

# A Canticle For Leibowitz

By Walter M. Miller, Jr.

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## Fiat Homo

### 1

B

rother Francis Gerard of Utah might never have discovered the blessed documents, had it not been for the pilgrim with girded loins who appeared during that young novice's Lenten fast in the desert.

Never before had Brother Francis actually seen a pilgrim with girded loins, but that this one was the bona fide article he was convinced as soon as he had recovered from the spine-chilling effect of the pilgrim's advent on the far horizon, as a wiggling iota of black caught in a shimmering haze of heat. Legless, but wearing a tiny head, the iota materialized out of the mirror glaze on the broken roadway and seemed more to writhe than to walk into view, causing Brother Francis to clutch the crucifix of his rosary and mutter an Ave or two. The iota suggested a tiny apparition spawned by the heat demons who tortured the land at high noon, when any creature capable of motion on the desert (except the buzzards and a few monastic hermits such as Francis) lay motionless in its burrow or hid beneath a rock from the ferocity of the sun. Only a thing monstrous, a thing preternatural, or a thing with addled wits would hike purposefully down the trail at noon this way. Brother Francis added a hasty prayer to Saint Raul the Cyclopean, patron of the misborn, for protection against the Saint's unhappyprotégés. (For who did not then know that there were monsters in the earth in those days? That which was born alive was, by the law of the Church and the law of Nature, suffered to live, and helped to maturity if possible, by those who had begotten it. The law was not always obeyed, but it was obeyed with sufficient frequency to sustain a scattered population of adult monsters, who often chose the remotest of deserted lands for their wanderings, where they prowled by night around the fires of prairie travelers.) But at last the iota squirmed its way out of the heat risers and into clear air, where it manifestly became a distant pilgrim; Brother Francis released the crucifix with a small Amen.

The pilgrim was a spindly old fellow with a staff, a basket hat, a brushy beard, and a waterskin slung over one shoulder. He was chewing and spitting with too much relish to be an apparition, and he seemed too frail and lame to be a successful practitioner of ogre-ism or highwaymanship. Nevertheless, Francis

slunk quietly out of the pilgrim's line of sight and crouched behind a heap of rubble stone where he could watch without being seen. Encounters between strangers in the desert, while rare, were occasions of mutual suspicion, and masked by initial preparations on both sides for an incident that might prove either cordial or warlike. Seldom more than thrice annually did any layman or stranger travel the old road that passed the abbey, in spite of the oasis which permitted that abbey's existence and which would have made the monastery a natural inn for wayfarers if the road were not a road from nowhere, leading nowhere, in terms of the modes of travel in those times. Perhaps, in earlier ages, the road had been a portion of the shortest route from the Great Salt Lake to Old El Paso; south of the abbey it intersected a similar strip of broken stone that stretched east-and westward. The crossing was worn by time, but not by Man, of late.

The pilgrim approached within hailing distance, but the novice stayed behind his mound of rubble. The pilgrim's loins were truly girded with a piece of dirty burlap, his only clothing except for hat and sandals. Doggedly he plodded ahead with a mechanical limp while assisting his crippled leg with the heavy staff. His rhythmic gait was that of a man with a long road behind him and a long way yet to go. But, upon entering the area of the ancient ruins, he broke his stride and paused to reconnoiter.

Francis ducked low.

There was no shade amid the cluster of mounds where a group of age-old buildings once had been, but some of the larger stones could, nevertheless, provide cooling refreshment to select portions of the anatomy for travelers as wise in the way of the desert as the pilgrim soon proved himself to be. He searched briefly for a rock of suitable proportions. Approvingly, Brother Francis noted that he did not grasp the stone and rashly tug, but instead, stood at a safe distance from it and, using his staff as a lever and a smaller rock for a fulcrum, he jostled the weightier one until the inevitable buzzing creature crawled forth from below. Dispassionately the traveler killed the snake with his staff and flipped the still wriggling carcass aside. Having dispatched the occupant of the cool cranny beneath the stone, the pilgrim availed himself of the cool cranny's ceiling by the usual method of overturning the stone. Thereupon, he pulled up the back of his loincloth, sat with his withered buttocks against the stone's relatively chilly underside, kicked off his sandals, and pressed the soles of his feet against what had been the sandy floor of the cool cranny. Thus refreshed, he wiggled his toes, smiled toothlessly and began to hum a tune. Soon he was singing a kind of crooning chant in a dialect not known to the novice. Weary of crouching, Brother Francis shifted restlessly.

