

# NEGAVIT

**George Abbe**

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S.U.N.Y., Plattsburgh

(Continued from preceding issue)

On our primitive bicycles, Ratiche and I passed along the quiet, pastoral roads where owls, partridges, foxes, woodchucks, deer, squirrels, rabbits came and went without molestation from humans and without attacking each other. A bear wandered near the road, and we stopped and approached it. Our conversation was not exactly like that between mortals, but many years of careful, humane experimentation with all kinds of wild life had developed in people certain extra-sensory powers that had long lain dormant, and one of them was the Meaning Impulse--the transmission of a general urge, idea, or emotion, not presented in specific detail, but accurately enough telegraphed so that a real exchange took place.

This morning, I simply exerted this psychic impulse in terms of the message: "Are you planning a new family these days?"

I did not do it by uttering any sound; rather, I concentrated hard on the idea--sort of tensed myself violently, so that a chill spread up my back and my nerves tingled and jumped.

Back from the bear came the reply, as he shambled about, grinned, and flipped his paws up and down convivially: "Hell, I can't even find a dame who really takes to me. And they're all so snobbish now. They get too much love and affection from you highpowered mortals."

Ratiche and I laughed appreciatively, and Ratiche said: "What are you doing for sports?"

Back came the impulse: "Learning to read."

It was true. Our Ministry of Communication had been putting out a new news bulletin



Jim Harter, *Animals*: 1419  
Copyright-Free Illustrations.  
New York: Dover, 1975

entitled Between the Species. It had large print and compressed ideas, and it was charged with a peculiar energy which acted like the physical presence of a human person and aided animal or bird or insect to catch the Impulse Meaning of the printed words.

Now the bear took from his armpit, where he had been carrying it whimsically and conspiratorially all the while, a copy of Between the Species, and pointing to the top item, made a fluent growling sound, and we caught his thought impact. He was correctly conveying the printed message--a report of a convention of rodents--rats, chipmunks, and mice--and the bear expressed in soundless, psychic humor and irony: "They complained that you humans are trying to tell them what to do about overpopulation--coming to their secret meetings and boring from within--after all the centuries they were supposed to be subversives, boring within your homes."

Ratiche and I shook with merriment, and the bear peered from the news-sheet at us and then all around him at the fields and trees, in a ludicrous, half-amused, half-fearful manner, his fuzzy head cocked, as if to offer muted satire more effective than our explicitness.

We left him and continued along the idyllic roads where people were sitting under the trees, pointing or writing or composing music. Four-fifths of the day was devoted to leisure now, and the arts benefitted; much

religious and psychic experimentation was also pursued, and participant sports were popular, though not as much as the creative, inward activities--the contemplative, aesthetic, or extrasensory.

As we approached the commodious stucco house of Grayson Tandrell, the side door opened, and my wife, Agra, stepped out. When she looked up and saw us, she started a bit, and for an instant I thought a fear, a guilty expression passed over her face like a fleeting shade. Then she smiled, burst into her usual animated buoyancy of manner, and hastened toward us.

"Darling!" she embraced me, and her warmth seemed so honest, richly sensuous and spiritually exhilarating as always.

Our marriage had been ideal. We had not had children, but the Council encouraged birth control, even to the extreme, because of the persistent concern about overpopulation--one of those dread phenomena of the Pre-Cataclysm Era that had brought about that human downfall. But we enjoyed the children of others and entered into many community activities involving parents and youngsters alike.

"Indeed," Agra had said to me, her radiant beauty piercing me with desire, with fear that I might some day lose her, "It's as though they're all our children."

"And I'm just as glad," I replied, "that you don't have to run the risks of childbirth."

"But with our modern attitudes of Cooperative Trust in the Natural God and drawing on the Infinite Energies, I could not suffer too much," she said.

But I wondered if I detected a note of sarcasm in her voice.

"What are you doing at Grayson's?" I asked. "I thought you were conducting the class in watercolor today."

Her eyes flashed a jewel keenness of life, and her bearing was cavalier.

"Oh, I left Anne to do it. I needed to check something here."

She looked at me with sudden serious-

". . . something in line with your duties. I was told that Grayson is exploiting animals, and so I visited--thinking I could help you."

It sounded a bit lame; Grayson was the most handsome, popular bachelor in the community; but I accepted it as the truth and kissed her.

"You're a honey-bun," I murmured, closing my eyes and pressing my mouth into her cloudy, fragrant hair. "Always beautiful in mind and figure."

She responded to me with the pressure of her body and then pirouetted away. "I'm off--shopping--awfully late today!" she cried. "See you at home."

"And did you find Grayson breaking any laws?"

"You'll see."

She flitted away like a pixy. Although her figure was on the heavier side, being voluptuous, maddeningly, soft and deep, in its swelling roundness, she was quick, astonishingly agile in movement, and was one of the stars in the Dance Troupe.

I watched her go and reflected that she had been a remarkable assistant in many of my projects as Minister of Communications and Director of the Institute of Equality. There was no reason for my being so suspicious, jealous--and yet the doubt would not be put down. Why had she come here? To my knowledge she had never had the slightest association with Grayson--outside of casual contacts at social occasions.

