NEGAVIT

a short novel

BY

George Abbe

1

In that time when humankind's world had become worthless and sterile, in the dark, utterly sparkless dawn of a November day, I woke to see against the East the imprint of an inconceivable sunrise--a hard, flashing explosion--spiked and haloed--a rush of light that might have been the crown of death worn by kings of dim, monstrous myths--in primitive, demonic days.

But there was something odd about that blast, that brightness that crushed the air of earth, that left it eyeless and dumb, witless and stricken--that blast like a blazing trumpet wave of distant sound--it did not fade or recede; it remained static, fixed against the eastern sky.

It must be close to the seaboard, that soundless explosion--so far away that I could not hear. It meant the Day of Cataclysm, I knew; and as soon as I saw it, I thought: "This is what those brawling, senseless people who rule our continents, the millions regimented to drugs, advertisements, infinite cheap and futile amusements pour up over their lives like the sweet ferment turning to sewage--this is what they, the contrivers and manipulators of all things for profit, have brought to pass. This is the result of human cupidity for the machine, our lechery for the secure."

Then suddenly, on the steep inner stair of spirit, I felt a Presence ascending, vibrant, bright. There was a hushed sound, and there was The Master, keen eyed and still, his body clothed in a strange, plain, white, seamless garment.

I stood astounded, unbreathing. I had thought that he could never return, that the story about his declaring "I shall come again" was a myth to bring people into line with dogma or church or power. And yet here he was.

His radiance made me lower my gaze.

"That bomb-blast," he said, "fired from the East against your continent blows the music of a justice promised long ago in Bibles."

"I know you," I said, "And yet it is hard to believe."

And I looked up again. I wish that I could describe to you the flashing fire and gentleness of those eyes, the strength and courage in his face, the compassion.

"Why," I asked, "is the explosion fixed, and never fades?"

"Because the hot blade of its punishment must sear the eye-balls of the self-indulgent till they crack and smoke like candle flames at a wake."

Outside, on shores of dawn, past lingering roofs of night, I saw birds flying--blundering, as though their energy failed--and falling. They were dying. Autos stood motionless on roads stone-gray in sleep.

"What shall I do?" I asked.

"I will open the corridors of vision," he said, "to the Kingdom on Earth, a living and serene dimension. I will drive home to your heart the power that prophets know."

My body felt stunned. The world hung in breathless silence.

"Your nations," the Master said, "where amusement was deity and indulgence the only soul acknowledged--now your engines that hurtled the throughways furiously and futilely will never have fuel again; your buildings jerry-built for profit are pulverized."

And he pointed toward the East.

"That is where the Kingdom is beginning."

He walked in that direction. A few doomed people knelt, gray-faced, straining for breath. Already the swellings of nuclear poison puffed throat and eyes.

They cried out: "Save us! Master, save!"

"Be brave," I said. And tried to pry their fingers from their stomachs, which they clenched like death. But their hands held like cement.

The Master said: "Pass on. Horrors are everywhere, and many yet must perish in torment. But a few who knew me and believed in my retribution--who had faith still after two thousand years--who chose lonely values, integrity of self, our sources in Nature--these shall build the intuitive-rational society, develop bold, explosive principles of living, a federation of love."

Along the lost highways, the blighted bodies of machines and people lay, gaping and sterile, cringing, withering. One man came toward me, bearing a baby, but stumbled and called: "It bleeds from ears and mouth!"

And then he fell; and when I reached them, both were dead--the blood from nostrils laced with flaky green, their eyes whitening to ashy cold, limbs stiffened and trembling.

At a river, the bridge was crossed with the proud, sprawled, now-impotent citizens of "progress," infallible technology--cars paralyzed, people and animals dead or struggling slowly. The power lines hung unloved and currentless like the nerveless limbs of criminals after the flash of vindictive devastation in the electric chair, the relaxing from stiffness, the limp, careless arrangement of body for the long, empty, timeless journey beyond the grave.

And now the earth reeled beneath me.

"Fire hurricanes," he said. "Earthquakes at the ocean bottom."

We came to the streets of a city: we hurried past ghostly stores--bars and lounges darkened, exuding the fumes of horror.

A man came toward us--tall, swarthy, serene-faced. He was unhurt. The Master went to him, and they talked in low tones.

Then the Master turned to me and introduced him.

"Emil Ratiche," he said. "Director of Economics in the new order."

We shook hands. His grip was hard and quick.