While he sang, the pilgrim unwrapped a biscuit and a bit of cheese. Then his singing paused, and he stood for a moment to cry out softly in the vernacular of the region: "Blest be *Adonoi Elohim*, King of All, who maketh bread to spring forth from the earth," in a sort of nasal bleat. The bleat being finished, he sat again, and commenced eating.

The Wanderer had come a long way indeed, thought Brother Francis, who knew of no adjacent realm governed by a monarch with such an unfamiliar name and such strange pretensions. The old man was making a penitential pilgrimage, hazarded Brother Francis—perhaps to the "shrine" at the abbey, although the "shrine" was not yet officially a shrine, nor was its "saint" yet officially a saint. Brother Francis could think of no alternate explanation of the presence of an old wanderer on this road leading to nowhere.

The pilgrim was taking his time with the bread and cheese, and the novice grew increasingly restless as his own anxiety waned. The rule of silence for the Lenten fast days did not permit him to converse voluntarily with the old man, but if he left his hiding place behind the rubble heap before the old man departed, he was certain to be seen or heard by the pilgrim, for he had been forbidden to leave the vicinity of his hermitage before the end of Lent.

Still slightly hesitant, Brother Francis loudly cleared his throat, then straightened into view.

“Whup!”

The pilgrim’s bread and cheese went flying. The old man grabbed his staff and bounded to his feet.

“Creep up on me, will you!”

He brandished the staff menacingly at the hooded figure which had arisen from beyond the rock pile. Brother Francis noticed that the thick end of the staff was armed with a spike. The novice bowed courteously, thrice, but the pilgrim overlooked this nicety.

“Stay back there now!” he croaked. “Just keep your distance, sport. I’ve got nothing you’re after—unless it’s the cheese, and you can have that. If it’s meat you want, I’m nothing but gristle, but I’ll fight to keep it. Back now!*back!*”

“Wait—” The novice paused. Charity, or even common courtesy, could take precedence over the Lenten rule of silence, when circumstances demanded speech, but to break silence on his own decision always left him slightly nervous.

“I’m not a sport, good simpleton,” he continued, using the polite address. He tossed back his hood to show his monastic haircut and held up his rosary beads. “Do you understand these?”

For several seconds the old man remained in catlike readiness for combat while he studied the novice’s sun-blistered, adolescent face. The pilgrim’s had been a natural mistake. Grotesque creatures who prowled the fringes of the desert often wore hoods, masks, or voluminous robes to hide deformity. Among them were these whose deformity was not limited to the body, those who sometimes looked on travelers as a dependable source of venison.

After a brief scrutiny, the pilgrim straightened.

“Oh—one of *them*.” He leaned on his staff and scowled.

“Is that the Leibowitz Abbey down yonder?” he asked, pointing toward the distant cluster of buildings to the south.

Brother Francis bowed politely and nodded at the ground.

“What are you doing out here in the ruins?”

The novice picked up a chalklike fragment of stone. That the traveler might be literate was statistically unlikely, but Brother Francis decided to try. Since the vulgar dialects of the people had neither alphabet nor orthography, he chalked the Latin words for “Penance, Solitude, and Silence,” on a large flat stone, and wrote them again below in ancient English, hoping, in spite of his unacknowledged yearning for someone to talk to, that the old man would understand and leave him to his lonely Lenten vigil.