We knocked at the front door and were admitted by Grayson himself, a tall, genial, intense person with a sort of peering, piquant face, like a mole's. He didn't look cruel or sadistic. In fact, he was rather gentle-appearing and withdrawn; his eyes were a muted, dusky brown, his lips plump and restless. He kept biting his lower lip, then wetting it nervously.

He led us into the formal living room. I could see two empty glasses on the table and what seemed suspiciously like the amber

of liquor in the glass bottom--although in all of the nation no liquor was sold legally, there were a few bootleg outfits, and now and then an arrest for intoxication was carried out. The penalty was severe--a year in close confinement, with special educational assignments and tests. But drinking was extremely rare in Unaria. People simply no longer found pleasure in artificial stimulation when, because of their increased spiritual and aesthetic powers, they derived so much more pleasure in natural pursuits, and were so naturally stimulated and zealous and quickened by life, and did not require the contrived and synthetic. In Unaria, forced methods, the fabricated, were always avoided when possible. The natural was a prime value, and this was shown in childbirth, where women eagerly welcomed the natural pain, as a revelation opening to them new doors to the mystic, to Christ's solicitude and grace and strengthening mercy.

The fact that the glasses appeared to show traces of liquor made me more suspicious of Agra than ever. What in God's name was Grayson doing to her?

"I note that Agra was here," I said, affably, off-handedly.

"Yes, she wanted me to join her water color group. I agreed. I do have a slight talent. In school, I won the Tel Award. Not much, maybe, but enough to make me egotistic about it."

He laughed, softly and jerkily, then hastily wet his lips with his tongue and hastened out to the kitchen to get us a popular fruit juice drink. He took with him the two empty, sinister glasses on the table.

The Tel Award was given each year to the young student who showed the most promise in Telepathic Art. I had had no idea that Grayson Tandrell was so gifted in that direction. It did, of course, make Agra's interest in him quite logical--but that did not palliate my discovery of her coming here in the least.

Grayson returned with the fruit drink. We drank and exchanged pleasantries. Then I said: "Grayson, I am told that you are experimenting with animals. You know that experimenting per se is not forbidden. If the other creatures wish to cooperate or if it does not entail suffering, we are liberal-

minded about it. But . . ."

Grayson had turned a bit pale. He dropped his gaze and then glanced up at us with that peering, piquant, mole's look.

"I'll show you what I'm doing," he said.

And he brushed his untidy hair back from his forehead and led the way down a long corridor. Nibbling his lower lip and wetting both lips with his tongue, he opened the door and we went into a glittering-white, immaculate room containing several cages of different sizes. In them were solitary hamsters and mice, rabbits, groups of rabbits, dogs, and cats.

"Now, here," Grayson said, "is a solitary white rat."

"Yes," I said, "one of the most delightful and talented of animals, as Unaria has found out, and they used to trap, shoot, and poison rats, abuse or torture them to death. They were considered the lowest of the low. To be called 'a rat' was the worst anathema."

"These rats are not tortured," said Grayson. "I have had this white rat in solitary confinement for nearly a year."

"But why?" Ratiche asked. "Surely he must be miserable. A rat is a gregarious creature."

"I have rabbits in solitary for the same reason," said Grayson.

"Which is what?"

Grayson turned toward us. His brown eyes glazed over with emotion; his plump lower lip moved restlessly, and he wet it with his tongue like a small boy trying to write meticulously well in the prescribed penmanship manner.

"Gentlemen, I am a believer in Unaria. I have not been a noisy dissenter or participated in the protest demonstrations the law allows--small and infrequent though they are. I am convinced that we are on the threshold of the perfect Kingdom Christ himself promised and has visited us here to depict in vivid homily."

"And which he will urge on us again,"

Ratiche added, "when he comes back a third time, next year. Hovar has reported that all the psychics in the Baylel Nebulae where Christ has appeared often, agree that his latest messages are clear: he will be on this earth again next summer."

I studied Grayson's face. He averted his glance.

"And so," I asked him, "what is your point?"

"The point is . . .," Grayson straightened his shoulder and tried to look serene, authoritative, almost imperious, "I am a patriot of this perfect New Jerusalem we are building, but I have come to the conclusion that there is a weakness."

"The Ministry of Communications has never pretended," I said, "that we are one hundred percent flawless."

"Nor has the Ministry of Economics," added Ratiche.

"There has been a struggle," I went on, "and it has kept our spiritual and moral muscle hard. But what is the shortcoming?"

"Negavit," Grayson tapped the cage bars with his finger. Inside, the white rat looked despondent, still, passive, uninterested in life. "And I have proved it with this rat, and others, and with rabbits, as well."

"How?"

"For many years . . .," Grayson pronounced his words slowly and distinctly, "Unaria has emphasized adequate space, quiet, individual privacy and isolation, and freedom of land and movement. This was to encourage self-reliance, initiative, reflection, inward searching and growth. This was to develop advanced, independent, value-conscious people with strong character."

"And it has," I declared, becoming a bit irritated, defensive.

"Maybe. But what will happen if we pursue this theory to its ultimate conclusion? What will happen when people lose their natural gregariousness and enjoy being lonely and isolated to an extreme degree? They will no longer care about companionship,

common social ventures, group activities, sports, institutions of any kind. They will be anti-social, hermits. There will be no more community. They will vegetate, rot, disintegrate, pining away in small, sterile retreats where they will crouch, lethargic and dull, doing only what they must for a few scraps of food. The mission God has on earth for humankind will fail. The human soul will putrefy."

