

The Three Stigmata  
of Palmer Eldritch  
**Philip K. Dick**



# 1

His head unnaturally aching, Barney Mayer-son woke to find himself in an unfamiliar bedroom in an unfamiliar conapt building. Beside him, the covers up to her bare, smooth shoulders, an unfamiliar girl slept on, breathing lightly through her mouth, her hair a tumble of cottonlike white.

I'll bet I'm late for work, he said to himself, slid from the bed, and tottered to a standing position with eyes shut, keeping himself from being sick. For all he knew he was several hours' drive from his office; perhaps he was not even in the United States. However he *was* on Earth; the gravity that made him sway was familiar and normal.

And there in the next room by the sofa a familiar suitcase, that of his psychiatrist Dr Smile.

Barefoot, he padded into the living room, and seated himself by the suitcase; he opened it, clicked switches, and turned on Dr Smile. Meters began to register and the mechanism hummed. 'Where am I?' Barney asked it. 'And how far am I from New York?' That was the main point. He saw now a clock on the wall of the apt's kitchen; the time was 7:30 A.M. Not late at all.

The mechanism which was the portable extension of Dr Smile, connected by micro-relay to the computer itself in the basement level of Barney's own conapt building in New York, the Renown 33, tinnily declared, 'Ah, Mr Bayerson.'

'Mayerson,' Barney corrected, smoothing his hair with

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fingers that shook. 'What do you remember about last night?' Now he saw, with intense physical aversion, half-empty bottles of bourbon and sparkling water, lemons, bitters, and ice cube trays on the sideboard in the kitchen. 'Who is this girl?'

Dr Smile said, 'This girl in the bed is Miss Rondinella Fugate. Roni, as she asked you to call her.'

It sounded vaguely familiar, and oddly, in some manner, tied up with his job. 'Listen,' he said to the suitcase, but then in the bedroom the girl began to stir; at once he shut off Dr Smile and stood up, feeling humble and awkward in only his underpants.

'Are you up?' the girl asked sleepily. She thrashed about, and sat facing him; quite pretty, he decided, with lovely, large eyes. 'What time is it and did you put on the coffee pot?'

He tramped into the kitchen and punched the stove into life; it began to heat water for coffee. Meanwhile he heard the shutting of a door; she had gone into the bathroom. Water ran. Roni was taking a shower.

Again in the living room he switched Dr Smile back on. 'What's she got to do with P. P. Layouts?' he asked.

'Miss Fugate is your new assistant; she arrived yesterday from People's China where she worked for P. P. Layouts as their Pre-Fash consultant for that region. However, Miss Fugate, although talented, is highly inexperienced, and Mr Bulero decided that a short period as your assistant, I would say "under you," but that might be misconstrued, considering—'

'Great,' Barney said. He entered the bedroom, found his clothes – they had been deposited, no doubt by him, in a heap on the floor – and began with care to dress; he still felt terrible, and it remained an effort not to give up and be violently sick. 'That's right,' he said to Dr Smile as he came back to the living room buttoning his shirt. 'I remember the memo from Friday

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about Miss Fugate. She's erratic in her talent. Picked wrong on that US Civil War Picture Window item . . . if you can imagine it, she thought it'd be a smash hit in People's China.' He laughed.

The bathroom door opened a crack; he caught a glimpse of Roni, pink and rubbery and clean, drying herself. 'Did you call me, dear?'

'No,' he said. 'I was talking to my doctor.'

'Everyone makes errors,' Dr Smile said, a trifle vacuously.

Barney said, 'How'd she and I happen to—' He gestured toward the bedroom. 'After so short a time.'

'Chemistry,' Dr Smile said.

'Come on.'

'Well, you're both precogs. You previewed that you'd eventually hit it off, become erotically involved. So you both decided – after a few drinks – that why should you wait? "Life is short, art is—" ' The suitcase ceased speaking, because Roni Fugate had appeared from the bathroom, naked, to pad past it and Barney back once more into the bedroom. She had a narrow, erect body, a truly superb carriage, Barney noted, and small, up-jutting breasts with nipples no larger than matched pink peas. Or rather matched pink pearls, he corrected himself.

Roni Fugate said, 'I meant to ask you last night – why are you consulting a psychiatrist? And my lord, you carry it around everywhere with you; not once did you set it down – and you had it turned on right up until—' She raised an eyebrow and glanced at him searchingly.

