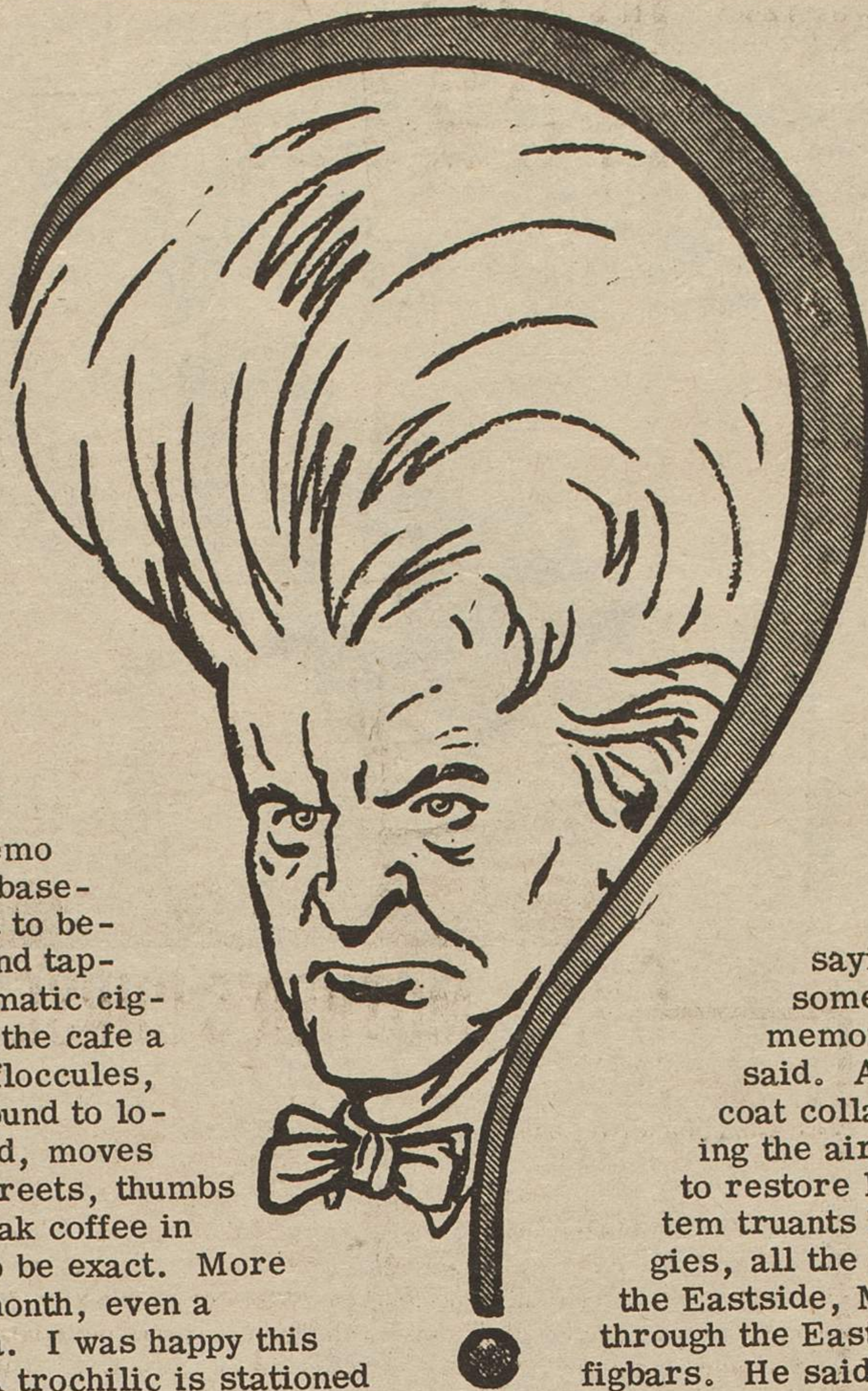


by Editor Farbo

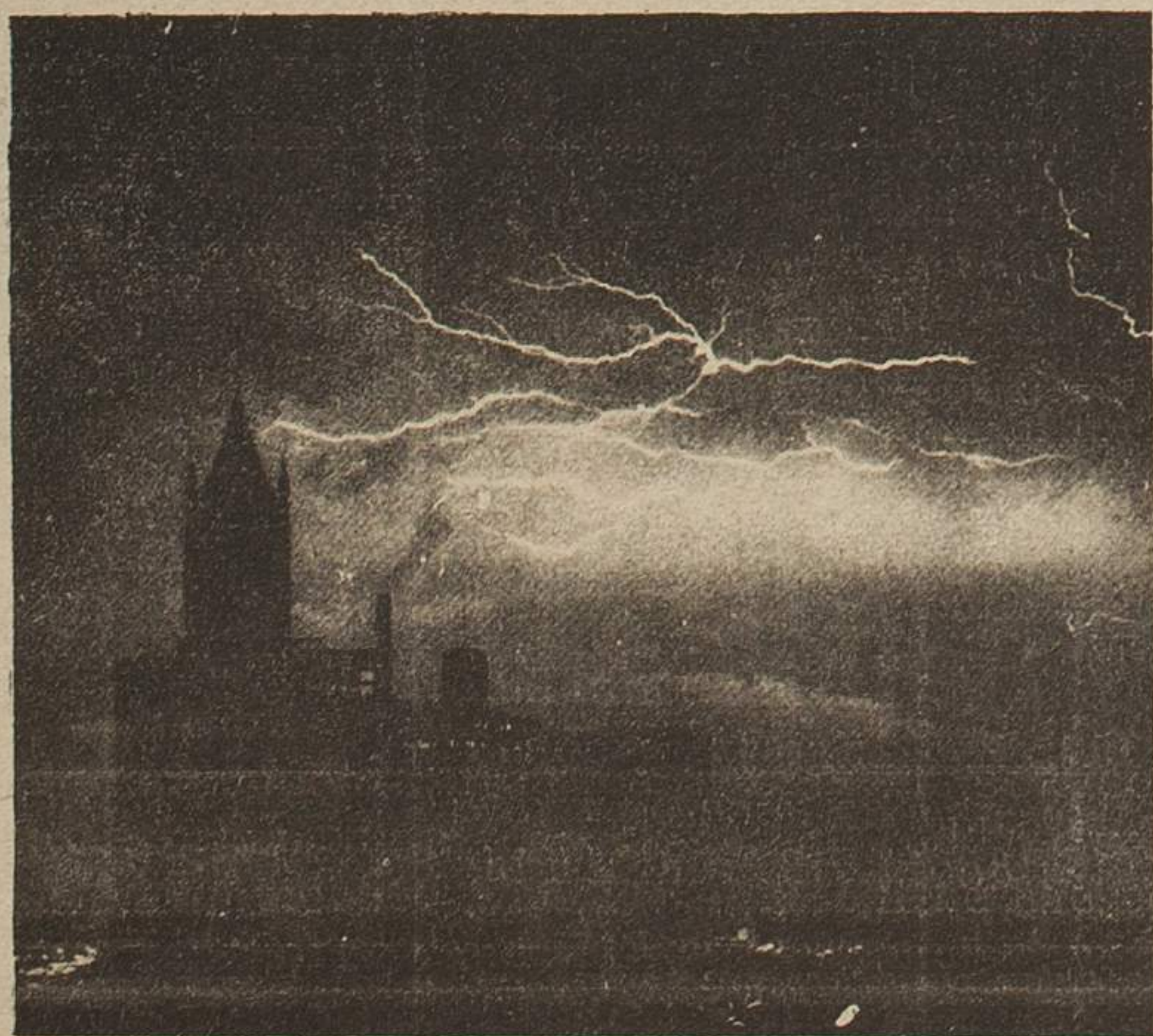
It was the winter of 50. I was to contact editor Dinsmoor, in Dodge City, my codepiece in the latest Moon so directing me, and from there drive him, in the lime-green agency Nash, to a clinic in Alamogordo, where he had arranged medical appointments. A patch of dry scale had begun to trouble the backs of his hands, as it had his scalp and knees previously. It was something going around. Every one of us had patiently struggled with it, without any benefit of radio medicine, its itch a trial on a summer night. I parked in front of the Tunney Arms, an agency hotel in Dodge City and went into the cafe in the lobby, the Hunger Art. I bought a copy of the City Moon and sat down to have coffee. A man at a back booth stared conspicuously at me, dunking a griddle bun in his brown soup, then kneading it with fingers thick at the hilts and tapering carrotlike, choffing it down, in a fit of clumsy swallowing. I ordered C-meat strips and a soycake. I opened my City Moon to the code page: "Demonitely. Working painlessly with needles on a stage in basement. Poet Black throwing the teetotum. See this act to believe." The man watched me continuously, coughing and tapping his spoon on the table to get my attention, an aromatic cigarette held close to the clownlike lips. Somewhere in the cafe a radio voice, like dry reeds in a windswell, talking of floccules, sun spots, fading in static and returning. I looked around to locate the radio but saw no sign of it. One drives around, moves from hotel rooms to public morphing houses, walks streets, thumbs books in what's left of the Almagordo library, sips weak coffee in Cafes, and watches out for Dinsmoor. He's not one to be exact. More likely he'll name a region of the Farm system and a month, even a season--see you in the fall, Farbo. . . eastern Kansa. I was happy this time to have run into him so quickly, if it was him. A trochilic is stationed on the banquette outside, spinning teetotums and begging jitneys. His woman has a line of birdwings, starling I suppose, strung from the pole of a dalite to the bumper of my Nash. Snow thickened on the roof of the City Moon building across the street, kitty corner. Plainfolk suffled along the avenue in Army wool ens, heads bowed into the cold wind of the plain, puddles frozen in the street, the dalites crackling and glowing dimply with an orange light. I ate the C-meat strips, the leathery strings entwining my rotted teeth. I swivelled on my stool, looked out into the lobby of the Tunney Arms. It's grand puce carpeting strewn with figbar wrappers, flattened wafers of discarded targum trodden by anxious feet into a pile. A dog resembling a chihuahua came into the Squat, probably