Grayson's mild brown eyes had become electric with intensity, conviction.

"These solitary animals prove it. Without companionship, they corrode and deteriorate, lose appetite and concern for anything around them. After a year, if I put others of their own kind in with them, they are apathetic, or show marked antipathy, often growing violent."

"And you feed them Negavit?" I inquired.

"Yes. I increased the concentration of Negavit as the process of indifference and decay became more marked--but no amount of the Unaria type of nourishment could reverse the trend. The organism approached death. And . . ."--Grayson gazed directly into my eyes and then into Ratiche's--"that is what will happen to mortals on this globe, if we persist in our mad behavior, neurotic sensitivity and tenderness, our false doctrine of the sacredness of all things even at the expense of the individual human life and the social organism."

Grayson was silent, and there was no sound in the fanatically purified, sparkling laboratory except the low, clear moan of a dog at the farthest end. Didn't that indicate pain? I wondered. It must. I would find out.

"That dog." I jerked my head in that direction. "He's certainly suffering."

Grayson stared at me.

"He has come to a natural end--old age. Nothing I did has caused him misery or pain."

"And this beautiful white rat," I said, looking at that melancholy, passive, hopeless face, the lean, drooping body, "do you mean to say it isn't wretched, suffering?"

"Why, no. To lose weight and alertness,

to pine away and reject one's own kind is not agony. It is only an undesirable state--if one knows its opposite--and the rat doesn't."

"But," I said, and now anger was pumping up in me, "the state of this rat is not happy, normal, or fulfilling. No creature is meant to live and die like that. It is artificially imposed on the animal by people. It is brutality; it is evil; and it breaks the law. We are intended by God to aid and comfort and sustain each other--all forms of life--all creatures--who are equally sacred in God's eyes. If you could collect your data without the cruelty of forcing this creature to decline, fade away, lose heart and interest, and die--fine. But this is deliberate, calculated cruelty. All the cheer, the hope, the normal pursuits that give animation to all earth's beings are missing, and taken away. It is deprivation, pure and simple. This wretched friend of ours is suffering."

My voice rose; I was trembling with indignation.

"And he should be relieved of such conditions, not intentionally compelled to endure them. Obviously, he is weak, frustrated, warped; he is suffering--sick in body and spirit."

Grayson shook his head.

"I don't think he is."

The dejected, empty expression on the rat's face--and he had scarcely moved since our arrival--made my blood fume and rage. I fought to keep my poise.

"We'll check it," I said.

I took out the slender, thermometer-like Pain Gauge, an instrument which had been used in India in Pre-Cataclysm days to prove that plants and trees recoiled from pain and felt it as surely as people do--and in very similar fashion.

"But how accurate is it?" Grayson asked, unctuously, patronizingly yet bitter.

I turned to him savagely.

"It works. You wouldn't question it unless your conscience bothered you."

I unlocked the cage and held the gauge near the rat's head. The animal did not stir. The principle of the wonderful instrument was plain enough. If placed on the skin of the subject, or within an inch or two if it, for a full minute, the irradiations of protesting energy, of resistance and recoil--in other words, pain, physical and mental--would be registered clearly by the red arrow.

I placed the instrument almost against the animal's skin and waited. In a minute's time the arrow had climbed to a distinct level of pain--physical discomfort and misery--intense spiritual pain--completely inexcusable.

"There you are." I withdrew the gauge. "A high degree of suffering, by the standards of measurement agreed on in Unaria. You've been engaged in criminal experimentation."

Grayson drew himself up taller. His face was pale; his eyes glowed belligerently.

"Wait, now. I have another project, and its results will justify all I have done."

He led us to a cage where another white rat was galivanting about gaily--riding on swings, running on rotating bells, tumbling on mats, and revolving on bars.

"Here," announced Grayson, "is another white rat from the same litter--kept in isolation also. The only difference in condition--"I've fed it meat."

Again there was a silence. And again we could hear--above the click-click of the tread-mill the rat was now climbing, unavailingly and exuberantly--we could hear that dog groaning. And I recalled now, in the days before the Holocaust, scientists, in order to hush and conceal their depravity, to prevent outsiders from hearing the clearcut evidence of their atrocities, would cut the vocal cords of the unfortunate dogs, who must then writhe soundlessly in their anguish.

I labored to control my fury.

"It is outright evil," I said. "You induced pain in the other creature. You gave meat to this one. The eating of meat is against the Divine Law. It means the taking of life, murder. What did you kill?"

"I killed nothing."

Grayson laughed; he almost jeered at me.

"I merely waited until animals died naturally. I scoured the fields and woods and discovered their freshly dead bodies and brought them back for food."

"It is still illegal!" I exclaimed, "whether for mortal or wild creatures. It encourages the cardinal sin we have all overcome--living off the suffering and death, the flesh of other life. That is why we all--human and non-human--depend on Negavit--the non-sentient, non-living food--not even alive as much as minerals and plants and minute protozoa are alive."

Grayson raised a clenched hand.

"But I'm discovering what will happen to us if we continue our present custom of wide separation, loneliness, and isolation!" he cried. "And I'm revealing our only solution--meat. The discarded food. We must begin to eat it again--to retain the vital energy though all the forthcoming stages of increased individualism, privacy, self-reliance."