The pilgrim smiled wryly at the inscription. His laugh seemed less a laugh than a fatalistic bleat. “Hmmm-hnnn! Still writing things backward,” he said; but if he understood the inscription, he did not condescend to admit it. He laid aside his staff, sat on the rock again, picked his bread and cheese out of the sand, and began scraping them clean. Francis moistened his lips hungrily, but looked away. He had eaten nothing but cactus fruit and one handful of parched corn since Ash Wednesday; the rules of fast

and abstinence were rather strict for vocational vigils.

Noticing his discomfort, the pilgrim broke his bread and cheese; he offered a portion to Brother Francis.

In spite of his dehydrated condition, caused by his meager water supply, the novice's mouth flooded with saliva. His eyes refused to move from the hand that offered the food. The universe contracted; at its exact geometric center floated that sandy tidbit of dark bread and pale cheese. A demon commanded the muscles of his left leg to move his left foot half a yard forward. The demon then possessed his right leg to move the right foot ahead of the left, and it somehow forced his right pectorals and biceps to swing his arm until his hand touched the hand of the pilgrim. His fingers felt the food; they seemed even to taste the food. An involuntary shudder passed over his half-starved body. He closed his eyes and saw the Lord Abbot glaring at him and brandishing a bullwhip. Whenever the novice tried to visualize the Holy Trinity, the countenance of God the Father always became confused with the face of the abbot, which was normally, it seemed to Francis, very angry. Behind the abbot a bonfire raged, and from the midst of the flames the eyes of the Blessed Martyr Leibowitz gazed in death-agony upon his fasting protégé, caught in the act of reaching for cheese.

The novice shuddered again. "*Apage Satanas!*" he hissed as he danced back and dropped the food. Without warning, he spattered the old man with holy water from a tiny phial sneaked from his sleeve. The pilgrim had become indistinguishable from the Archenemy, for a moment, in the somewhat sun-dazed mind of the novice.

This surprise attack on the Powers of Darkness and Temptation produced no immediate supernatural results, but the natural results seemed to appear *ex opere operate*. The pilgrim-Beelzebub failed to explode into sulfurous smoke, but he made gargling sounds, turned a bright shade of red, and lunged at Francis with a bloodcurdling yell. The novice kept tripping on his tunic as he fled from flailing of the pilgrim's spiked staff, and he escaped without nail holes only because the pilgrim had forgotten his sandals. The old man's limping charge became a skippity hop. He seemed suddenly mindful of scorching rocks under his bare soles. He stopped and became preoccupied. When Brother Francis glanced over his shoulder, he gained the distinct impression that the pilgrim's retreat to his cool spot was being accomplished by the feat of hopping along on the tip of one great toe.

Ashamed of the odor of cheese that lingered on his fingertips, and repenting his irrational exorcism, the novice slunk back to his self-appointed labors in the old ruins, while the pilgrim cooled his feet and satisfied his wrath by flinging an occasional rock at the youth whenever the latter moved into view among the rubble mounds. When his arm at last grew weary, he flung more feints than stones, and merely grumbled over his bread and cheese when Francis ceased to dodge.

The novice was wandering to and fro throughout the ruins, occasionally staggering toward some focal point of his work with a rock, the size of his own chest, locked in a painful embrace. The pilgrim watched him select a stone, estimate its dimensions in hand-spans, reject it, and carefully select another, to be pried free from the rock jam of the rubble, to be hoisted by Francis and stumblingly hauled away. He dropped one stone after a few paces, and, suddenly sitting, placed his head between his knees in an apparent effort to avoid fainting. After panting awhile, he arose again and finished by rolling the stone end-over-end toward its destination. He continued this activity while the pilgrim, no longer glaring, began to gape.

The sun blazed its midday maledictions upon the parched land, laying its anathema on all moist things. Francis labored on in spite of the heat.

When the traveler had washed down the last of his sandy bread and cheese with a few squirts from his waterskin, he slipped feet into sandals, arose with a grunt, and hobbled through the ruins toward the site of the novice's labors. Noticing the old man's approach, Brother Francis scurried to a safe distance. Mockingly, the pilgrim brandished his spiked cudgel at him, but seemed more curious about the youth's masonry than he seemed eager for revenge. He paused to inspect the novice's burrow.

