

ONE DOLLAR VOLUME 8 / NUMBER 12

MAGAZINE FOR MEN

KNIGHT

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**A SEX ROMP
WITH THE
BEAUTIFUL**

EWA AULIN

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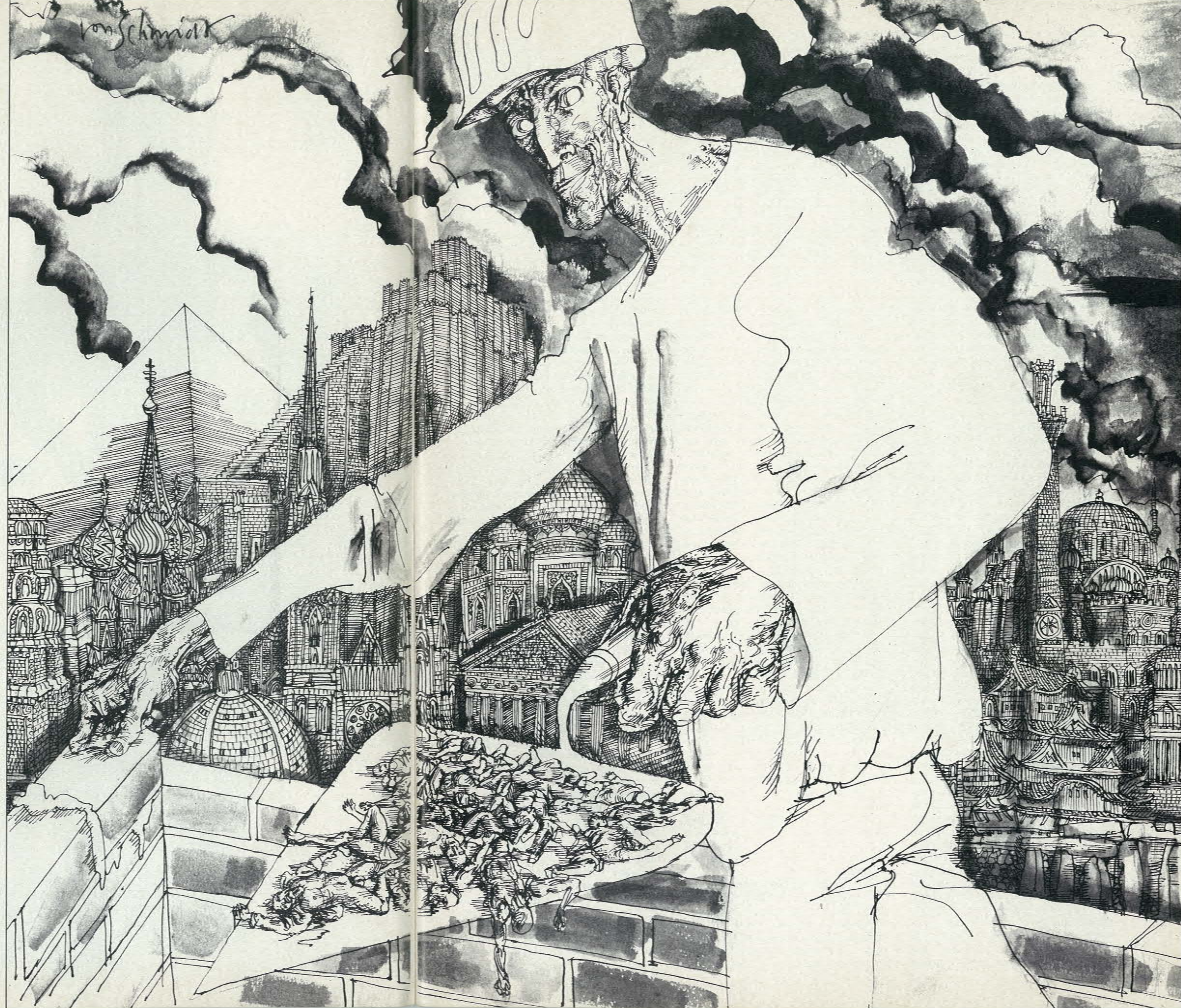


Was Mister Nicks, the new foreman, a diabolical genius or merely nuts? He seemed to believe all building was a sacred chore that must be consecrated by a violent death...and one man had died already.