"It is still evil," Ratiche declared. "Ultimate evil. You used meat. It creates the taste, the gradual dependence."

"And," I added, "in the other case, the rat fed with Negavit, but kept entirely apart from all comforting, redeeming, healing contact, you are guilty of flagrant cruelty."

He stood there in silence. Through my mind passed memories of conditions before the Holocaust--the infamous Government Agency, FDA, Federal Drug Administration, which deliberately poisoned hundreds of thousands of dogs--poisoned them to death to find out about new drugs. And they all had to die! The doses had to be increased until the drug killed them. The agonies were indescribable. And, of course, this exemplary activity by the Government itself set a pattern for all labs--commercial, private, State, and Foundation-backed. The massive torture of the helpless was appalling--and unchallenged by any appreciable counter-force in society.

This evil, along with war, was the chief reason, of course, why the earth had been overwhelmed by God's bitter retribution--his scourge of germ warfare, atom bombing, earth-

quake, and flood, the sinking of old continents, the rising of new ones.

"You remember," I said, "the hideous practices of the former age; we must never let them happen again."

Grayson inclined his head mutely. He was pale. He plucked his soft under-lip with long, agile fingers, and frowned. There was a spark of rebellion in his glance.

Ratiche began to speak: "Your intentions, Grayson, may be the finest, Grayson, but, as you know . . ."

His remarks were cut short by a blood-chilling scream of agony from the cage across the lab, where a dog had been pacing desperately, and groaning. We hurried over. The animal was skin and bones; its eyes were pits of frustrated, blazing, frenzied anguish. She was twitching in her death throes.

"Good God!" I cried. "What have you done to the poor creature?!"

"I've been studying her reactions to extended periods of starvation," Grayson said.

"Starvation!" Ratiche cried. "But this is calculated atrocity! How long has she been without food?"

"Twenty-seven days."

"Twenty-seven days! Merciful Christ! How can you stand it? Are you a Unarian, or a pervert, a cannibalistic monster, to endure the sight of this poor wretch? This is the sort of thing they did before the Devastation, the Great Punishment."

Grayson stood erect and belligerent.

"It is for the good of humankind."

"The good of humankind, hell!" I burst out. "Damn your soul, and those of all others who permitted this sort of horror before, and would like to promote it again."

Ratiche smiled sardonically.

"We're going to have to arrest you, Grayson."

Grayson's lips curled derisively."

"Of course. The perfect state must crush the slightest attempt at change."

I reached into my pocket for the handcuffs.

"Not only that your case matters so much, per se," I said, "but you also might contaminate others, and the revolt would threaten the foundations of our charitable and compassionate order."

I slipped the handcuffs on the experimenter.

"We'll make out a card at the Municipal Building."

4



At home, I said to Agra: "Grayson is a plain criminal. One of his dogs died a terrible death while we were there."

She came and slipped her arms around me and leaned her head against my chest.

"Doan, try not to be too vindictive."

How beautiful she was, I reflected, looking down at her fleecy, glinting hair, the pure whiteness of her skin. How fortunate I had been to have such a love as Agra's. It had conferred on me the strength and effectiveness of ten men. To come from love-making with her was to walk exalted, humbled, reverent, to find all faculties sharpened to the point of supernatural inspiration, genius. Now I tried to curb, unsuccessfully, a twinge of suspicion, jealousy.

"Why are you so concerned about Grayson?"

"He is a talented painter. I hate to see him crippled by any political misadventure."

I became angry again.

"To inflict suffering like that, he must be vicious, warped."

"But he believes it will further the welfare of people."

"But all life is 'people.' And even if we were a so-called 'higher life,' would we be that much more important that such means would be justified?"

She was distressed. Clasping her hands, she paced the room.

"He has the spirit of the old-time scientist. He has a passion for data--regardless of how it's gathered."

"As for that, Agra, we know that other means would be far better, far more scientific than the subjection of a whole organism to pain, starvation, psychological states of strain, distress, or abnormality. It is sadistic madness deliberately to induce these things. Far more efficient were the methods--undertaken, unfortunately, by only a few enlightened ones--employing high-powered microscopes, tissue culture, etc. But we have none of these instruments and refuse to develop these approaches again, because of the lack of technology and the wider tendencies of corruption and scientific degeneracy which they would foster."

Suddenly, Agra threw her head back, so that her lustrous, beautiful hair flooded over her shoulders.

"Doan, I wonder if Unaria isn't going entirely in the wrong direction, if we shouldn't put humans at the center once again--humans as the creatures made in the image of God."

I stared. I groaned. My love for her was torn asunder by her words.

"My God, Agra, what are you saying? You sound like the rankest reactionary! All the natural world is made in the image of God--and of Christ, as well. This is the stupidest heresy."

I paused for breath, to steady my nerves.

"You sound like Amdar Cutcheon, the

Minister of Aesthetics. He claims that we should encourage the old dissenting ideas in the arts--for variety, stimulation. I agree that we ought to know about them, see them dramatized, but never allow their widespread popularity again."

"Why not?"

"If people return to such convictions and beliefs naturally, without propaganda, fine! But otherwise . . ."

I shook my head.

"I'm afraid that you've been influenced by Grayson. That way, we undermine our entire faith."