one of Oneba's nuform dogs, circled aimlessly, snarling, exposing ricelike teeth, spitting up a froth, and then went out hobbling. I ate the flavorless soycake and drank another cup of the bitter chicory water served as coffee commonly at agency restaurants. The man I presumed to be Dinsmoor had the Moon folded in a crisp rectangle in front of him. His face was like a doctored photograph under the neon of the Hunger Art. He raised the sleeve of his overcoat to scratch at his elbow, lifted his chin to bother a patch of scale on his throat, and after this he rubbed his thumb and forefinger together in front of his nostrils and smelled them, as though in the qualities of its odor he might divine the cure. An oriental woman sat a few stools down from me at the counter, working at code in a City Moon with a lead pencil. She had recently come in from the snow, a sprinkling of it like salt in her pepper-black hair, and on the shoulders of her army coat. As the kitchen doors opened and closed, I heard the rattle of dinnerware, a baseball game on a radio, a tiny plainsman frying griddle buns in a pot of hot fat. Finished eating, I walked into the lobby proper and sat down to watch the television set, which was lag-bolted to the floor and enclosed in a wire cage. A few Tunney residents, most of them agents, sat quietly in front of the screen, some of them morphing out in wingback chairs, one of them wearing elaborately tubed and goggled headgear. In the mens I shit, a dribbling like a goat with scours, searched it for white worms. I tucked in my shirt tails, straightened my agency blazer, washed my hands. At the counter of the Hunger Art again, I waited for Dinsmoor to make an official gesture of contact with me. I drank another cup of coffee, my stomach soured, the water served me in a plastic tumbler warm and clouded. Dinsmoor at last came forward. "Farbo? The journalist?" We shook hands mechanically and smiled shallowly. He made his apologies for having me wait so long. He said he didn't want to approach the wrong man and be shot somewhere and left in the open air to die leaking, and have the grackles and crows pecking at his goggles. I assured him I was the right man. Dinsmoor said he was anxious to get to the clinic in Alamogordo, his jaws grinding cowlike on a ball of targum. Before that, though, and here a spindled finger of his indicated an item on the code page of his Moon, we would have to cover Oneba's demonstration, over on the Eastside, one of the historic areas. "Have you seen him do needlework, Farbo?" "I'm afraid not." "Ah, then. So this will be the first time." "Yes, I think so." "The City Moon has no idea what to make of him, Farbo. On the one hand he's a perfect