HICKY NICKY THE FLOATIN' BRICKY

BY PIETRO DI DONATO

MISTER NICKS, the tall, new bricklayer-foreman, was very different from the run of hard-hats; he was educated and was a gentleman. What set him apart also was that he was happy with building; the average hard-hat is miserable—he thinks little and curses and drinks much and prattles about that “dream-someday” of hitting the lottery, the someday when his particular special ship will come in and he’ll throw his tools off the George Washington Bridge with a grand gesture. But this Mister Nicks had an affair with building; he loved construction the way a guy idolizes a woman. ■ Mister Nicks said, “Peter, you are different from the building slaves. You are probably the only apprentice-bricklayer in the United States who comes to the job site with *The Divine Comedy*, the *Golden Bough* and Lampriere’s classical dictionary under his arm.” ■ I was embarrassed and said apologetically, “Well, you see, during lunch and when we’re held up by weather, other trades or material, I like to read—I must read—I can’t help it. Somehow, what I read seems more real than life.” He said zealously, “You’ve got to read about architecture; construction reveals the essential history of man; Christ himself laid many a brick, and he was critical about the jerry-built tower of Siloam that fell and killed eighteen Hebrew workmen—I expected it to collapse—” “You ‘what?’” I said. He skipped my question; his strange sunken big eyes glowed. “Peter, do you know that every landmark project has a ‘genius’ and is a shrine?” I said in confusion, “A ‘shrine?’ A shrine to what?” He smiled, “To the reason for life.” There was something morbid, disastrous, in



his smile. Then he laughed and said jokingly, "A shrine to anything. Let us say, a shrine to Mister Construction..."

While I was laying bricks rapidly around the Big Steel many floors above the city street he'd magically appear out on the swinging scaffold by my side, and say odd things: "Peter, don't you feel the building as a growing stalk, and you one of the chemicals urging it upward? Listen to the music of its heartbeat; the building is a plant with concrete roots, steel fibers, and skin of burnt clay. The skyscraper is like a great child, either ugly or beautiful, ashamed or arrogant, and sometimes relaxed and noble; it's a being throbbing high and naked in the elements—don't you feel it, see it?"

He was the boss; so I nodded and said I guessed so. But he wouldn't let me go and he'd go on: "It's the offspring of the earth and water and fire; and like all things it tires and dies and dissolves and returns to the Great Earth Mother." I said, "Isn't there anything that remains? In my Catholic religion, if we're good we go to Heaven. What's your religion?" He said, "Occasionally a few ponderous corpses like the pyramids and the Chinese Wall remain, but the spirits of the monuments return to the site like golems and vampires seeking sacred human blood for reincarnation because all things must die in order to live."

It would always be something like that—"life-death," "death-life," and suggesting the possibility that skyscraper was the "true" being and man its synthetic by-product, and so forth, making me uncomfortable, and finally saying it was a bit over my head and very interesting but that I had to concentrate on bricklaying and not fall behind the other brickies.

Hard-hats run to repetitive muscle behaviorism and are peevish children bitchily envious of anyone in the foreman's good graces. That the HH is practically a robot is not his fault; he is a product of our compartmentalized times. The challenging intricacies of past craft forms have been discarded; the improvised artistry of the building individual is not required and has disappeared; the rigger—eagle of the tower—puts together steel members like a kid with his Erector set—it is all modular; the bricklayer lays one brick upon one or two other bricks ad infinitum; everything comes in prearranged marked sections from the kiln, foundry, mill, plant and factory; the HH is a belt-system putter-together; building today is an automatic process obviating the mind. The construction job, like the army, the insane asylum, monastery and prison

is an unnatural, womanless, all-male society that evokes both subtly and blatantly the utter baseness of the herd.

