



The Invention (1959)

The Invention

Characters

Researchers at the South African Restoration Vaults

CRUGER
BYTRON
FREMULER
NEUBATEN
HARDIBURR
GLU
DESTUS

The Guinea-pigs (Voices)

1st VOICE: A FARMER
2nd VOICE: PRIME MINISTER'S BROTHER-IN-LAW
3rd VOICE: A WOMAN
AUTOMATED VOICE

The Envoys

BRIKLEMAINE
MRS HIGGINS
DIRECTOR OF THE LABORATORIES
PUBLIC PROSECUTOR, NEWLY RECRUITED FOR THE VAULTS
BISHOP KALINGA
AN EX-RACIAL SECURITY OFFICER
GUARDS, etc

The faces of the characters could be hideously deformed or simply pasty with sickly grayishness. The two envoys are not so badly affected.

The laboratory is a gleaming piece of futurisation. Researchers are in white overalls. DESTUS has a class-conscious manner; GLU is an old man; HARDIBURR is a slobbering idiot; FREMULER is a dedicated worker, his desk is to the wall and his back to the audience. He is a stammerer. The DIRECTOR is just another boss; MRS HIGGINS is a simpering fool and BRIKLEMAINE is a typical bloated American native of the South. The EX-RACIAL SECURITY OFFICER is demented. BISHOP KALINGA is inscrutable.

The laboratory should suggest being underground. Behind CRUGER'S desk is a rogues' gallery. One or two others make notches against their instruments on 'unmasking' a criminal. One or two charts of human anatomy.

Long speeches were [sic] obvious should be directed frankly at the audience. In fact, this need not be confined to the longer speeches.

In the centre of the rear wall is a fox hole, heavily barred and bolted. For the rest, the usual equipment of a laboratory, tongs, scales, crucibles, burners, beakers, flasks on tripods and tubes leading to and from bubble burping beakers.

The Prologue

To be spoken by BISHOP KALINGA. He appears front-stage in a black cassock and cleric hat, sets up his portable lectern, and begins to gesture with both arms in the manner of one who is telling his audience to come closer. He delivers the prologue expressionlessly.

'On July Fourth, nineteen hundred and seventy-six, the United States of America celebrated its two hundredth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, and incidentally, of the Declaration of Human Rights. And as the climax of the jubilation, a rocket was sent up to Jupiter, this being the nearest planet on which their latest isoto-nuclear bomb could be exploded without any danger to the human race. Like most of their efforts, it went astray. From Massachusetts to Madagascar, through the icebergs

of the Antarctic Sea, twice beneath the North Pole until every compass upon earth was distorted, and it finally disappeared for two days and nights from sight and radar. When, three days later, it hovered over the Cape of Good Hope and landed in a disused mineshaft in Johannesburg, the world was reassured that this bomb had been rendered harmless ...

(The PUBLIC PROSECUTOR enters, stands quietly listening)

... but it was not very long before this abomination of man's handiwork hit us and killed us and twisted us till no man can say today whether he is flesh or vegetable. And amidst this carnage, the only fact that distresses my countrymen is that they can no longer tell who is black and who is white. The wealth of the nation has gone into a laboratory where men must submit themselves to the testing of ...'

PUBLIC

PROSECUTOR: *(Comes forward)* One moment, you. Are you a white bishop or a black bishop?

KALINGA: *(Turns slowly to face him)* Is this a game of chess?

(The PUBLIC PROSECUTOR signals to someone off-stage. Two guards appear from the darkness and march off the BISHOP, and the curtain lifts to reveal the researchers at work.)

(BYTRON is peeping through a chink in the wall.)

CRUGER: Can you see anything?

BYTRON: Not a valve. The man works in utter darkness.

CRUGER: Make another hole.

BYTRON: *(Throwing down the small hand drill.)* No use. I tell you the place is completely dark.

CRUGER: Do you think we'll lose our jobs then?

NEUBATEN: Rubbish. That thing will never work.

LOUDSPEAKER: Coffee time, Gentlemen, Coffee time, Gentlemen.