ass hole, on the other a miracle man in mufti. And who can deny that he does, in a way unknown yet, generate low life forms from palm-loads of, as far as we can tell, ordinary peat?" "Yes, they're fouling the sidewalks all over town." "Sure, it's temporary, clearly imperfect, but life nevertheless. It's something in his genes, Farbo, and they say he's working for the agency these days. And what is a little shit in the face of one who has capped the well of the vis vitalis?" "I've always thought of it as stage magic, Mr. Dinsmoor, nothing really to fuss over." "So, then where are all these cockers coming from? As you say, they're lousy in the streets, barging into restaurants." "The Nash is waiting, Mr. Dinsmoor. I'll be anxious to get a seat in the front row, for a close look at the procedures." "This is the latest, he's been reviving dogs for short periods, stimulating the midbrain with galvanic devices, calling them necronauts, a clever coinage of his. He claims it a matter of time before our dead uncles will be back to haunt the taverns, to sip jitney and tell tales of the great beyond, and our aunts to rattle piano keys again." "The Nash is waiting, Mr. Dinsmoor." Dinsmoor asked if I knew the Oriental woman sitting down from us, forking a plate of D-meat and eating it half heartedly, at the same time paying close attention to what we were saying. I said no, that there was some slight resemblance to someone I'd encountered somewhere, though eclipsed in my memory. "Parchman is a very well-known memory dump," he said. A dot of the brown soup he had eaten dried rubbery on his coat collar, his teeth like rat's teeth, the smell of camphor enclosing the air around him. "Sometimes I wonder whether they're trying to restore life down there or dribble it away--most of the farm-system truants I've interviewed are empty husks, Farbo, sad sad prodigies, all the gut and substance eaten out." "Shall we head on over to the Eastside, Mr. Dinsmoor?" In the Nash, Dinsmoor and I drove through the Eastside historic area in narrowing spirals, Dinsmoor eating figbars. He said, "Oneba will tell us what to do. Oneba will give us the word." "The bottom line," I said. At a corner, a huddle of plainfolk attracted Dinsmoor. We pulled over to the curbing. One of Oneba's dogs was in flames on the banquette. "Drive away, Farbo. Get out of here. They could notice we're in an agency car. We don't want to provoke them. They'll be on us like flies, wanting figbars, targum and jitney tokens, a dozen other things." "I guess they're sick of nothing and D-meat," I said. He offered a figbar, which I refused, not caring for the sweet taste and gritty seeds, and we drove on, looking for signs of the demonstration. Dinsmoor raked at his patches of scale, attending to the ones on the backs of his hands more than the rest. "They say," he said, "that Oneba keeps