'At least I did turn it off then,' Barney pointed out.

'Do you think I'm pretty?' Rising on her toes she all at once stretched, reached above her head, then, to his amazement, began to do a brisk series of exercises, hopping and leaping, her breasts bobbing.

'I certainly do,' he murmured, taken aback.

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'I'd weigh a ton,' Roni Fugate panted, 'if I didn't do these UN Weapons Wing exercises every morning. Go pour the coffee, will you, dear?'

Barney said, 'Are you really my new assistant at P. P. Layouts?'

'Yes, of course; you mean you don't remember? But I guess you're like a lot of really topnotch precogs: you see the future so well that you have only a hazy recollection of the past. Exactly what do you recall about last night?' She paused in her exercises, gasping for breath.

'Oh,' he said vaguely, 'I guess everything.'

'Listen. The only reason why you'd be carrying a psychiatrist around with you is that you must have gotten your draft notice. Right?'

After a pause he nodded. *That* he remembered. The familiar elongated blue-green envelope had arrived one week ago; next Wednesday he would be taking his mental at the UN military hospital in the Bronx.

'Has it helped? Has he—' She gestured at the suitcase. '—Made you sick enough?'

Turning to the portable extension of Dr Smile, Barney said, 'Have you?'

The suitcase answered, 'Unfortunately you're still quite viable, Mr Mayerson; you can handle ten Freuds of stress. Sorry. But we still have several days; we've just begun.'

Going into the bedroom, Roni Fugate picked up her underwear, and began to step into it. 'Just think,' she said reflectively. 'If you're drafted, Mr Mayerson, and you're sent to the colonies . . . maybe I'll find myself with your job.' She smiled, showing superb, even teeth.

It was a gloomy possibility and his precog ability did not assist him: the outcome hung nicely, at perfect balance on the scales of cause-and-effect to be.

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‘You can’t handle my job,’ he said. ‘You couldn’t even handle it in People’s China and that’s a relatively simple situation in terms of factoring out pre-elements.’ But someday she could; without difficulty he foresaw that. She was young and overflowing with innate talent: all she required to equal him – and he was the best in the trade – was a few years’ experience. Now he became fully awake as awareness of his situation filtered back to him. He stood a good chance of being drafted, and even if he was not, Roni Fugate might well snatch his fine, desirable job from him, a job up to which he had worked by slow stages over a thirteen-year period.

A peculiar solution to the grimness of the situation, this going to bed with her; he wondered how he had arrived at it.

Bending over the suitcase, he said in a low voice to Dr Smile, ‘I wish you’d tell me why the hell with everything so dire I decided to—’

‘I can answer that,’ Roni Fugate called from the bedroom; she had now put on a somewhat tight pale green sweater and was buttoning it before the mirror of her vanity table. ‘You informed me last night, after your fifth bourbon and water. You said—’ She paused, eyes sparkling. ‘It’s inelegant. What you said was this. “If you can’t lick ’em, join ’em.” Only the verb you used, I regret to say, wasn’t “join.”’

‘Hmm,’ Barney said, and went into the kitchen to pour himself a cup of coffee. Anyhow, he was not far from New York; obviously if Miss Fugate was a fellow employee at P. P. Layouts he was within commute distance of his job. They could ride in together. Charming. He wondered if their employer Leo Bulero would approve of this if he knew. Was there an official company policy about employees sleeping together? There was about almost everything else . . . although how a man who spent all his time at the resort

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beaches of Antarctica or in German E Therapy clinics could find time to devise dogma on every topic eluded him.

Someday, he said to himself, I'll live like Leo Bulero; instead of being stuck in New York City in 180 degree heat—

Beneath him now a throbbing began; the floor shook. The building's cooling system had come on. Day had begun.

Outside the kitchen window the hot, hostile sun took shape beyond the other conapt buildings visible to him; he shut his eyes against it. Going to be another scorcher, all right, probably up to the twenty Wagner mark. He did not need to be a precog to foresee this.

In the miserably high-number conapt building 492 on the outskirts of Marilyn Monroe, New Jersey, Richard Hnatt ate breakfast indifferently while, with something greater than indifference, he glanced over the morning homeopape's weather-syndrome readings of the previous day.