There, near the east boundary of the ruins, Brother Francis had dug a shallow trench, using a stick for a hoe and hands for a shovel. He had, on the first day of Lent, roofed it over with a heap of brush, and used the trench by night as refuge from the desert's wolves. But as the days of his fasting grew in number, his presence had increased his spoor in the vicinity until the nocturnal lupine prowlers seemed unduly attracted to the area of the ruins and even scratched around his brush heap when the fire was gone.

Francis had first attempted to discourage their nightly digging by increasing the thickness of the brush pile over his trench, and by surrounding it with a ring of stones set tightly in a furrow. But on the previous night, something had leaped to the top of his brush pile and howled while Francis lay shivering below, whereupon he had determined to fortify the burrow, and, using the first ring of stones as a foundation, had begun to build a wall. The wall tilted inward as it grew; but since the enclosure was roughly an oval in shape, the stones in each new layer crowded against adjacent stones to prevent an inward collapse. Brother Francis now hoped that by a careful selection of rocks and a certain mount of juggling, dirt-tamping, and pebble-wedging, he would be able to complete a dome. And, a single span of unbuttressed arch, somehow defying gravity, stood there over the burrow as a token of this ambition. Brother Francis yelped like a puppy when the pilgrim rapped curiously at this arch with his staff.

Solicitous for his abode, the novice had drawn nearer during the pilgrim's inspection. The pilgrim answered his yelp with a flourish of the cudgel and a bloodthirsty howl. Brother Francis promptly tripped on the hem of his tunic and sat down. The old man chuckled.

"Hmmm-hnnn! You'll need a strange shape of a rock to fit that gap," he said, and rattled his staff back and forth in a vacant space in the highest tier of stones.

The youth nodded and looked away. He continued to sit in the sand, and, by silence and by his lowered gaze, he hoped to tell the old man that he was neither free to converse nor free to accept willingly another's presence in his place of Lenten solitude. The novice began writing with a dry twig in the sand: *Et ne nos inducas in...*

"I've not offered to change these stones into bread for you yet, have I?" the old traveler said crossly.

Brother Francis glanced up quickly. So! the old man *could* read, and read Scripture, at that. Furthermore, his remark implied that he had understood both the novice's impulsive use of holy water and his reason for being here as well. Aware now that the pilgrim was teasing him, Brother Francis lowered his eyes again and waited.

"Hmmm-hnnn! So you're to be left alone, are you? Well, then, I'd best be on my way. Tell me, will your brothers at the abbey let an old man rest a bit in their shade?"

Brother Francis nodded. "They'll give you food and water too," he added softly, in charity.

The pilgrim chuckled. "For that, I'll find you a rock to fit that gap before I go. God with you."

But you need not—The protest died unspoken. Brother Francis watched him hobbling slowly away. The pilgrim wandered in and about among the rubble mounds. He paused occasionally to inspect a stone or

pry at one with his staff. His search would surely prove fruitless, the novice thought, for it was a repetition of a search which the youth himself had been making since mid-morning. He had decided at last that it would be easier to remove and rebuild a section of the highest tier than to find a keystone that approximated the hourglass shape of the gap in that tier. But, surely, the pilgrim would soon exhaust his patience and wander on his way.

Meanwhile, Brother Francis rested. He prayed for the recovery of that inward privacy which the purpose of his vigil demanded that he seek: a clean parchment of the spirit whereon the words of a summons might be written in his solitude—if that other Immensurable Loneliness which was God stretched forth Its hand to touch his own tiny human loneliness and to mark his vocation there. The *Little Book*, which Prior Cherokee had left with him on the preceding Sunday, served as a guide to his meditation. It was centuries old, and it was called *Libellus Leibowitz*, although only an uncertain tradition attributed its authorship to the Beatus himself.