Then he swung about and led us through the havoc, the mad tumble of shattered steel, concrete, splintered wood.

"Remember," said Ratiche, "the earlier missiles brought germs, and those germs decimated half of us before the big bomb fell."

"To the south of us," the Master said, "they have not yet been hit so badly,"

"But they will be," Ratiche replied, "when China shoots her neutron missile. We have advance warning."

We came closer to the spot where the bomb had landed and all buildings had burst asunder. Blood poured in streams along cracked pavement, through crushed sinew, bone-shards, rubble, mangled limbs.

"What we did to others, in Asia and elsewhere," I said aloud, "at last we had to suffer it also. I knew it. Year by year, I sensed it would occur."

Incendiary explosives had hurled their jellied fury far and wide, and all about us bodies were still blazing--officials, Government leaders, Civil Defense authorities. The burning napalm settled beneath the skin of Americans--that nation that had given it birth.

Against the lofty, brass-studded doors of a bank, someone had nailed a gentleman of means--neat cuffs, clean underwear, button-down collar. Appallingly meagre and defenseless now, he hung, stuck there, crucified in the most obstinate, insolent manner--nail after nail through pale palm and pale foot. Uprooted tongue and torn intestines seemed unrelated to the flawless attire, irrelevant to a death of such impeccable importance.

Crumbled and muddy where a water main had flooded lay clothing hurled from a burst Fashion Store. From a subway entrance rose the slow smoke and stench of recent suffoca-

tion and panic. Smashed plate-glass, neon signs, masonry of penthouse and night club, charred foods--all heaped on the steaming, incinerated bodies, animal and human.

A long, awed moment I paused and observed. The birdless sky arched over me--a stunned, numb gray. Away to the west, the fires of many cities lingered. Far down, the earth convulsed.

I felt a sudden, unbearable spasm of desolation.

"Love!" I cried. "Did it live? Was it ever known?"

We came to a hotel building only partly demolished. Under the entrance awning, we stood to survey the scene.

"What sort of a world," I asked, "are we now to create?"

"The cities," the Master said, "where people were crowded so horribly were the worst evil. They must never be allowed again."

"How can you prevent them?"

He smiled and turned to the tall, sinewy man beside him.

"Ratiche will tell you."

Ratiche had an easy smile, an ingenuous, disarming manner.

"It is perfectly simple. There will be only a few thousand people left in this devastated country when the attacks finally cease. These survivors will be scattered. We shall organize small community governments, forbid entry into the old urban areas, most of which are now completely smashed, polluted."

"But how can you stop people from building new urban centers?"

The Master smiled.

"You must remember that all science, all industrial and technological knowledge are destroyed. The few mortals left have been deeply chastised by events; they were also the finest humans on earth, those selected by

me and our Astral Brotherhood for survival. Their qualities make them long to be perfect, to exist in fraternity, equality, and goodwill, to atone for the terrible crimes of the nations which brought on the War of Extinction."

I had a sudden hunger for a cigarette.

"Is there anyplace," I asked, "where one may find cigarettes?"

"No," Ratiche replied. "Those who come through alive do not want tobacco; they have no neurotic tendencies--maladjustment, insecurity, over-anxiety, which were the main reasons that people smoked."

I was astounded.

"People are now ideal creatures, then--infallible?"

The Master turned his majestic head and shoulders to survey the vast sweeps of rubble, debris, the smoking fires, the distances without life.

"No, it is possible that evil may enter through a person here and there; the forces of corruption and retrogression and sterility are still in the universe. Even I cannot completely exterminate them, not for long centuries to come; and moreover, it is good for humans to have something to contend with, an enemy, conflict; it maintains tension; it keeps humans alert. They are sure to overcome all such subversion eventually, but the battle will toughen and nerve them."

We began to pick our way among the ruined buildings, the splintered, mangled trees, toward a patch of green grass still visible at the base of a distant hill.

"There," said the Master, "we can sit awhile, look at the sky, the one clean thing remaining, and draw in power from the God of all."

"Are you not God?"

"Yes. But there is a dimension I represent that is more than I, also."

We neared the grass. I bent my head back and gazed at the sky. It was bluer now, but still flushed flamingo-pink from the

explosion that had rocked the East.

How I missed the sight of birds. I had loved birds more than anything else alive.

"Will we never have birds again?"

"Oh, yes," said the Master. They have retreated to the mountains far to the north. They will return gradually. Millions, of course, were destroyed."