The key glacier, Ol' Skintop, had retreated 4.62 Grables during the last twenty-four-hour period. And the temperature, at noon in New York, had exceeded the previous day's by 1.46 Wagners. In addition the humidity, as the oceans evaporated, had increased by 16 Selkirks. So things were hotter and wetter; the great procession of nature clanked on, and toward what? Hnatt pushed the 'pape away, and picked up the mail which had been delivered before dawn . . . it had been some time since mailmen had crept out in daylight hours.

The first bill which caught his eye was the apt's cooling pro-rated swindle; he owed Conapt 492 exactly ten and a half skins for the last month — a rise of three-fourths of a skin over April. Someday, he said to himself, it'll be so hot that *nothing* will keep this place from melting; he recalled the day his l-p record collection had fused together in a lump, back around '04, due to a momentary failure of the building's cooling

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network. Now he owned iron oxide tapes; they did not melt. And at the same moment every parakeet and Venusian ming bird in the building had dropped dead. And his neighbor's turtle had been boiled dry. Of course this had been during the day and everyone – at least the men – had been at work. The wives, however, had huddled at the lowest subsurface level, thinking (he remembered Emily telling him this) that the fatal moment had at last arrived. And not a century from now but *now*. The Caltech predictions had been wrong . . . only of course they hadn't been; it had just been a broken power-lead from the NY utility people. Robot workmen had quickly shown up and repaired it.

In the living room his wife sat in her blue smock, painstakingly painting an unfired ceramic piece with glaze; her tongue protruded and her eyes glowed . . . the brush moved expertly and he could see already that this was going to be a good one. The sight of Emily at work recalled to him the task that lay before him, today: one which he did not relish.

He said, peevishly, 'Maybe we ought to wait before we approach him.'

Without looking up, Emily said, 'We'll never have a better display to present to him than we have now.'

'What if he says no?'

'We'll go on. What did you expect, that we'd give up just because my onetime husband can't foresee – or won't foresee – how successful these new pieces will eventually be in terms of the market?'

Richard Hnatt said, 'You know him; I don't. He's not vengeful, is he? He wouldn't carry a grudge?' And anyhow what sort of grudge could Emily's former husband be carrying? No one had done him any harm; if anything it had gone the other way, or so he understood from what Emily had related.

It was strange, hearing about Barney Mayerson all the time



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and never having met him, never having direct contact with the man. Now that would end, because he had an appointment to see Mayerson at nine this morning in the man's office at P. P. Layouts. Mayerson of course would hold the whip hand; he could take one brief glance at the display of ceramics and decline ad hoc. No, he would say, P. P. Layouts is not interested in a min of this. Believe my precog ability, my Pre-Fash marketing talent and skill. And – out would go Richard Hnatt, the collection of pots under his arm, with absolutely no other place to go.

Looking out the window he saw with aversion that already it had become too hot for human endurance; the footer runnels were abruptly empty as everyone ducked for cover. The time was eighty-thirty and he now had to leave; rising, he went to the hall closet to get his pith helmet and his mandatory cooling-unit; by law one had to be strapped to every commuter's back until nightfall.

'Goodbye,' he said to his wife, pausing at the front door.

'Goodbye and lots of luck.' She had become even more involved in her elaborate glazing and he realized all at once that this showed how vast her tension was; she could not afford to pause even a moment. He opened the door and stepped out into the hall, feeling the cool wind of the portable unit as it chugged from behind him. 'Oh,' Emily said, as he began to shut the door; now she raised her head, brushing her long brown hair back from her eyes. 'Vid me as soon as you're out of Barney's office, as soon as you know one way or another.'

'Okay,' he said, and shut the door behind him.

Downramp, at the building's bank, he unlocked their safety deposit box and carried it to a privacy room; there he lifted out the display case containing the spread of ceramic ware which he was to show Mayerson.

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Shortly, he was aboard a thermosealed interbuilding commute car, on his way to downtown New York City and P. P. Layouts, the great pale synthetic-cement building from which Perky Pat and all the units of her miniature world originated. The doll, he reflected, which had conquered man as man at the same time had conquered the planets of the Sol system. Perky Pat, the obsession of the colonists. What a commentary on colonial life . . . what more did one need to know about those unfortunates who, under the selective service laws of the UN, had been kicked off Earth, required to begin new, alien lives on Mars or Venus or Ganymede or wherever else the UN bureaucrats happened to imagine they could be deposited . . . and after a fashion survive.