The English bricky, Norman Parker, was favored by Mister Nicks. It's nice to be considered above the rest of the gang, assigned to corners and light work, treated before the men as an honored bricklayer, spoken to respectfully in dulcet appreciative tones.

There are countless personal worlds within the vast dizzying world, but your own local little world usually, eventually, is your whole world. At that time the goal on my horizon of Job was to be the star trowel and have the lord of my bread and butter, Mister Nicks, say with patronizing voice in front of the brickies, "Peter, please take your tools and put up the main corner. I want it dead plumb; that's why I send you to put it up."

Norman Parker told me, "There's something uncanny about Nicks. I was with the International Firebrick Company; we travelled the world puttin' up smokestacks for electric plants. Now, you're gonner think I'm crazy but I'm ready to swear on my mother's grave I seen Nicks in Istanbul and Peking and Rangoon and Tierra del Fuego and Magnitogorsk as bricky foreman, and he was called 'Hicky Nicky The Floatin' Bricky.' An' would you believe it, kid, in the Himalayas an old Lama priest said to me pointin' to Nicks, 'My son, do you know who he is?' I said, 'No, who and what is he?' He said, 'That person whom you think is of contemporary flesh and blood like you and I is—'"

Just at that moment Mister Nicks called Parker, "Oh Norman. I have a chore for you in the basement; follow me, Norman."

In the afternoon Parker returned. His rosy face was pale, chalky. He looked as if a mortician had drained his blood vessels, and his expression was as vacant as if he had been de-brained. Mister Nicks sent him to another corner. Parker scooped mortar and bricked up the corner with the movements of a zombie. Mister Nicks said to me enthusiastically, "Peter, look at Parker's brickwork; every brick vertical as a plummet and level as the sea; neat and clean as diamonds."

Mister Nicks exuded an odor that made me blanch—I don't know—it was like the dank air of a tomb and the stomach-turning smell of the crematorium.

But, I must have had fever that day and imagined that Parker had come back from the basement; Parker's unwitnessed, accidental death in the basement must have shocked me so that I rejected its reality. They say he was putting a few bricks under a

huge boiler that was suspended by block and tackle, and the boiler slipped its sling and crushed him. To me it did seem a stupid, avoidable accident.

MISTER NICKS said, "Our next job will be the tallest edifice in history." The burning light came into his eyes. "It will be ten times higher than Babel!" He took me into his shanty-office and spread the blueprints of the next job. The Morris Tower was to be also the most beautiful skyscraper in the world; it was to simulate a gigantic lily; a circular stem faced with pure white glazed brick one-hundred-and-fifty stories high with a great gold-faced flaring cap. He said, with a grim smile, "Oh the thrill of constructing a pile that reaches the clouds and defies heaven!" His smile chilled me. He said melodiously, "Peter, you shall be my ace bricky!" I said, "But, Mister Nicks, I'm only the apprentice."

To be number one bricky on a Wonder of the World kept me in a state of elation. I laid the first ceremonial brick. Mister Nicks spoke of the pyramids, and of the slaves who quarried the huge slabs and chiseled them into blocks; and how the slaves ferried them down the Nile and lived on onions, bread and locusts and a few mouthfuls of precious water; and how they obediently worked themselves to death; and how it was the highest honor for the workmen to die for the spirit of the pyramids.

Mister Nicks treated me as though I were king of the Morris Tower. My ego was pleased beyond description; the job was paradise, and Mister Nicks a sort of beneficent diety.