"Ah," I said, and a sudden pain entered my heart. "I loved the birds."

The Master smiled.

"I know," he said. "Don't you think that I have been aware of it, that I have been planning to use you in their need, to champion their causes in our new world?"

My heart sprang up; my heart boiled wildly and began to sing.

"Thank God!" I said, and I went down on my knee, and the tears welled and spilled out and raced down my cheeks so that I tasted them in my mouth. "Omnipotent mercy, I thank you. It is the one thing I have longed for--to be able to help the weakest, the most defenseless of all--the birds, the other creatures exploited, butchered, and tortured by humans."

The Master smiled and gripped my arm, firmly. His eyes seared me.

"Do you forget my beatitudes--'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy'--'Blessed are ye that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for ye shall be filled'?"

"I thought," I replied, "that all those desires, to save and to uplift, those endless prayers, might never be granted."

"You were wrong. No genuine desire is lost; no prayer of love and pity is unanswered in the long span of things, over stretches of many lives."

I raised my eyes and tried to meet his gaze.

"Master," I said, "I thank you for letting me enter this new kingdom on earth.

Make me your perfect follower."

He did not reply, but his eyes riveted mine, as spikes might rivet flesh. And in the spasm of agony that seized me, I felt simultaneously a beauty and strength like rising wind, the the flow of rivers and the shine of early-morning mountain tops, bearing me up in a levitation that was so real and overwhelming that I was sure my physical body rose upward and floated.

I bowed my head, then got to my feet and walked on, between the Master and Ratiche.

"And so, all people will live in the country again," I asked, "as in pioneer days?"

"Exactly. And each will grow his or her own food and build his or her own house and do his or her own blacksmithing and apple-picking and wheat-threshing."

"Threshing by hand? Blacksmithing? Are there no machines?"

"No, indeed. The machine was the chief evil of all. People let it dominate them; the temptation to be perverted and defiled again would be too great. The machine, except in its simplest forms, will be banned, perpetually."

A wave of joy broke over my heart.

"Thank God!" I said. It was the curse and scourge of life. And all great poets and artists have known it and predicted its eventual downfall--men like Thoreau and Blake. It could have been a savior of humankind."

"But was our nemesis," said Ratiche, "the supreme agent of our ruin."

We came to the grass, and sank down. After the broken steel and iron, the splintered glass and crushed cement, the sensation of natural grass on our feet again was indeed sweet. I stroked the soil.

"Ah, and we deserted you, my friend, the earth--for power, the speed of throughways, high-rise buildings, and the instruments and efficiencies of war. All of it was ultimate evil, all false, regimentation, mass hysteria, and aggrandizement."

Ratiche nodded.

"Before the atom blasts and the germ war," he said, "I got a fine idea of how people had come to lean on material things, on mechanical means. Going in and out of supermarkets they couldn't even open the doors for themselves; an electric eye had to automatically open the door for them. That gave them a greater sense of power, as their automobile power-steering and power-brakes did. And this power, stimulated through Madison Avenue promotion, gave a false sense of security; it warped and corrupted the soul, as the infinite forms of insurance did. The human spirit was softened, weakened; it became so flabby that under the bombing it collapsed like jelly-fish."

"And now?" I asked.

"Now we shall restore that quality to humanity so all-important, so completely pulverized by Technology."

"Which quality?" I asked.

"Self-reliance."

"Yes," the Master added. "And it will be gained by compelling each person to be on his or her own. Each will have his or her 200 acres; each will be separated from every other person, and quiet, isolation, will force each to think, to look inward, to discover him- or herself. Each person will make his or her own instruments and conveniences and necessities; each person will test him- or herself against the elements, against struggle and hardship. Each person will come to know his or her sources again, will learn the friendship of nature, not how to exploit, conquer, and befoul it."

"We shall create," said the Director of Economics, "the Permanent Frontier. Humanity will have to toughen its spirit, to develop character."

"But," I protested, "you can't force all people to do the same things, to be farmers."

"They don't all have to be full-time farmers," said Ratiche. "But they will all have to do some farming, to get back to our sources, to draw Nature into their spirits again after the long spiritual drought of urban life, technology, so-called 'progress,' and science, which was history's blackest blight."

"But," I began, "civilization . . ."