(They all leave their work and form a queue facing left. A long, shiny tube emerges from the wall and begins to dispense coffee into their held-up cups.)

CRUGER: Do you really think that? Do you think it won't work?

NEUBATEN: It's all a lot of blabber. The idea of such an invention is too ridiculous for words.

GLU: I wouldn't be so sure of that. Something tells me our days are numbered.

CRUGER: Numbered! Why, we've hardly begun. It is not quite a fortnight since we began this work.

BYTRON: My friends, let us be thankful for small blessings. When the Invention is completed, we are redundant; so we'd better make the best of today, and perhaps tomorrow.

CRUGER: What will become of us?

BYTRON: Perhaps the Committee will let us wheel the invention from house to house, or act as census-taker. They are bound to find a job for us.

NEUBATEN: Your affected pessimism does not impress me, Mr Bytron. The so-called Invention cannot be realised. When it has been tried without success, the Committee will come back on their hands and knees and beg us to continue the good work we are doing.

LOUDSPEAKER: *(Everybody now has coffee and stands waiting)* And now, gentlemen, Grace before coffee. Let us pray to God for guidance in our work.

ALTOGETHER: We dedicate ourselves to repairing the damages of the isoto-nuclear blast.

We swear to discover and reveal any man who seeks to take criminal advantage of the isoto-nuclear mutation.

We will never rest until mankind is redeemed.

LOUDSPEAKER: Amen, Gentlemen, Amen. And now kindly rest your brains and play your favourite records on the macrogram. We greet you all, first Citizens of the State.

(Click of loudspeaker turned off.)

BYTRON: *(Jauntily)* Favourite records, my bloody eye!

CRUGER: *(Fearfully)* Bytron!

BYTRON: Two hundred copies of the same record. You must admit it's taking things a little ...

DESTUS: He's going to put it on, the cad.

CRUGER: Who is?

DESTUS: Hardiburr of course. Don't ask stupid questions.

CRUGER: Well, I didn't know who it was.

DESTUS: Only one person plays that record in this place. *(Nodding his head in HARDIBURR'S direction.)* He is a music lover, isn't he? Teha! The phoney!

BYTRON: *(Generally)* And the pot said to the kettle, 'How black you look ...'

DESTUS: I say, old boy, was that remark intended for me?

BYTRON: *(In the same tone)* And the pot repeated, 'If the cap fits ...'

DESTUS: I say, you're rather churlish, you know.

(HARDIBURR all this time had been examining a disc with great painstakingness.)

HARDIBURR: *(Addressing them all)* Which side would you gentlemen like to hear? Shall I play the first side first or the second side after?

BYTRON: Toss it up and play whichever comes on top.

HARDIBURR: Yes, Mr Bytron.

(Throws up the record. It falls and breaks.)

HARDIBURR: Good God! Good G-haw-haw-haw-haw ... *(Sobbing.)*

BYTRON: *(Paternally)* Now Hardiburr, there is no reason to start crying. We have over a hundred copies left of that record, so take out another disc and play it.

HARDIBURR: Good G-haw-haw-haw-

BYTRON: Quickly, Cruger. Put on a record and drown that bleat.

(CRUGER complies.)

BYTRON: We. After the peroration of inspiration, it is fitting that we hear the oration. Right, Hardiburr?

HARDIBURR: Yes Mr Bytron. *(Giggles and move towards the gramophone)*

CRUGER: *(Rushes to restrain HARDIBURR)* Bytron, I wish you'd stop trying to get him into trouble.

GLU: *(As they all move back to their work)* Mark my words, that young fellow will go too far one of these days.

DESTUS: He likes showing off. He might get us into hot water with the Committee.

GLU: *(Chuckles, almost indulgently)* No, no I don't think there is much to worry about in that respect. The Committee are rather afraid of us, you know. After all, they are not themselves immune from suspicion, are they?

DESTUS: You bet they're not. Only we are. You could see how scared they looked when they made a tour of inspection of this place. Afraid that they might get analysed by accident. I suppose ... I say, this is really going too far.