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Grayson Tandrell was to go on trial in a month, but one of the progressive tenets of Unaria's code was the view that education was indivisible and perpetual and should continue even as an accused person waited to appear in court. Grayson was an important person in our society, a cultured and gracious leader in the field of sports coordination, and it was imperative that we try to salvage his former and better self, which had subscribed devoutly to our conviction that all life is equally sacred.

In line with this official state policy, I planned to take Grayson to visit a hermit who had been living for four years with little or no human contact and on nothing but the simplest, unseasoned, unspiced Negavit--and who, because of this, had flowered spiritually, artistically, and psychically. His recognition, clairvoyance, and telepathic powers were now more acute than those of any persons living in the villages or towns; his receptive capacities--in reading, absorbing nature, art, music, and all experience--were greatly expanded; he was joyous and fulfilled from dawn to sleep; his faculties of communication--with tree, plant, beast, or bird, rock or water--were astoundingly advanced; and all the world about him revelled in his nearness. The trees, the grass and herbs and weeds and flowers, the wild creatures--all were flourishing invincibly, abounding in vitality and perspicacity, growing rapidly in communication and cultural talents.

"It is literally true," I had said to

Agra, "that all the earth about Roonif Par-dock's hut is upreaching, outstretched like the hands of countless comrades--radiant with immortal physical zest and inward illumination."

I had decided to offer to Grayson, Roonif's development, his spiritual strength and contentment as evidence against the pernicious, ancient theory that mass contact, intensive social activity were positive values that would open out into the more enriched, adjusted, productive human being. The aim of the mortal community was no longer to be adjusted but to be one's self. Besides, my testimony would be stealing Grayson's own thunder--the strictly objective, factual, indisputable accumulation of data--we had all the information on paper in Roonif's case. It was scientifically compiled, irrefutable--his creative and extra-sensory rating before he'd become a recluse, and after four years of his ascetic habits and separation.

I made an appointment with Amdar Cutcheon, the Minister of Aesthetics, to meet me at my home the following Wednesday, along with Ratiche. We were to pick up Grayson at prison and to go out to West Land Forest, where Roonif was secluded.

I wanted Amdar to verify for me the extraordinary increase in Roonif's creative and artistic powers. The walls of his hut were crowded with fantastically lovely paintings, and dozens more were stretched in his store-room.

We had invited Agra to accompany us, but she had declined.

On Wednesday afternoon, I left my office at the Ministry two hours earlier than usual and returned home to relax before the trip to the Forest. I entered my study on the ground-floor and stretched out on the couch where I often lay to compose publicity statements for the Institute of Equality and to make telepathic contact with my friends in the human and non-human world--especially, for shoptalk purposes, with associates in the Programs of Sacred Research and Originality.

From the living-room came the sounds of Agra's playing on the inventorio, a new instrument like the piano of earlier eras, only simpler and with reed and string effects



combined. I was always moved by Agra's playing. Although not as expert in this medium as in painting, she brought a great refinement, cultivation, and psychic depth to her music. It soothed me like an hour at the Baths for Contemplation, those open-air, particularly invigorating and relaxing waters charged with ultra-energy from space. Her unique improvisations gave one a sense of distance, solar power, reincarnation, the unconscious recrudescence of earlier eras of love and harmony, 25,000 B.C., or before.

As I listened to her now, my eyelids half-closed, I glanced along the walls and across the ceiling, upon which were fixed a number of my wife's paintings--oils and pastel water-colors. They communicated chills of recognition, of exalted vision. The art of Unaria dealt largely with abstract concepts and insights--but it did so in concrete symbols created by extrasensory intuition--delightful or bizarre or tragic--representations of spirit meaning and action, from which emanations of all five senses could be received. A light, an aureole, a tangible evocation rose out of the colors like smoke or mist. The beholder's face seemed touched by the lines and colors; there was a faint sound, a mingling of shadowy areas; and, upon moving the lips, one was conscious of supernatural and ravishing tastes.

For example, one of her best portrayals, a large painting that dominated the ceiling, was called "The Debonaire." It caught a moment of contact with Divinity; there were clouds, leaves, bird-wings muted and intensified; there were waters and rainbow fragments and the flesh and spirit tones of animals and fish--all pirouetting and spiralling and exalted in an instant of vision. It was all marvelously expressionistic--and impressionistic, as well--and the unity and organization were inspired: it came from cosmic reality and revelation; it depicted a universality of awareness and mood which the beholder suddenly experienced for the first time, as his or her own fresh grasp of God, his or her corporeal and aesthetic liberation to a closer contact with the Presence.

Our painting, like our music, was designed to stimulate telepathic communion with whatever persons were within easiest range for the beholder at that moment. And as I looked upon the consummate beauties of The Debonaire and caught the scents, sounds,

tastes, and electrifying secret touches as well, I suddenly saw the hermit, Roonif Paddock. His light frequency, pulsating visibly and freely like a hummingbird's wings, came in with great force.

"Are you coming to visit?" he asked. "I seemed to catch an impulse from you that said you wished to see me."

"Yes." I answered. "I'm glad you received my intention. It shows that you will be glad to help me with a Regressor, Grayson Tandrell, recently arrested for atrocities against animals. We must persuade him that isolation is more conducive to perception and growth than are crowded conditions, humanity in close quarters and large settlements. He maintains that we must develop more sociability, proximity, to satisfy our gregariousness."

I could see Roonif smiling--tolerantly, sadly.