I had The Dream: Mister Nicks makes more work on dams and tunnels and bridges and the Morris Tower is the ferris wheel at Coney Island and I lay bricks on a revolving wall and my trowel is all wrong and the mortar is decayed garbage and the bricks are vegetables and bundles of rags and I'm in stocking feet and can't find my tools and work clothes and I'm far behind the men and Mister Nicks looks at his watch and berates me in front of the brickies and says he's going to fire me and he takes me to one of the cabs of the ferris wheel and it is his narrow dark dirty furnished room and he gives me nuts and raisins and it is very late and I'm tired and can't remember where I live and there is one bed and we sleep back to back and then his painted fairy face hovers lecherously over me and his breath stinks of onions and locusts and he puts his cold hands between my legs and I shout you queer sonovabitch what the hell are you doing? Let go of my prick! Mister Nicks be-

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comes dignified and says Peter bring up the fluted section on the south side and he leads me to the door and says it's safe and he pushes me out into space and I am falling from the one-hundred-and-fiftieth floor and in my terror I awake.

WE WERE up near the top; it seemed you could reach out and touch the Hudson, the East River, Jersey, Westchester; and when the sky cleared bright you could see River-head sixty miles out on Long Island. Mister Nicks appeared. He spoke about the ships that looked like toys, and how glorious it was for men to raise a structure that tall. "Peter, I had an interesting dream about you." He peered at me. I remained silent. "Well," he said, "dreams may be of consequence—or—chaotic folly; don't you think so?" I felt guilty and ashamed for having that disgusting dream; but nevertheless I began to feel an uncontrollable revulsion for Mister Nicks. From then on he said little, but watched me constantly with a cloying smile; and when he gave me orders he spoke with a maddening, lilting nicety.

By day he concentrated on me like a confident, patient vulture awaiting certain surrender, and at night he was the incubus of my dreams, sucking my breath, encircling me, blocking my path, seeking me from beneath my feet and from over my head, and cornering me into the diminishing end of the funnel. I simply could have quit and walked off the Morris Tower job; but curiosity as to what that man was up

to and, further, my instinctive abhorrence and growing aggression, were vividly animating conditions; the crepuscular aura of unnamable danger that he cast made me acutely aware of being alive; amorphous demonic fear being a passion magnifying the senses and compressing livingness in a closer space and time; also, I felt, or preferred to feel, there was a profound or historical significance to my laying bricks—each brick a key in the mysterious code of the cosmos; and that what mattered was not the endurance of one's life but the quality and intensity—for example, the brief existence of Christ the construction worker; perhaps no one was actually sane, and Mister Nicks had to play a game; perhaps threatening, troubling and harming were eternal in the Scheme that dreaded the vacuum of common sense regularity.

And was Mr. Nicks just an erudite fellow trying to elevate me above the usual bricky who has his head stuck in the mortar tub and his ass pointing at the azure sky? He said, "Peter, if you're building a cesspool pretend you're laying brick on a cathedral. There's a genius in everyone if only they will call it forth, like Faustus summoned Mephisto—and who knows but that death is superior to life in sensual satisfaction!" Was I fated to have a clandestine rapport with the imago and psyche of the Tower Morris, a preordained belonging? Was Mister Nicks a male impersonator? Could I have erotic union with a skyscraper? Could there be final truth and justice in the man-job blood rites Mister Nicks hinted at? Were archi-

tecture and flesh and bones synonymous (structurally the church was the body of Christ—and flats and apartments were post-wombs) and was the building the receptacle and keeper of the soul scheduled for reincarnation like Ark and altar? And was the skyscraper God, and Mister Nicks Its prophet—and was there a High Mass without the celebration of Sacrifice? If I hadn't mused fancifully while laying bricks I would have gone mad or withered away.

Suddenly questions about ordinary everyday things posed importantly: all brickies piss against the wall right where they're working like self-unconscious animals in the street—and I never saw Mr. Nicks piss—never saw him drink water or eat lunch—did he have a wife, children—where did he live—why didn't he attend meetings at the union hall—where was he from—who was he?