"What they had was not civilization, or culture," said the Master. "It was depravity; it was a drug-store culture. Look at the final types of music, like rock--the louder it became, the more hideously mangled, the more the sated, despiritualized youth enjoyed it. Being deprived of values by their parents, they craved the debased and hideous--it was a form of masochism, the wish for self-annihilation."

I remembered how, at the college where I had taught, at dances, the music would go on and on, often hitting only 4 or 5 notes over and over--a sort of mad repetition, hysteria, frenzy, indicating the absence of the cerebral or spiritual part of the self, a sort of abandonment to sensual insanity--much like the final wars, which were the public commitment to a form of suicide--music which was like lying down in the street and having someone drop water on your skull day after

day, indefinitely, one drop each 5 seconds, until you became deranged, a raving lunatic.

"Rock music was the final manifestation of decadence--the distintegration of the soul," said Ratiche. "I can recall thousands of youngsters, just before the Bomb, walking around with transistor radios glued to their ears, thousands riding bicycles with the transistors held to their ears; thousands walking across streets, listening to that music from the transistor--a music that became their psyche, their soul, their substitute for the self. The music displaced the character and individuality of the person; he or she was only part of a mass reaction to sound, a sort of furious rushing to self-extinction, like lemmings running off a cliff into the ocean."

I glanced up at the sky.

"Why aren't there any planes?" I asked.

"Missiles," said Ratiche. "Pin-point accuracy. Only a few got up; they were all shot down."

"It is the total obliteration of our civilization," I said, as though just beginning to understand.

"Or of our lack of it," observed Ratiche dryly.

There was a tremor of the earth, heavier than any preceding ones. The Master faced the East.

"The final neutron bomb," he said, "from China. Poorly aimed, it has struck in mid-ocean, and the tidal wave is roaring toward us. Come. The hill-top."

We climbed to the summit, a few hundred feet above the plain. And there I saw the wave towering over the low hills to the East--a sheer dark wall like a mountain, white-crested.

An icy cold caught my body. Ratiche was pale.

"We'll be drowned," I said.

"Have faith," the Master answered.

I turned toward him.

"If you could come back to establish your Kingdom," I said, "you can save us as well."

The wave roared up against the sun. On its tumbling crest came the wreckage of cities--bodies and buildings and machines--all lifted and hurtled in an unspeakable nightmare phantasmagoria. The sun had grown crimson; the air was thick and heavy, so that I fought for breath. Now the light faded suddenly to a misty, sickish red, and through my mind flashed the Biblical prediction: "The sun will be turned to blood."

Then the wave swallowed up the hill; it swept up around us, rising higher and higher till I felt it above my waist, my chest, raising and battering me against debris. The water was dark and stinking of death; I cried out, but was alone. Now I was immersed to my neck, and panic assailed me. I wanted to cling to that summit, that highest point of ground, but I was losing my balance.

And as I was knocked off my feet by the turbulent violence, I saw a single tree, the only one remaining after that first massive avalanche of water had bent and broken all before it. I struggled toward the tree; I reached out and caught it; we both were tugged and buffeted by the swirling turmoil, but it held.

"Its roots go far down," I thought.

I felt my strength going, but I gripped the trunk and closed my eyes and exerted all my remaining energy and will. It was not enough. I felt myself being pulled away. Then the thought rose up in me: it was a tree Christ was crucified on; it was wood like this. His suffering and death meant I was redeemed, I could live.

At once, I felt new strength. Regaining a surer grip on the trunk, I waited. The

waters went down-- so quickly that in an hour I was standing on ground again, immersed only to my waist. In another hour I was on an exposed, devastated hill. Wreckage was heaped all about me, dead and dying creatures.

The dark wastes of water lay as far as eye could see. But they were lowering fast. By night, there would be many bare places. Far off on another elevation emerging above water, I saw Ratiche. I shouted to him, and he waved his hand. Then, as I moved in that

direction, out of the corner of my eye I saw, washed up close to the tree which had saved me, a human body. I went toward it. It was a woman, half naked, lying as though dead.

I came nearer. In that fixed, stricken, reddish light that still covered the world, she was blazingly, awesomely beautiful. Her thighs were parted; her breasts fell--as heavy and rich as that idyllic childhood of goodness and love not content that hangs on the sad, bent boughs of the past. Her breasts' swelling ripeness spilled over her torn dress, and fell against her arm. Such warm and milky flesh, such secret whiteness scared me. I cried out: "Beauty brutally mortal, divinely wild--ecstatic past knowledge, foul with lust, yet bursting with the pure and godly-devout! Oh loneliness we cannot leave, but grieve always to stretch to, touch, saturate the self in--the soul, stark and thirsty--I pay my tribute to you."