his crippled feet in a canvas bag." "I wouldn't know," I said. "You're too spare with words, Farbo. Be looser. I see soft slippers and long corridors in your future." "I really can't say," I said. "You see, there you go again. How can you prosper in the journalism field? The acorn embraces the oak, if you see what I mean. Spill more beans, ass hole. How can you expect to cut the mustard?" I dialed in a radio station and we listened to a football game being played in Chicago, a few brief minutes left in the last quarter. Sooty starlings lined the eaves of broken down factories and mills, an egg of moon threatened at the skyline, frozen auras clouded the glare of dalites blinking on for the night. The City itself, as ancient as it was, brittle in the cold. "Turn the heater on, Farbo." "I'm afraid it doesn't work. I turn it on and nothing happens." "Typical of the agency, to send us out on a tricky run like this and issue a junker vehicle. Fucking ass holes. We'll freeze to death in the middle of nowhere. It doesn't matter. Who gives a shit?" We saw the beam of an arc-light sweep the sky, the first hint of where the demo might be. We decided to head in that direction, to see what we could find. On Centrola Boulevard, a ponycart rattled over bricks, a plainsman tooting a kazoo in the bed of it, selling hot soy waffles. We hailed him and bought two a-piece. They were served in a fold of waxed paper, coated with cane syrup. Dinsmoor complained that the sweetness stung his teeth and he threw them out the window as we drove away, still in clear sight of the vendor. "Dogfood," Dinsmoor said. "I hope he saw that." The closer we approached the source of the beacon, the more difficult it became to locate exactly. We found ourselves, once in the neighborhood of it, a little disoriented. We circled the same blocks, re-crossed the same intersections, the architecture so much of a piece that we had to get along without landmarks. We parked the Nash under a dalite, locked it, thinking we would be better off on foot. In a few minutes, as though the car had been steering its own course, we were standing in front of the place. We heard a Sousa march playing hollowly from the throat of the loudspeaker, somewhere in the vicinity.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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HEN-PECKED MAN WILL LOSE AN EYE

Tarrytown, N. Y., Sept. 9.—Frederick Henshaw will be blind in his left eye for life as the result of a hen peck. He was petting Clara, the blue-ribbon rowl of his flock of fancy poultry, and she was playfully pecking at his face when her beak struck th pupil of his eye a glancing blow. Physicians declared that the use of the eye could never be restored.



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