GLU: What is?

(DESTUS has turned round to see CRUGER, who is pinning up a newspaper photograph of a man.)

DESTUS: That fellow Cruger. He keeps treading on my toes. Do you see what he's up to?

GLU: (*Looks in that direction. Wearily*) Oh, don't tell me you're off again.

DESTUS: It is not a question of being off again. This happens to be a serious matter. I'll have to settle this once and for all.

(*Steps across to DESTUS and rips down the photograph from the wall.*)

CRUGER: Hey, stop it. What do you think you're doing?

DESTUS: That man happens to be one of my departmental victims. He belongs in *my* rogues' gallery.

CRUGER: That is not true.

DESTUS: And I think, my dear fellow, it is high time you learnt some professional etiquette. I have already placed a notch against my microscope for this particular criminal and you merely duplicate records by pinning up his photograph as if you had anything to do with the case.

BYTRON: (*With mock suavity*) Dear Gentlemen scientists, what importance can you attach to this one pretender when you already hold the joint record of two hundred and twenty-seven convictions a piece in the fifteen days in which this laboratory has been opened? And in any case, while you argue, that genius in the top-secret vault is working frantically at the Invention which will take the bread out of your mouths. So wouldn't you be better advised to spend your time collecting more heads before it is too late?

DESTUS: Will you kindly mind your business, sir.

BYTRON: (*In the same tone*) This is my business. You are seeking personal glory of working for humanity.

CRUGER: It's the principle of the thing, Bytron. The jury based their decision on the evidence of my analysis, not his.

DESTUS: Since when has the examination of hairs been your department?

CRUGER: But the hairs came from the nose. And my theory of black and white operates from the nose.

DESTUS: A hair is a hair, no matter where it comes from.

CRUGER: And a nose is a nose, including what's inside it.

DESTUS: The jury commended my work, not yours, Sir.

CRUGER: And when the judge read the findings, whose department did he mention?

DESTUS: Department of the hair, you scoundrel.

CRUGER: Did he? (*Rapidly brings out a number of sheets and searches through them*) I have it here. I kept the full report ... Ah, here it is!

(*reads*)

'On the abundant evidence of a careful analysis of the nasal hairs of the suspect, I find him guilty of treason in the highest degree, to wit, attempting to take illegal advantage of the mutation caused by the isoto-nuclear catastrophe, and posing as a white man. I therefore sentence him to commit suicide within twenty-four hours of this judgement, on pain of instant death. And in accordance with the emergency laws of this land, I order his body to be handed over to the body of investigators who were responsible for his conviction, for the purpose of further research and the unmasking of further masqueraders, namely, the department of ...'

(*Interruption at this point takes the form of a long, piercing metallic whine. Gasps and exclamations are wrung from everyone. All except FREMULER, who remains as indifferent as ever.*)

- GLU: (*Bitterly*) He's done it. I knew he would.
- NEUBATEN: The end! The infernal, unspeakable end!
- BYTRON: Ah well, it was good while it lasted. In future we shall be contemptuously referred to as the old-fashioned theorists.
- GLU: Oh my God! Do you realise what this means? We are no longer the first citizens of the state.
- BYTRON: (*Chuckling him under the chin*) No longer humanity's blue-eyed boys, eh? Gone are all the tons of fan-mail and the adoring women who asked for autographs and proposed marriage. And – don't forget – no more free issues of native servants.
- GLU: My God! This is the end of the world!
- BYTRON: Nonsense! They said the same when the bomb was dropped. And here we still are, alive though redundant.
- GLU: And did they not speak the truth? When human beings became so mutated that it becomes impossible to distinguish between black and white – is that not the end of the world?
- BYTRON: Then all the more reason for you to rejoice in the Invention. It will do away with guesswork once and for all. The race of any man can now be verified in less than one second ... if the Invention lives up to its publicity.
- NEUBATEN: (*Sinking down*) We are out of a job.
- BYTRON: (*With sarcasm*) A cheap price – if humanity is to be saved.
- DESTUS: I suppose, old boy, that you are not in the least worried by this new development?
- BYTRON: Not in the least. Even the Invention cannot last for ever. It will be superseded by something else.
- NEUBATEN: Like what?
- BYTRON: U-uh, I don't know. In all probability, it will be defeated by

this Mutation itself. You know what I mean – just as certain microbes develop new strains which are resistant to drugs, your increasingly unprepossessing grand children may become immune to the x-rays of the Invention.