And we think we've got it bad here, he said to himself.

The individual in the seat next to him, a middle-aged man wearing the gray pith helmet, sleeveless shirt, and shorts of bright red popular with the businessman class, remarked, 'It's going to be another hot one.'

'Yes.'

'What you got there in that great big carton? A picnic lunch for a hovel of Martian colonists?'

'Ceramics,' Hnatt said.

'I'll bet you fire them just by sticking them outdoors at high noon.' The businessman chuckled, then picked up his morning 'pape, opened it to the front page. 'Ship from outside the Sol system reported crash-landed on Pluto,' he said. 'Team being sent to find it. You supposed it's *things*? I can't stand those things from other star systems.'

'It's more likely one of our own ships reporting back,' Hnatt said.

'Ever seen a Proxima thing?'

'Only pics.'

'Grisly,' the businessman said. 'If they find that wrecked

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ship on Pluto and it is a thing I hope they laser it out of existence; after all we do have a law against them coming into our system.'

'Right.'

'Can I see your ceramics? I'm in neckties, myself. The Werner simulated-handwrought living tie in a variety of Titanian colors – I have one on, see? The colors are actually a primitive life form that we import and then grow in cultures here on Terra. Just how we induce them to reproduce is our trade secret, you know, like the formula for Coca-Cola.'

Hnatt said, 'For a similar reason I can't show you these ceramics, much as I'd like to. They're new. I'm taking them to a Pre-Fash precog at P. P. Layouts; if he wants to miniaturize them for the Perky Pat layouts then we're in: it's just a question of flashing the info to the P. P. disc jockey – what's his name? – circling Mars. And so on.'

'Werner handwrought ties are part of the Perky Pat layouts,' the man informed him. 'Her boyfriend Walt has a closetful of them.' He beamed. 'When P. P. Layouts decided to min our ties—'

'It was Barney Mayerson you talked to?'

'I didn't talk to him; it was our regional sales manager. They say Mayerson is difficult. Goes on what seems like impulse and once he's decided it's irreversible.'

'Is he ever wrong? Declines items that become fash?'

'Sure. He may be a precog but he's only human. I'll tell you one thing that might help. He's very suspicious of women. His marriage broke up a couple of years ago and he never got over it. See, his wife became pregnant *twice*, and the board of directors of his conapt building, I think it's 33, met and voted to expel him and his wife because they had violated the building code. Well, you know 33; you know how hard it is to get into any of the buildings in that low range. So instead of

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giving up his apt he elected to divorce his wife and let her move, taking their child. And then later on apparently he decided he made a mistake and he got embittered; he blamed himself, naturally, for making a mistake like that. A natural mistake, though; for God's sake, what wouldn't you and I give to have an apt in 33 or 34? He never remarried; maybe he's a Neo-Christian. But anyhow when you go to try to sell him on your ceramics, be very careful about how you deal with the feminine angle; don't say "these will appeal to the ladies" or anything like that. Most retail items are purchased—'

'Thanks for the tip,' Hnatt said, rising; carrying his case of ceramics he made his way down the aisle to the exit. He sighed. It was going to be tough, possibly even hopeless; he wasn't going to be able to lick the circumstances which long predated his relationship with Emily and her pots, and that was that.

Fortunately he managed to snare a cab; as it carried him through downtown cross-traffic he read his own morning 'pape, in particular the lead story about the ship believed to have returned from Proxima only to crash on Pluto's frozen wastes – an understatement! Already it was conjectured that this might be the well-known interplan industrialist Palmer Eldritch, who had gone to the Prox system a decade ago at the invitation of the Prox Council of humanoid types; they had wanted him to modernize their autofacs along Terran lines. Nothing had been heard from Eldritch since. Now this.

It would probably be better for Terra if this wasn't Eldritch coming back, he decided. Palmer Eldritch was too wild and dazzling a solo pro; he had accomplished miracles in getting autofac production started on the colony planets, but – as always he had gone too far, schemed too much. Consumer goods had piled up in unlikely places where no colonists existed to make use of them. Mountains of debris, they had

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become, as the weather corroded them bit by bit, inexorably. Snowstorms, if one could believe that such still existed somewhere . . . there were places which were actually cold. Too cold, in actual fact.