“Parum equidem te diligebam, Domine, juventute mea; quare doleo nimis . . . Too little, O Lord, did I love Thee in the time of my youth; wherefore I grieve exceedingly in the time of my age. In vain did I flee from Thee in those days...”

“Hoy!Over here!” came a shout from beyond the rubble mounds.

Brother Francis glanced up briefly, but the pilgrim was not in sight. His eyes fell again to the page.

“Repugnans tibi, ausus sum quaerere quid, quid doctius mihi fide, certius spe, aut dulcius caritate visum esset. Quis itaque stultior me...”

“Heyboy!” they came again. “I found you a stone, one likely to fit.”

This time when Brother Francis looked up, he caught a glimpse of the pilgrim’s staff waving signals to him beyond the top of a rubble heap. Sighing the novice returned to his reading.

“O inscrutabilis Scrutator animarum, cui patet omne cor, si me vocaveras, olim a te fugeram. Si autem nunc velis vocare me indignum . . .”

And, irritably from beyond the rubble mound: “All right, then, suit yourself. I’ll mark the rock and set a stake by it. Try it or not, as you please.”

“Thank you,” the novice sighed, but doubted that the old man heard him. He toiled on with the text:

“Libera me, Domine, ab vitiis meis, ut solius tuae voluntatis mihi cupidus sim, et vocationis . . .”

“There, then!” the pilgrim shouted. “It’s staked and marked. And may you find your voice soon, boy. *Olla allay!*”


Soon after the last shout faded and died, Brother Francis caught a glimpse of the pilgrim trudging away on the trail that led toward the abbey. The novice whispered a swift blessing after him, and a prayer for safe wayfaring.

His privacy having been restored, Brother Francis returned the book to his burrow and resumed his haphazard stonemasonry, not yet troubling himself to investigate the pilgrim’s find. While his starved body heaved, strained, and staggered under the weight of the rocks, his mind, machinelike kept repeating the prayer for the certainty of his vocation:

“Libere me, Domine, ab vitiis meis. . . Set me free, O Lord, from my own vices, so that in my own heart I may be desirous of only Thy will, and be aware of Thy summons if it come. . . *ut solius tuae voluntatis mihi cupidus sim, et vocatinonis tuae conscius si digneris me vocare. Amen.*”

“Set me free, O Lord, from my own vices, so that in my own heart...”

A sky-herd of cumulus clouds, on their way to bestow moist blessings on the mountains after cruelly deceiving the parched desert, began blotting out the sun and trailing dark shadow-shapes across the blistered land below, offering intermittent but welcome respite from the searing sunlight. When a racing cloud-shadow wiped its way over the ruins, the novice worked rapidly until the shadow was gone, then rested until the next bundle of fleece blotted out the sun.

It was quite by accident that Brother Francis finally discovered the pilgrim’s stone. While wandering thereabouts, he stumbled over the stake which the old man had driven into the ground as a marker. He found himself on his hands and knees staring at a pair of marks freshly chalked on an ancient stone: 

The marks were so carefully drawn that Brother Francis immediately assumed them to be symbols, but minutes of musing over them left him still bemused. Witch markings perhaps? But no, the old man had called: “God-with-you,” as a witch would not. The novice pried the stone free from the rubble and rolled it over. As he did so, the rock mound rumbled faintly from within; a small stone clattered down the slope. Francis danced away from a possible avalanche, but the disturbance was momentary. In the place where the pilgrim’s rock had been wedged, however, there now appeared a small black hole.

Holes were often inhabited.

But this hole seemed to have been so tightly corked by the pilgrim’s stone that scarcely a flea could have entered it before Francis had overturned the rock. Nevertheless, he found a stick and gingerly thrust it into the opening. The stick encountered no resistance. When he released it, the stick slid into the hole and vanished, as if into a larger underground cavity. He waited nervously. Nothing slithered forth.

He sank to his knees again and cautiously sniffed at the hole. Having noticed neither an animal odor nor any hint of brimstone, he rolled a bit of gravel into it and leaned closer to listen. The gravel bounced once, a few feet below the opening, and then kept rattling its way downward, struck something metallic in passing, and finally came to rest somewhere far below. Echoes suggested an underground opening the size of a room.