The more I thought of Norman Parker the more I was convinced he was murdered. Intuition told me that Mister Nicks was a goddamn nut who imagined each job was a separate sacred entity that had to be propitiated and consecrated by the violent death of a hard-hat. All signs indicated Mister Nicks had chosen me as his next immolation—at least, I had to believe that in order to be on constant guard against the possible. I cryptically told Mister Nicks about the voodoo who salvaged and pampered a bushy-haired drunken white derelict so he could trap the derelict and add him to his fine collection of shrunken heads. Mister Nicks grinned.

He sent me to lay bricks on a stairwell by myself. Next to my mortar tub was a pail of water. I supposed it to be for tempering mortar. I don't know why, but I happened to look up and saw a steel worker about to cut holes in a beam with an acetylene torch; and I moved away from the stairwell. Within moments a shower of molten steel fell upon where I had been; and what I had thought was a pail of water exploded and spread great flames; someone had put a pail of gasoline where I was to lay brick. In my mind's eye I visualized Mister Nicks stealthily placing the gasoline there, knowing that after I arrived there the steel worker would burn steel with his torch above me.

I saw myself hunted and destroyed by Mister Nicks: knocked down a chute and buried in fresh concrete, tricked into space and being squashed onto the street, mashed under a falling wall. My physical being—body, limbs and countless considerable parts—was my problem; only and all of that was in jeopardy; my ineffable soul could not be touched. My duty was to keep alive and intact. If anything was



"Now, Frank, I know what you're thinking!"

going to happen it would have to happen before the Morris Tower was completed. I was determined to watch Mister Nicks' movements from starting to quitting whistle.

Day's work was over and the brickies left the scaffold and rode the hoists down to the shanty. I had a premonition and hid behind a section of air duct. There was no one on the floor. The Tower was still. A few pigeons soared up and rested on girders above, looking at me. Mister Nicks appeared, carrying a wrench. He looked around, then went out on the swinging scaffold where I would be working in the morning. He loosened the inch-thick bolts holding the cable drum and scaffold brackets to the suspended cables. He did it very carefully, like a thief calibrating the tumblers of a safe.

After he was gone I examined the scaffold. The nuts were holding on to the bolts by a hairsbreadth, connecting with about one-half a turn on the last thread.

In the morning, if I went out onto that scaffold, between my weight and the burden of a full tub of mortar and more hands of brick, the vibrations would soon dislodge the nuts and bolts and brackets, and the planking underfoot would give way and I'd plunge down one hundred stories. I fetched a wrench and tightened the nuts. There's nothing like being certain; Mister Nicks was my worst enemy in my life and world.

Next morning I saw him at a distance. He must have assumed that the scaffoldman or the safety inspector had found the defective bolts and routinely fixed the scaffold. He came to me and said it was a lovely day. He was affable and solicitous. His whorish acting did not succeed; I kept seeing him tamper with the scaffold in the private manner of an assassin to have me die for his insane job symbolism. I agreed that it was a lovely day but added that lovely day or not each day was a tremendously exciting lifetime because no one knew what might happen. His smile made me loathe him more than ever.

IT WAS a murky, humid afternoon. Mister Nicks was away from the job a few days and Cockeye Lynch was running the work. I had unconsciously relaxed my vigilance. Finished with my stint, I had to go to the opposite side of the building. Carrying my level and toolbag I started across the inside of the building. As I came by the open elevator shaft I saw mirrored in a big stainless steel sheet crazy Mister Nicks coming at me from behind, and before I could turn around or move away from the elevator shaft, he shoved me.

In the split-second that I had seen him mirrored my reflexes operated with electronic speed to save my life; in that untimable flash I noticed the elevator cable and as I was thrown I dropped the level and toolbag, and, thrust into the open shaft, I lunged for and caught the cable with both hands and twined my legs about the cable and shouted for help with all my might; workmen responded immediately; one pushed the elevator button signalling the hoisting engineer not to run the hoist, while others threw planks across the shaft and brought me back onto the floor. Mister Nicks had disappeared.