"One of them," he murmured. "I suppose, as it was said long ago: 'The world you have with you always,' Maybe we'll never eliminate the type completely. Perhaps it's to keep us alert, as Christ says. To cope with sin sharpens our own faculties of self-appraisal and self-improvement."

Roonif's long gray hair framed his black eyes and hollow cheeks with a sort of somber dignity.

"I'll be ready when you arrive," he said.

Then, abruptly, I sat up on the couch. Agra's playing had stopped. And through the silence a peculiar, soft, cautious sound now intruded--stealing with sinister deadliness and meaning. Somehow, its very sibilance and restraint were a dire, menacing portent of horrible misfortune.

I tip-toed to the door leading to the terrace. And I saw Amdar Cutcheon, the tall, lithe, athletic Minister of Aesthetics, gliding joyously and purposefully toward Agra's studio. Amdar was a sophisticated, blithe soul--much addicted to the admiration of women and, one could almost say, guilty of the sin of frivolity. I knew that he was fond of Agra, but I frankly could not understand what she saw in him. She was a woman

of depths and rare cosmic attunements, affinities, rich seriousness, and spiritual maturity--a superb tragic sense mixed with optimistic and triumphant soulfulness. Amdar was shallow compared to most Unarians--much more superficial and self-oriented than Grayson. His gayety was conceit, and his proficiency in aesthetics thinly hid a tendency toward the greatest heresy of all--a disdain for the sacred.

It had even been rumored that he was sexually promiscuous.

But I had never dreamed that Agra cared for him with any degree of affection. And yet, the swift, hushed, conspiratorial manner of his movements across the terrace bespoke a rendezvous with my wife--a secret relationship.

I waited in growing astonishment, awe, terror. And, sure enough, the door to Agra's studio swung open; she stood there, limned against the sunset light in all her incomparable glory.

She did not know, of course, that I had come home early to rest before my departure for West Land Forest, nor did Amdar, who was to meet me here much later. It suddenly swept over me that she had sent him an extra-sensory message to come now before I should return.

They were turned away from me, so that I could not be noticed. She opened her arms to him, and he walked forward with an ease and familiarity that betokened habit.

She drew him and shut the door behind them.

I was so aghast and stunned, so freezing cold from foot to scalp, that I could not move. It must have been five minutes before I passed a hand weakly across my closed eyes, then lifted my hand and walked away, still numbed, still unaware of where I was going.

In a beech grove behind the house, I sank down in a sick torpor and wept.

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All the way to Roonif's hut with Rat-iche, Grayson, and Amdar Cutcheon I agonized insupportably. Amdar sat next to me in our horse-drawn carriage, and his flesh seemed to

singe and blacken my body. This traitor, this foul degenerate, had copulated with my wife, my imperishable love and purpose in living. Dear Christ! It was incomprehensible. I trembled and could scarcely resist the urge to turn, to seize and strangle him--so his eyes would glisten--glaze--fade out.

But my training as a Unarian, the years of youthful disciplined moderation in deed and thought, in catechism and endless examples of the virtuous, self-controlled adult--my everyday neighbors--laid hold upon me and restrained me now.

I regained my poise. I could not bring myself to speak to this filth, this criminal who had plundered my very heart, soul, and immortal breath, by the physical possession of my beloved.

We arrived at Roonif Pardock's seclusion. It was deep in the West Land Forest, a tiny log shelter, with an under-the-floor, earthen cache to keep food cool, a rough bunk, two chairs, simple cooking utensils, and books and magazines stacked in one corner and under the bunk. We could scarcely all crowd into the hut, and the odor of Roonif's body was quite noticeable, although we knew he bathed frequently. But in such conditions it was almost impossible to avoid sweat and uncleanness. His beard was obviously washed and combed.

"Let us go outside," Roonif said in his clear, vibrant, exalted voice. He always sounded as though he were speaking with angels--excited by some transfiguration, by an impending vision of God, and constantly being transfigured himself into some kind of John the Baptist.

As we stepped down toward the deep, slow stream that wound through a rocky cut shadowed by pines and birch trees, Roonif, in his gentle, fraternal manner took Grayson's arm.

"Now, Grayson, I have lived here through four years. My spirit grows stronger daily. I reduce the amount of Negavit I eat, I eliminate all spice, seasoning; the thought of meat and alternate foods has gone completely. I simplify. The results are the opposite of what you claim they will be for people if we continue to isolate ourselves and go meatless."

Roonif stopped and gazed up with native love, wisdom, and calm into Grayson's face, but the latter's expression was cold, resistant, aloof.

"I only came here because I was forced to under law," he said, and his lips curved in loathing. "I am now a prisoner of the State."

Roonif looked as disappointed, as dismayed as a small boy repelled by his entire gang of friends. But he bowed his head and drew the Regressor along the path with gentle concern.

"Note," he said, "how the natural world is opened to me and the communion impossible in communities where you are distracted by the problems of mortal relationship and organization."

He went ahead a few feet and held out his hands. The trees bent toward him, the flowers and brilliant-hued weeds and somber-hued grasses stretched toward him. His lips moved, and the emanation of frequency waves from these growing things, these comrades of the wild--the communication impulses--became an audible hum; one could distinguish the breaks which were the ends of words and phrases--the syllables and inflection and cadence of language, primitive and experimental though it was.