Brother Francis climbed unsteadily to his feet and looked around. He seemed alone, as usual, except for his companion buzzard which, soaring on high, had been watching him with such interest lately that other buzzards occasionally left their territories near the horizons and came to investigate.

The novice circled the rubble heap, but found no sign of a second hole. He climbed an adjacent heap and squinted down the trail. The pilgrim had long since vanished. Nothing moved along the old roadway, but he caught a fleeting glimpse of Brother Alfred crossing a low hill a mile to the east in search of firewood near his own Lenten hermitage. Brother Alfred was deaf as a post. There was no one else in view. Francis foresaw no reason whatever to scream for help, but to estimate in advance the probable results of such a scream, if the need should arise, seemed only an exercise of prudence. After a careful scrutiny of the terrain, he climbed down from the mound. Breath needed for screaming would be better used for running.

He thought of replacing the pilgrim’s stone to cork the hole as before, but the adjacent stones had

shifted slightly so that it no longer fit its previous place in the puzzle. Besides, the gap in the highest tier of his shelter wall remained unfilled, and the pilgrim was right: the stone's size and shape suggested a probable fit. After only brief misgivings, he hoisted the rock and staggered back to his burrow.

The stone slipped neatly into place. He tested the new wedge with a kick; the tier held fast, even though the jolt caused a minor collapse a few feet away. The pilgrim's marks, though blurred by his handling of the stone, were still dear enough to be copied. Brother Francis carefully redrew them on another rock, using a charred stick as a stylus. When Prior Cheroki made his Sabbath tour of the hermitages, perhaps the priest would be able to say whether the marks had meaning, either as charm or curse. To fear the pagan cabals was forbidden, but the novice was curious at least to learn what sign would be overhanging his sleeping pit, in view of the weight of the masonry on which the sign was written.

His labors continued through the heat of the afternoon. A corner of his mind kept reminding him of the hole—the interesting, and yet fearsome, little hole—and the way the rattle of gravel had caused faint echoes from somewhere below ground. He knew that the ruins all about him here were very old. He knew also, from tradition that the ruins had been gradually eroded into these anomalous heaps of stone by generations of monks and occasional strangers, men seeking a load of stone or looking for the bits of rusty steel which could be found by shattering the larger sections of columns and slabs to extract the ancient strips of that metal, mysteriously planted in the rocks by men of an age almost forgotten to the world. This human erosion had all but obliterated the resemblance to buildings, which tradition ascribed to the ruins in an earlier period, although the abbey's present master-builder still took pride in his ability to sense and to point out the vestige of a floor plan here and there. And there was still metal to be found, if anyone cared to break enough rock to find it.

The abbey itself had been built of these stones. That several centuries of stonemasons might have left anything of interest still to be discovered in the ruins, Francis regarded as improbable fancy. And yet, he had never heard anyone mention buildings with basements or underground rooms. The master-builder, he recalled at last, had been quite specific in saying that the buildings at this site had had aspects of hasty construction, lacked deep foundations, and had rested for the most part on flat surface slabs.

With his shelter approaching completion, Brother Francis ventured back to the hole and stood looking down at it; he was unable to put off the desert-dweller's conviction that wherever a place exists to hide from the sun, something is already hiding in it. Even if the hole was now uninhabited, something would certainly slither into it before tomorrow's dawn. On the other hand, if something already lived in the hole, Francis thought it safer to make its acquaintance by day than by night. There seemed to be no tracks in the vicinity except his own, the pilgrim's, and the tracks of the wolves.

Making a quick decision, he began clearing rubble and sand away from the hole. After half an hour of this, the hole was no larger, but his conviction that it opened into a subterranean pit had become a certainty. Two small boulders, half buried, and adjoining the opening, were obviously jammed together by the force of too much mass crowding the mouth of a shaft; they seemed caught in a bottleneck.