I bowed my shoulders, took her body up, and drank the rank, fierce perfume of her flesh. I set my lips upon her mouth and kissed and drew in the wondrous message of that immortality of sense and spirit that is woman.

"Not all have died then!" I cried.

And I sought to stir her to words, a flicker of animation. And she did. She moved.

"Friend," she said.

A rush of blood to my throat choked me a moment. Her eyes were a bright, warm hazel; her mouth was curved in the firm, red, luscious hues of fruit; her breasts rose eager to meet maleness. And the flowing white of her neck and waist and hips reached out to pull me down, drunken and lolling in a trance.

I placed my face against her cheek.

"Dream it is more than friend--rather, a lover from the inconceivable."

She smiled--and striving to control the wonder and flogging hunger of my blood, I turned my lips to devour hers.

The pallid red stain paled from the sky as the sun sank. The world furled under in a cold, smoky dusk; it thickened, and the utter dark was marshalled from sea and sky and the regions of infinite groping void.

I felt the welling beauty and bloom of the woman's flesh tense in my embrace. Across the blackness of sky a jet of light descended, sharpened to scour the air with a pure edge of jewel.

I knew the creatures it contained before the doors opened, before it landed. The hand of their presence reached and quickened me.

"Welcome, brothers truer than flesh."

I set my feet and rose, the woman also. The blowing clean, freshening air, the power of wisdom and primitive grace released by that light--the upstirring, the rebirth pain of sleeping vestigial faculty deep within--lifted and chilled me. Astonishment, a new immensity of spirit struck upward in me a sense of nobility, a shaft of gladness--straighter than bone and blood and sinew.

I stood up, irrationally calm, perceptive.

"I know them. They have sensed and sought me for years. I was obtuse. I deflected their emanations, being placed in the confining blind dimensions of a human world. Their sun could not penetrate; their generous culture and community so far outstripping mortals was beaten back by the thick, cold barrier of arrogant human ego. But now, the blow of their mercy is struck from distant

dominions where they watched and cared and knew they would come, to save us this day of ultimate self-destruction, sorrowfully aware that we were tearing our universe apart and would hurt and dislocate theirs if they failed to intervene.

"Hail, people of divine pity!"

I lifted my hand. I saw the face of my woman companion flash with a similar spiritual recognition. She and I were bound in astounding psychological power, a pure sweet unity, a revelation of the right and good that for a long time had lain straining and perfectly just in the unconscious, barely below the threshold.

The streamlined ship dipped fast. It drifted close and poised, lowering, touching earth. A shape--not human exactly, and not known creature--seemed to converge from distant points as the jointless, scarless door slipped open and the low sound of music came and the light whitened, pulsing, flooding the still, listening height of my body. A voice spoke, and though the words were in unfamiliar tongue, I understood.

"How you can do the higher good only the death of the old earth would permit . . ."

The figure of the Master emerged from behind the speaker and said: "These brothers and sisters have come to lead, to help to rebuild. Scattered over the continents are a handful of mortals, the saving remnant. Inspired by these visitors who are advanced beyond you through their greater nearness to me, you few people, drawn together by the sharpening of extra-sensory perception, by clairvoyant awareness, will develop the glittering community humans have sadly, shyly dreamed of in the unconscious for lost and numberless centuries.

A marvelous euphoria, a blessed exultance and liberation flushed and soared through my blood. The Master's companion seemed to breathe a clean luminosity; soundlessly, he wound me in threads of message, meaning, beauty--a music that told me all I had not learned from birds I'd loved, from flower or fox or insect with which I'd yearned to share inward image and impulse, nuance of thought, and to know theirs.

And here now, between us two, communica-

tion grew like the swift shifting of beautiful formations of wild geese increasing to bigness as they sweep over, sounding, flashing their mystic, thrilling, inscrutable legends.

The woman beside me stepped toward the visitors and said: "I am Agra. I was born of the land, on the borders of wilderness, and all my life I sensed that the Master would use me in a great venture."

The Master nodded and smiled at her.

"You were right, and I was pleased at your trust, your dedication. You were chosen at birth because of your extraordinary meekness and simplicity of heart and innocence. Through the years you must have heard my voice often."