The face of the hermit was refulgent, and a sort of light quivered upon all the growing things that conversed with him.

"What is the birch tree saying," Ratiche inquired.

"That its roots drank the underground sources of the stream this morning, and it and the water exchanged anecdotes about rain and cloud-bursts and fresh hail-storms, and many of the episodes were humorous."

"And what," I asked, "are the giant blue asters saying, the ones that appear to walk up from the stream in their eagerness?"

"They are telling us that they are acquiring now the arts that people have had for centuries. For instance, this blue aster can move itself from place to place and declare the glory of God by staining a broad canvas of daylight with its color--staining it in

appropriate curves and depths and variations in conformation with other plants, flowers, and trees, who can move about also and contribute their laws to the artistic imagery and interpretation of truth as this wild life sees it."

"A sort of dynamic, cooperative symphony of plants," Ratiche said.

"Exactly."

"And," I put in, "this flexible web of beauty is a projection of nature's nurturing imagination?"

"Yes--to surprise and please the Creator and to mark new trends in the life of an expanding universe."

Ander Cutcheon, who had not spoken till now, asked: "Can we record these amazing ingenuities and miracles for the Ministry of Aesthetics?"

"Of course," said Roonif. "They are imprinted on my psychic screen and can be reproduced for you whenever convenient."

We all stood and watched Roonif's beautiful, effulgent face as he turned it here and there toward the natural world, the scenery about us, and we observed that he communed with it all--its radiance and joy and keen thanksgiving matched by his own; their variegation of personality reaching to his.

"You see," I told Grayson, "this man so strictly trained in contemplation and solitary sensitivity, so advanced in conversing with other life, is the ultimate product of our new principles and faith; we shall all be like him some day."

"God forbid," murmured Grayson.

"It is possible," said Roonif, "in these quiet circumstances, to develop extra-sensory force sufficient to draw a person out of space to one's side."

He closed his eyes; his face took on a startling intensity.

"Hovar," he said.

And suddenly the figure of the spiritual guide materialized and stood before us. He smiled.

"Your magnetism, Roonif, is embarrassingly inconvenient. I was in the midst of rescuing several unfortunates on a distant star from an unanticipated dust storm."

"You'll have to leave your radar impact to take over for you in interrupted missions of that kind," said Ratiche.

"I did, but there's nothing like the original--as the advertisers of the infamous Commercial Age before the Catastrophe liked to point out."

And we all laughed.

Then, sobering, I asked: "Is it true, Hovar, that Roonif is far ahead of most Unarians in his powers and that isolation, reflection, and rigid self-reliance are the most helpful ingredients in such growth, and all Unaria should aim toward such a regimen?"

"Precisely right," said Hovar quietly. "From such separation eventually will come the most meaningful human contacts and creative relationship."

Ratiche turned to Grayson.

"Does this convince you?"

The Regressor shook his head.

"It will all crumble--the whole dictatorship of phony concept."

"What force will crumple us?" I asked.

"Dissenters. Those who will insist we return to scientific truth and progress."

"'Progress,'" said Hovar angrily, "which destroyed all but a handful of people. 'Progress' that would once again sanctify commercialism and unspeakable cruelties. Never! The Higher Spirits of the Cosmos would never allow it."

Now, rabbits, thrushes, white-throated sparrows, mice, partridge, coyote, and fox came toward us; they sounded that low hum of pleasure and fulfilling perception as they conversed with the hermit and the bright illumination of face and spirit, of inner power, played back and forth between them all.

"There is absolute and inviolable con-

tentment," Ratiche said. "And communication."

"Do you remember," Roonif asked us, "when we first were building Unaria? We could see how the abolition of meat and the use of Negavit, which Hovar, here, brought from Baylel, would recreate the human spirit, but what about the wild creatures? What could ever reform them? We wondered. They must continue to rend and tear each other for nourishment, to maintain the balance of violence, the hierarchy of brute power and effectiveness in killing."

"Yes," I said, "we knew that we could change the order of things for people, the inherent drives of mortals, but what could reform the beast, the bird, fish, and plant?"

"And," Ratiche exclaimed, "we finally had to combine education and prayer. We gathered together numbers of a certain species--say, the fox. We put them in a lecture room at the Cultural Center and showed them pictures of foxes killing partridge and rabbit. Then we showed them the foxes eating the prey just slain. Next, we depicted black rays striking from the sky and burning and scorching the foxes and causing intolerable pain.

"Next, we all prayed aloud, using sounds and words such as 'The Master,' 'mercy,' 'Christ,' 'love,' 'charity,' 'compassion,' As we did so, we showed drawings of foxes approaching their prey--rabbit or partridge--and then pausing, drawing back, sparing the victim. We then gave a series of pictures revealing the foxes going to patches of Negavit to eat; the white ray descending; the foxes happy, deeply and richly contented, obviously bountifully nourished in both body and spirit."

"And," Roonif went on, "we humans all prayed aloud, spurred on this transformation growth as it was being visualized by our wilderness comrades. And they gradually got the idea, were influenced by us and the Higher Spirits, and in time, mastered the old impulse and made the right new decision; when they started after a victim, they hesitated, turned aside, and went to a pasture of Negavit to eat. And it was more palatable to them, and they enjoyed it more and more and flourished increasingly."