‘Thy destination, your eminence,’ the autonomic cab informed him, halting before a large but mostly subsurface structure. P. P. Layouts, with employees handily entering by its many thermal-protected ramps.

He paid the cab, hopped from it, and scuttled across a short open space for a ramp, his case held with both hands; briefly, naked sunlight touched him and he felt – or imagined – himself sizzle. Baked like a toad, dried of all life-juices, he thought as he safely reached the ramp.

Presently he was subsurface, being allowed into Mayerson’s office by a receptionist. The rooms, cool and dim, invited him to relax but he did not; he gripped his display case tighter and tensed himself and, although he was not a Neo-Christian, he mumbled a prolix prayer.

‘Mr Mayerson,’ the receptionist, taller than Hnatt and impressive in her open-bodice dress and resort-style heels, said, speaking not to Hnatt but to the man seated at the desk. ‘This is Mr Hnatt,’ she informed Mayerson. ‘This is Mr Mayerson, Mr Hnatt.’ Behind Mayerson stood a girl in a pale green sweater and with absolutely white hair. The hair was too long and the sweater too tight. ‘This is Miss Fugate, Mr Hnatt. Mr Mayerson’s assistant. Miss Fugate, this is Mr Richard Hnatt.’

At the desk Barney Mayerson continued to study a document without acknowledging the entrance of anyone and Richard Hnatt waited in silence, experiencing a mixed bag of emotions; anger touched him, lodged in his windpipe and chest, and of course *Angst*, and then, above even those, a tendril of growing curiosity. So this was Emily’s former

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husband, who, if the living necktie salesman could be believed, still chewed mournfully, bitterly, on the regret of having abolished the marriage. Mayerson was a rather heavy-set man, in his late thirties, with unusually – and not particularly fashionable – loose and wavy hair. He looked bored but there was no sign of hostility about him. But perhaps he had not as yet—

‘Let’s see your pots,’ Mayerson said suddenly.

Laying the display case on the desk Richard Hnatt opened it, got out the ceramic articles one by one, arranged them, and then stepped back.

After a pause Barney Mayerson said, ‘No.’

‘“No”?’ Hnatt said. ‘No what?’

Mayerson said, ‘They won’t make it.’ He picked up his document and resumed reading it.

‘You mean you decided just like that?’ Hnatt said, unable to believe that it was already done.

‘Exactly like that,’ Mayerson agreed. He had no further interest in the display of ceramics; as far as he was concerned Hnatt had already packed up his pots and left.

Miss Fugate said, ‘Excuse me, Mr Mayerson.’

Glancing at her Barney Mayerson said, ‘What is it?’

‘I’m sorry to say this, Mr Mayerson,’ Miss Fugate said; she went over to the pots, picked one up and held it in her hands, weighing it, rubbing its glazed surface. ‘But I get a distinctly different impression than you do. I feel these ceramic pieces will make it.’

Hnatt looked from one to the other of them.

‘Let me have that.’ Mayerson pointed to a dark gray vase; at once Hnatt handed it to him. Mayerson held it for a time. ‘No,’ he said finally. He was frowning, now. ‘I still get no impression of this item making it big. In my opinion you’re mistaken, Miss Fugate.’ He set the vase back down.

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‘However,’ he said to Richard Hnatt, ‘in view of the disagreement between myself and Miss Fugate—’ He scratched his nose thoughtfully. ‘Leave this display with me for a few days; I’ll give it further attention.’ Obviously, however, he would not.

Reaching, Miss Fugate picked up a small, oddly shaped piece and cradled it against her bosom almost tenderly. ‘This one in particular. I receive very powerful emanations from it. This one will be the most successful of all.’

In a quiet voice Barney Mayerson said, ‘You’re out of your mind, Roni.’ He seemed really angry, now; his face was violent and dark. ‘I’ll vid you,’ he said to Richard Hnatt. ‘When I’ve made my final decision. I see no reason why I should change my mind, so don’t be optimistic. In fact don’t bother to leave them.’ He shot a hard, harsh glance toward his assistant, Miss Fugate.