction seemed miraculous because of its accomplishments. I healed the neurotics of my day. By suggestion, I added to the innocent gaiety of many a gathering. But even that poor, positive procedure is inverted now; many churches find their miracles in the hysterics of their own sick—bleeding, stigmata, fits!" He sighed. "Surely you, doctor, a miracle-maker in reality—are not naïve enough to ask that the very heart of truth be magically violated so you may *accept* truth? The evidence is—*within you*. I never said more. Find it there, man!"

"I thought so," the doctor replied in a cold voice.

Chris spoke persuasively. "*You* could work a miracle of transformation within *yourself*. But—even if I should suspend the very forces upon which that possibility depends—you would exert the last resource of your ingenuity to find out by what mechanical trick I achieved your illusion, as you'd call it! Prove, doctor, that you would not!"

"Let's see the experiment." Sopho's eyes were hard.

The stranger thought a moment and presently chuckled to himself. "The unsolved riddle of the *cause*—the *source*—the nature—of the energy in your atoms, doctor! Would you like to understand that next step in your science?"

"Impossible!"

Chris looked ardently at the old man.

A moment later, the scientist's eyes shut. An expression of immense concentration came upon his features. Perspiration welled and trickled on his countenance—as on the colonel's. Suddenly his eyes opened again. He grabbed the colonel's arm. "Great God, man! I've cracked the toughest problem in physics! The thing just came to me this moment! Why! With this equation—we'll be able to make bombs that will assure American domination for a century! I'll win my second Nobel Prize! Every nuclear physicist's head will swim with envy! The financial possibilities—billions!—trillions! I'll just get it on paper—!" He broke off. "Wasn't there—somebody else—standing here?" he said perplexedly. "Never mind! Lend me a pencil, Learned!"

"Somebody else?" The colonel shook his head. "Nobody but the three of us. And the gunners. Jesus, I wish this mission was ended! I've been having a terrible struggle in my conscience about it!"

Learned said, "Have you? Me—too. I kind of hate humanity today. I kept wishing—something would break down, and stop the whole thing. I get a choked-up feeling when I think of those people."

The scientist was crouching, now—gazing at the streaming gray desolation beyond the windows. "Funny," he said to the gunner at his side. "A minute ago—I was sure I'd got a new insight into a very complex problem. Now—I can't even remember my approach."

The gunner, who held palaver of the brass and all VIPs to be but one more nuisance of war, said, "Yeah?"

The B-29 flew on toward its as yet unspecified destination.

The City of Horror and Shame.

Back at the base, the brass was laying plans for a second run—to the City of Naked Sorrow.

9

A scorcher.

It was my father's phrase and came back to me as familiarly, when I opened my eyes, as the heard reveille of my childhood. The sun glared on the dark window-blinds, penetrating them at myriad pinpoints. I remembered summer mornings in Massachusetts, Ohio, North Dakota, Jersey, and on the cool, bright shores of Lake George.

"Rise and shine, everybody! It's a scorcher!"

The buoyant baritone of a man of God, excited by his life, frustrated in every excitement by his Faith; a man in there, as we used to say, trying.

The room was a fumarole—its atmosphere spent by my breathing and stained with the carbonic reek of yesterday's cigarettes. Nothing came through the windows; they were open to the eye—but invisibly walled by the heat. A stratum of smoke and dust lay across a sunbeam; the light pierced it, struck the corner of a mirror, broke, and rebounded to the ceiling in a prismatic dazzle: red, green, blue, yellow, purple.

The little awl had ceased pecking my throat. I swallowed—without unnatural sensation—reached for the phone, ordered coffee, and sat up naked on the bed's edge, leaving a damp plaster cast of myself in the sheet. I took a short shower and picked up the Sunday papers cautiously.

Karl didn't speak.

Saving his strength for the exhaustion of the day.

Ten-fifteen.

The coffee set my nerves dancing like a swarm of gnats, without bringing relief from the deadness, the ache, the recollection of sleep in every cell—fatiguing sleep—and the yearn for youth's restful slumber.