"And," said Hovar, "you earth people

used the same approach with all forms of life--mineral, vegetable, insect, etc.--and achieved the supreme victory: a planet where all live on the non-living, and nothing must cause suffering and kill in order to survive."

"True enough," Roonif declared, and he pointed to a patch of something that looked like white, low-growing wheat, which lay close to the water. Several animals and birds were eating it. "But," he continued, "the feeding of the plants, trees, rocks, grasses by it is even more dramatic. The animals and people give off in the breath that leaves the lungs a gas containing the essence of Negavit, which permeates the atmosphere and is absorbed by all things in air, earth, water that need the food but cannot move to the Negavit feeding places to eat it."

"Thus," I said, "our entire planet is saturated in the life-giving but non-living manna from God, which permits us to avoid all tortures of former slaughter-house or laboratory, all deliberately inflicted pain and death for edible meat."

Roonif had turned and was glancing at Grayson, who did not appear as yet to be softened in the least.

"And now," said Roonif, "if my progress, Grayson, my advanced ability to quicken responsiveness and inner growth in all things, without any food but Negavit--if this evidence you've seen, Grayson, doesn't convince you, perhaps my next revelation will. You know that the sparsely populated, carefully ruralized life of Unaria, with its quiet contemplation, greater initiative, creativity, and psychic development, has given us the faculty to see back in time, to talk with creatures, human and non-human, who lived centuries ago."

"Of course," I said.

"Well, then," continued Roonif elatedly, "I have accomplished a remarkable breakthrough."

There was a silence. We waited, tensely.

Roonif looked from face to face, jubilant, exalted, reaching deeply into us to

share this new wonder.

"I have now communed with the future, with creatures who will enter the earth-plane later.

There was a hush--shocked, appalled. Transfixed, we stared at the hermit.

"Is it possible?" Ratiche exclaimed.



"Not only possible," Hovar was smiling, "but inevitable, in the development of earth's community--and so I and others of the Higher Spirits helped to bring it about, through our will power, adding to the will and prayer of Roonif, who sat night after night, concentrating his full psychic energies on this one yearning."

"And then," Roonif said, "it happened. We shattered the barrier. We heard and replied. We communicated in a spontaneous, intuitive language. And so, now, before the other-worldly entity, the soul, selects its next mother for incarnation, to best further the responsibilities of its karma, we converse with it. And just as the contribution of our group prayers, will power, and love, plus our educational pictures made the wild creatures turn from tooth-and-claw principles to an enlightened method of survival, to Negavit good, so now, if you will concentrate on it, we can materialize a person from the next century of earth history."

And so, we all did that--all but Grayson, who was obviously sceptical and stood away from us, with an expression of contempt. The rest of us drove our wills, our prayers, our faith in Unaria and God straight at that desire, that object of our discipline, our confidence, that divine miracle.

And suddenly, we saw a figure there, shadowy but real. It seemed much the same as us, but its features were leaner and stronger.

"Hail to you from a woman to be born a thousand years from now," she said in a hollow, weird voice.

"What will the earth be like?" I asked.

"More Christ-like than ever. And Christ will be more constantly among us."

"And what will you be?" Ratiche asked.

"A Director of Constantly Changing Ceremonies and a Keeper of the Relativity of Religion."

"Will the population be ordered in the same way--spread out--individuals isolated for better self-understanding and growth?"

"Yes. The development will be unbelievable, the creativity godlike. Psychic thoughts will thrill flesh and soul like the greatest music. People will move bodily from point to distant point purely by exercising their wills."



The figure faded.

I felt a strange weakness in my limbs. Glancing at Grayson, I saw that he had finally been affected by the evidence. He was pale, frowning, gazing at the ground. The arrogant superiority had vanished.

Roonif took me aside.

"I have also been in touch with the future for your sake, Doan. I have been sensitive about your fate, have always admired you, and I knew when the trouble with Agra began."

My heart sickened, shrivelled. I trembled.

"Be of good cheer," Roonif whispered, gripping my arm. "I see in the future that you will conquer Amdar and the whole horrible predicament. You will win Agra back. Your

love will be even more glorious."

I felt relief, joy, a rush of gratitude.

"Thanks to God!" I murmured. "And to you, too, Roonif, for telling me."

And I closed my eyes and fixed Christ's image in my mind and praised it with my whole being, fiercely and devoutly.

As we turned toward the hermitage, Roonif paused, held me back, and gazed into my eyes with quiet searching and encouragement.

"Try to remember something else: you were married to Agra in a former existence."

"Married to her!"

"Yes. In Egypt. You were both refugees from the Atlantis community before it sank under the sea. Now again you have sought each other out by selecting mothers in this century and time, in order that you may test yourselves once again, overcome faults you could not correct earlier. God grant you the grace--and the character--to discern what the chief challenges are and to meet them victoriously."

I bowed my head.

"Challenges," I mused. "Faults. I have to reflect and discover them."

(To be continued in the next issue)

Tall and slender, full of grace  
Noble Being of a noble race,  
Thy beauty, bird, is deep and sure  
Thy loveliness is soft and pure.

Thy shyness tells, to those who see,  
Of tender sensitivity  
Thy shyness, bird, cocoons thy soul  
To keep it soft, alive, and whole.

Thy gentleness brings shame to me  
For my dull'd sensibility.  
Thy gentleness restoreth me  
To all that I was meant to be.

DON CHRISTIANSON