Escape from seeming sure death cannot be justly described; the feeling is that of having been taken to the world beyond and rapidly returned. And there are circumstances that inalterably and morally make it mandatory to kill—to preserve your life.

A couple of days later Mister Nicks was again very much in evidence. I saw him as my prey. I was transformed. Had I missed the elevator cable I would have gone to the bottom of the shaft and become old as time. His conjuring the shadow of death had matured me.

Death is not to be equivocated; its triumph over the ambulating fruit called flesh is total and without redress throughout ever-expanding infinity; and that deceptive fiend, Mister Nicks, wanted my one and only life on earth to be offered as a sort of spiritual mascot to the skyscraper god, Morris Tower.

We reached the final story, and the bricklayers' scaffolds were dismantled. There was some masonry to be done overhand, and the great capping that would resemble the flaring fulcrum of the fleur-de-lis, which would be constructed by the steel workers and faced in gold-limned sheets by the ornamental metal men. If the Morris Tower had had a Corinthian capital it would have been the Grecian column of the ages.

We had one day's work left, closing the openings where the outrigger I-beams had protruded to hold the scaffold cable. At noon there was a little rooftop party on the hundred-and-fiftieth floor-top with tycoons, politicians and clergy, and free sandwiches and soda.

Mister Nicks had the goddamn nerve to speak to me, saying man had come a long way from the tree, cave and tent. He thanked me for my dedicated bricklaying. Then his hellish eyes looked into me and he said fanatically, prayerfully, "To build! To build! The noblest art of all the arts! All the other arts are merely abstractions cast by outward things... Architecture exists in itself and surpasses all

man's accomplishments as substance shadow!" As he walked away I thought he said, "One must follow one's heart; obey impulse unthinkingly; act on the moment for good or evil!"

The work whistle blew; four hours more of bricklaying and we'd receive our pay envelopes and discharge slips. Filling the parapet openings was a fearsome task. It meant working on our knees, bending down and laying bricks overhand; one slight loss of balance, one false move would be the irreparable, irreversible end. We brickies warned each other to be extremely careful. We were alert and in full view of each other, and it was not possible for Mister Nicks to sneak behind me and nudge me over the brink—unless he were a phantom.

Below, no larger than an ant, I saw Mister Nicks emerge from a manhole and step out onto the street bridge; he had on the luminous yellow hard hat of the foreman. We always cautioned anyone who happened by beneath us. I checked the brickies on either side of me; they were not near, and were too occupied to see Mister Nicks. I did not cry out the usual, "Watch out below!"

Who was Mister Nicks? Was he the legendary Semite shepherd king, Hyksos Nyksos, who fashioned the first brick for mankind from the alluvial bed of the Euphrates in the Ur of Chaldees twenty thousand years ago? Was he Hiconium Niconium, the restless eternally wandering hermaphrodite of the Sacred Forbidden Architectural Mysteries? Or was he just that cabalistic snake oil doctor and Industrial Worker Of The World, Hicky Nicky The Floatin' Bricky, the invincible champion master mason from the parched claylands of pueblo Western Americana who came east to erect high-rises, live in smelly furnished rooms, eat dried apricots and sunflower seeds, and molest and make improper advances to apprentices?

I had a trowel of mortar in my right hand and a glazed white brick in my left; I wanted to pull back the brick and put it on the concrete floor but nervousness and the rich sweat in my palm let the brick go from my grip—I swear on The Cross that I would never have purposely dropped that brick... The sheer of the round Tower streamed under my vision looming hypnotically in invisible aerial space—true plumb never seeming perpendicular to the plane of the horizon—and the fleeing brick described an appealing beautiful long-curved flight scudding about a foot or so from the gleaming cliff-wall down through the waterlike shimmering waves of heat and went uninterrupted through Mister Nicks' hard hat and vanished home inside his head. ☺