When he pried one stone toward the right, its neighbor rolled left, until no further motion was possible. The reverse effect occurred when he pried in the opposing direction, but he continued to jostle at the rock-jam.

His lever spontaneously leaped from his grasp, delivered a glancing blow to the side of his head, and disappeared in a sudden cave-in. The sharp blow sent him reeling. A flyingstone from the rockslide struck him in the back and he fell gasping, uncertain whether or not he was falling into the pit until the instant his belly hit solid ground and he hugged it. The roar of the rockfall was deafening but brief.

Blinded by dust, Francis lay gasping for breath and wondering whether he dared to move, so sharp was the pain in his back. Having recovered a little breath, he managed to get one hand inside his habit and groped for the place between his shoulders where a few crushed bones might be. The place felt rough, and it stung. His fingers came away damp and red. He moved, but groaned and lay quietly again.

There was a soft beating of wings. Brother Francis glanced up in time to see the buzzard preparing to alight on a rubble heap a few yards away. The bird took wing again at once, but Francis imagined that it had eyed him with a sort of motherly concern in the manner of a worried hen. He rolled over quickly. A whole black heavenly host of them had gathered, and they circled at a curiously low altitude. Just skimming the mounds. They soared higher when he moved. Suddenly ignoring the possibility of chipped vertebrae or a crushed rib, the novice climbed shakily to his feet. Disappointed, the black sky-horde rode back to altitude on their invisible elevators of hot air, then disbanded and dispersed toward their remoter aerial vigils. Dark alternatives to the Paraclete whose coming he awaited, the birds seemed eager at times to descend in place of the Dove; their sporadic interest had been unnerving him of late, and he promptly decided, after some experimental shrugging, that the sharp rock had done no more than bruise and scrape

A dust column which had plumed up from the site of the cave-in was tapering away on the breeze. He hoped someone would see it from the abbey's watchtowers and come to investigate. At his feet, a square opening yawned in the earth, where one flank of the mound had collapsed into the pit below. Stairs led downward, but only the top steps remained unburied by the avalanche which had paused for six centuries in mid-fall to await the assistance of Brother Francis before completing its roaring descent.

On one wall of the stair well a half-buried sign remained legible. Mustering his modest command of pre-Deluge English, he whispered the words haltingly:

## FALLOUT SURVIVAL SHELTER

Maximum Occupancy: 15

Provision limitations, single occupant: 180 days; divide by actual number of occupants. Upon entering shelter, see that First Hatch is securely locked and sealed, that the intruder shields are electrified to repel contaminated persons attempting entry, that the warning lights are *ON* outside the enclosure. . .

The rest was buried, but the first word was enough for Francis. He had never seen a "Fallout," and he hoped he'd never see one. A consistent description of the monster had not survived, but Francis had heard the legends. He crossed himself and backed away from the hole. Tradition told that the Beatus Leibowitz himself had encountered a Fallout, and had been possessed by it for many months before the exorcism which accompanied his Baptism drove the fiend away.

Brother Francis visualized a Fallout as half-salamander, because, according to tradition, the thing was born in the Flame Deluge, and as half-incubus who despoiled virgins in their sleep, for, were not the monsters of the world still called "children of the Fallout"? That the demon was capable of inflicting all the woes which descended upon Job was recorded fact, if not an article of creed.

The novice stared at the sign in dismay. Its meaning was plain enough. He had unwittingly broken into the abode (deserted, he prayed) of not just one, but fifteen of the dreadful beings! He groped for his phial of holy water.

## 2

“A spiritu fornicationis,

Domino, libera nos.

From the lightning and the tempest,

O Lord, deliver us.

From the scourge of the earthquake,

O Lord, deliver us.

From plague, famine, and war,

O Lord, deliver us.

“From the place of ground zero,

O Lord, deliver us.

From the rain of the cobalt,

O Lord, deliver us.

From the rain of the strontium,

O Lord, deliver us.

From the fall of the cesium,

O Lord, deliver us.

“From the curse of the Fallout,

O Lord, deliver us.