"I did, and I was certain, even in the midst of the bombing, the flood, that you would bring me through, that you had further need for me beyond the Holocaust."

"You are right," the master answered.

And his companion now came forward and reached out his hand to Agra, who took it eagerly.

"I am Hovar," he said.

And that radiant strangeness, that elusiveness yielding to clear inner beauty which was his countenance, flashed a swift stroke of fraternal love.

"And I think we can plan, all four of us," he continued, and he pointed toward Ratiche, who was approaching across the rapidly drying earth, "an effective way to rescue, assemble, and organize for action the survivors scattered across the continent.

There are other interstellar visitors who are helping in other parts of the world, like Asia, and what is left of Europe, creating the new communities under Christ's guidance. And all of us will, in time, have our international government of good-will."

Ratiché was within hailing distance; at my greeting, he raised his hand in salute.

"It will be paradise, then," I said. "Perfection. The Kingdom on Earth so long sought for and promised."

"No," said the Master, "you will have free will. But evil is not entirely conquered yet. it will reappear. You will have to struggle again. But that is the cycle of

the timeless evolution toward the godly state of being for every favored soul--to move to higher and higher communities of less evil, till the character is strengthened to the very fibre of God's and all is divine--virtue realized through interminable stages of growth--fresh conflict and self-discipline in each succeeding phase till the ultimate."

"And that final stage?"

"Even God has not yet fully conceived of it."

Ratiché came near. He was dazzled by all three of these people: the uniquely formed, mystically virile Hovar; the Master, who regarded him so severely yet with sympathetic warmth; the celestially beautiful Agra. He knelt and put his hand over his eyes.

"I thank you for salvation," he mur-

mured. "Blessed be the Giver of Life!"

I knelt down also. A wave of powerful inspiration overwhelmed me and my tongue was loosened.

"There were those modernists," I said, "the cults of the compromisers and adjusters, who always had to placate, debase standards for the masses, in literature, art, all the cultural values, to make things easier or more marketable. There were those who changed the Bible to mundane language, colloquial pap, that took all the poetic power and grandeur out of it to be folksy, and big numbers, quantity to religion, to look good--those who couldn't hold to the absolute ideals of the finest, because they, like the bingo crowds in churches and the super-market green-stamp hoarders, wanted things easy, something for nothing, in a money-sick society. They coarsened and vulgarized and adulterated the King James' version, the richest and most lyrical and stylistically eloquent of all, in order to aid mass comprehension--a kind of quick, newspaper reaction that would not require any study or imagination, any mastery of a nobler and more exalted style.

"And what did they do to the Lord's Prayer? They changed the word 'hallowed' because it wasn't modern enough, and they substituted 'honored.'" 'May your name be honored,' instead of 'Hallowed be thy name,' But 'honored' doesn't even mean the same thing as 'hallowed,' it takes all the strength and majesty and sacredness out of the thought. A person who is hallowed is sacred; one who is merely honored is not. The poetry and the glory are gone.

"I feel hallowed in your presence, Master--almost sanctified myself. No word of our vernacular today expresses my awe and wonder and sense of worship now, so perfectly and poetically as the word 'hallowed.'"

"But just as parents did not have the character to discipline their children in any respect in the years of decadence before the Holocaust, but instead gave them watered-down versions of the classics or recent novels done in comic-book language to make things more palatable--so they did not have the character to compel their young to develop appreciation for the very special language of the King James' version which aids the very special exalted religious experiences of

reading an inspired message, the reverence required--the poetic power and beauty and associations of the centuries, the lyrical enchantment. No, they revised things to sterile journalism to please the crowds; in the Lord's Prayer, they changed every 'thou' to 'you' and every 'thine' to 'yours.' And they even omitted entirely the most eloquent part of all, the ending, 'For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.'"

The Master was quiet a moment.

"It was inevitable," he said, "rising out of a total degeneracy, a climax of materialism."

He paused, then went on: "Let me begin the gathering together of those who still live. The new community will be the richest experience of history. No one can now describe the supreme joy and consummation of the faithful, those who trusted and persisted through this ordeal of upheaval, the shifting of the earth on its axis, so that the polar caps were disrupted, with the attendant volcanoes, floods, and surfacing of new lands; no one can describe the exultance and peace, the triumphs of mind, heart, and imagination, the quickening of the new senses beyond the old five, new kinds of communication among

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many species in nature and between them and humans; no one can faintly body forth the revelations and miracles of the unique order you will build."

We bowed our heads--and suddenly, from far off came the call of a bird--a winged creature still alive--returning from the north; and my whole body grew icy with rapture, and I cried: "We shall know beauty again!"

2

My assistant bowed slightly and placed the paper on my desk.

"Another violation," he said.

I picked up the report. A Grayson Tanderell, far out on Caubry Road, was apparently experimenting with animals. Neighbors had seen cages there.

"Thank you. I'll start at once."

I rang Ratiche's office.

"Yes?" His cordial, finely-timbred voice came cleanly.

"Ratiche, can you run out to Caubry Road with me?"

I told him what I had heard.

"Of course. Be with you instantly. I have a report myself to check out in that direction. Someone is black-marketing vegetables. There are some who still believe that plants are not alive and will exploit them."

While I waited for Ratiche, I gazed out at the countryside and reviewed in my mind the past twelve years. We had reorganized the small remnants of human life, and communities everywhere else looked much the same as this one did from my window--openness, spaciousness, the nearest house a half-mile away, then another, a half-mile from that. At last the mortal spirit could breathe; it could contemplate, develop its own initiative, and grow.

And up there, in the open space at the top of the distant hill, a cluster of rooftops represented the Area Center--grocery store, theatre, cultural building, schools, church, a modest department store, a store

handling farming hardware and supplies. There were no automobiles, of course, and no tractors.

The communities had been kept widely separated and limited in population--never more than 750 to a village; a distance of at least 12 miles between centers. Birth control was systematically encouraged. In this way, we had defeated the aims of the hold-over scientists like Nocerne, who wanted to recreate industry, big business, advertising, mass entertainment, scientific research, and all the evils of the past which had extinguished most of the human race and which the present leadership would never permit again. As Hovar, Co-ordinator from Baylel Nebulae, had pointed out: We must move inexorably toward the purely pastoral life again. It produced the greatest thinking and cultures of the past. The greatest art has come from periods when people were close to nature--as in the English Romantic era."

As Minister of Communications and Director of the Institute of Equality, I had the responsibility of encouraging non-painful methods of coming to understand and of communicating with animals, birds, fish, all other life, and it was also my duty to prevent any act of cruelty, exploitation, or abuse against other creatures; for our New Order had established as one of its chief tenets the absolute sacredness of every living thing, the right of all such to love, concern, equal protection and treatment.

The hardest problem had been to decide where life ended and the non-living began--but since it was proven by instruments discovered in India that trees and plants felt pain, we knew that we must include in the category of "life" all that grew, and even sand and rocks and minerals contained in microcosm the macrocosm of electrical energy, the will to persist and reproduce of the universe, the elements, traits, and principles of the human and other life substances.

And so, since the avoidance of the infliction of suffering in any form was the Number One Law of the New Spiritual Order, and since Nourishment Without the Taking of Life was the Second Law, our foremost difficulty had lain in finding what could be eaten without killing anything, whether it was bacteria, as in milk, algae and plants, or creatures just short of the advanced-nerve-

center ones such as cows and pigs.

"I have the only solution," Hovar had declared, one day. "I will return to Baylel and bring back quantities of seed from crops of our Negavit Food--a peculiar substance that has none of the life qualities as we

know them, has no reflexes or responses of any sort, does not change or lend itself to human or non-human assimilation, or contribute to organic vitality as minerals can. And so we take no life in eating it. And yet this peculiar Negavit nourishes people better than the old foods. And so we have developed it in many variations for the sake of diversity of taste and table, so that you seem to be eating several different foods and the fare is very similar to popular ones before the Holocaust."

"Who conceived of such a miraculous food--one that permitted the avoidance of any kind of suffering in the obtaining and use of it--and one in which no life force exists to be able to suffer--and yet one that generates all desirable vigor?" I asked.

Hovar had gazed into my eyes a long moment.

"Doan," he said, "what have you prayed for yourself ever since early adulthood--by your own admission?

"Why," I replied, "the sufferings that I had observed in life, human and animal, our atrocities against moral creatures in all phases of society, home, school, Government, business, labor--and against animals in experimental laboratories--made me pray day and night for a world where there would be no suffering."

Exactly. And don't you believe that prayer is for a purpose, that it has effect and that nothing is lost in God's economy--

that all those prayers of yours and of many humanitarians like you across the world were piling up at Christ's front door?"

"I suppose so."

"You know so. And where there is a legitimate prayer, there is a legitimate answer, a provision for that need--a consummation of deep and virtuous desire. God and nature put thirst in us because water exists, hunger in us because there is food to be had, sex and love because there are mates waiting, loyalty because there are friends to sustain us, curiosity because there are revelations that will mature and revolutionize us.

"All through the centuries the insatiable belief in the individual soul, in an after-life and a God who cares and responds to trust and rewards and punishes like a mortal parent survived because all these bounties are realities, part of the great scheme of over-all justice prepared for us in proportion to our worthiness and our growth."

I nodded.

"It makes sense."

"Of course," said Hovar. "And so it makes sense that the prayers that have risen from the hearts of people since time began--actually, the supreme prayer, the most urgent and ardent of all, the prayer that suffering be reduced and at last extinguished--these prayers were pouring from the heart because the answers, the fulfillment waited there--out in space, in time; Christ was readying the Kingdom on Earth where no one would deliberately cause pain and death, the society where survival by tooth-and-claw was dead, and none lived off the life of another--and hasn't that been longed for by people for centuries?"

"Yes," I said. "Every sensitive person has hated to eat meat, to see the fox kill the rabbit and the coyote run down the deer."

"Yes, and all religions have predicted that this brutal, unjust, agonizing arrange-

ment of life would alter, that love and cooperation would be the mainspring of existence, the means of sustenance and growth, not despoilation, killing and dominance by force. All religions foretold the Era Abolishing Killing for Food. It was what Tennyson referred to as 'that divine far-off event toward which the whole creation moves.'"

"Remember the Bible?" I exclaimed. "Isaiah prophesied: 'The lion shall lie down with the lamb, and a little child shall lead them.'"

"Those were not idle words," said Hovar. "The cry of hope, of need, of desire was made because it could be met with fact sometime--a society of that very kind; and so it will come to pass, with the sort of nourishment Christ has been preparing, divorced from anything alive, animal, vegetable, or mineral--Negavit. 'In my Father's House are many mansions,' he said. And with this food he is making it possible to inhabit the Mansion of Food Without Injuring Others--the Age Transcending Intentional Pain."

"Yes," I said, inspired now by the eloquent, ringing words of Hovar. "Of course it is logical. The efforts of medicine all through the centuries were to eliminate suffering. The natural reaction of people when they saw a person or animal in anguish was to help--to relieve that person or creature. The ideals of all moral codes and religions included the injunction to avoid causing hurt, to ameliorate the sad fortunes of earthly life, suffering and brutality, poverty and despair; all sensitive artists have recoiled at cruelty in every guise, have stressed the theme of its defeat and abolition."

Hovar smiled at me.

"With Christ's help, and mine, you are surely learning," he said. "And that is why I go to Baylel, to bring the food Christ himself has prepared and which we there have used for aeons, to relieve us of the ultimate cardinal sin of life-by-death survival--through fatal pain, deliberately-imposed suffering."

And he had entered the astral ship and disappeared. And weeks later he had returned with an ample supply of Negavit seed; and they were scattered in water and produced a

vast quantity of grain-like food; and we had harvested and prepared it in a variety of dishes, and there had been little complaint about flavor, nor any other general dissatisfaction.

And we lived now without killing other life. We advanced and matured without exploiting, abusing, or torturing.

But here now was news of some reactionary conspirator making a commodity out of vegetables--and we knew that life was in all plants and vegetables, the same life that flowed in my veins and drove my heart and brain. We had had ample evidence of that from our holy men and leaders--and from the creatures and beings of all sorts in our communications workshops, which I myself directed.

And here also was news that perhaps animals, after all these years free from such scientific horror and atrocity, were being used, made to suffer, perhaps die again, in some kind of experiment.

(To be continued in the next issue)

George Abbe
S.U.N.Y., Plattsburgh

Correction: Will Baker's "Three Monkeys, I Am Father" (BTS2) was first published in *Nuclear Strategy and the Code of the Warrior* (editors Richard Grossinger and Linda Hough), Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1984. Will Baker teaches English at the University of California in Davis. Reprinted with permission.

BOOKS RECEIVED

Farley Mowat
Sea of Slaughter
Boston/New York: The Atlantic
Monthly Press, 1984
405p, bibliography, index
\$24.95

Patricia Dale-Green
The Archetypal Cat
Dallas: Spring Publications,
Inc., 1963
177p, bibliography, index
\$13.50

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