CRUGER: *(Coming forward admiringly)* I think that is a jolly clever thought. You know, you do sound like a real scientist.

BYTRON: And anyway, what is all the fuss about. All what has happened is that mankind has skipped two or three hundred years in its evolution.

(Muffled gasps and shock responses greet this statement. Then complete silence for a few seconds.)

GLU: *(His beard wagging furiously)* That was treason.

DESTUS: I say, old chap, you do skate rather close to the edge of thin ice, you know.

BYTRON: So what? I'm out of a job anyway.

NEUBATEN: You are a disgrace, Bytron. I think somebody ought to tell you. You are a disgrace to your fellow men.

(Another long metallic whine)

GLU: We heard! Does he have to crow over it?

NEUBATEN: Can't say I blame him.

BYTRON: You'll all eat grass before you're through.

HARDIBURR: *(Tearfully)* I don't mind. I've eaten grass before now and it's not as bad as people think. But that man is a swine. That man is a scoundrel.

BYTRON: Sagely words from the mouth of an idiot.

DESTUS: He's right, you know. The Inventor is a rotten confidence trickster. He stabbed us in the back.

- BYTRON: Careful now, Cruger. Where is that sense of humanity?
- DESTUS: Humanity be damned. That so-called Inventor ought to be horse-whipped. And if we had any spunk we'd do it.
- NEUBATEN: We were doing good work, weren't we? He was one of us, with his own department in this very room. We all swore to work together and to maintain the integrity of our methods, no matter how much we pretended to differ in public. He took that oath with the rest of us, didn't he?
- GLU: And then he went and shut himself in there, claimed he had found the secret of the infallible machine.
- CRUGER: Ridiculous idea! How can any machine tell at a glance who is white and who is black?
- BYTRON: He claimed more than that, my dear Glu. His Invention is going to be far more discriminating. At a press of the button, it will distinguish between the Wog, the Nigger, the Dago, the Jew, the half-breed, the half-caste, the semi-breed, the inter-breed and their several components, and any other permutation and combination of the aforementioned races, right back to the sixth or seventh root of the individual's genealogy.
- HARDIBURR: (*Who has been listening open-mouthed*) You've got to hand it to him. The man must have brains. Anyone who can do it is a genius. Even if this Invention can only distinguish between ... between ... I say Mr Bytron, it *was* black and white wasn't it? (BYTRON *nods*) Ah yes, well, the man must be clever, that's all I have to say.
- BYTRON: Note it down someone. Hardiburr's longest speech to date.
- NEUBATEN: This is no time for levity. If the Inventor is a fraud, someone ought to expose him. It is our duty to expose him. We will state the case to the people directly, and the Committee will be forced to admit that they were duped.
- BYTRON: They'll never do it.
- NEUBATEN: They'll have to. I tell you it has been nothing but

propaganda. The quack even declared that his autotector – that’s the name they all give it, I believe – well, he says it is going to be a one-man job. No-one else can understand it. No-one else can operate it. Not even we, his old colleagues.

CRUGER: And the Committee believed all this?

DESTUS: They were most disgustingly impressed by him.

NEUBATEN: Politicians! What do they know of science?

GLU: That’s it. What do they know? What made them give him all the money he asked? What did he say to convince them? Bah, it’s all a frame-up.

BYTRON: He didn’t have to say much. Either you are all deceiving yourselves or you are as brilliant as Hardiburr over there. All the Inventor had to say was – One mouth is easier to feed than seven or eight. One First Citizen of the State is a smaller drain on the Treasury than seven or eight fakers.

GLU: Do you mean ... he sold us?

CRUGER: I can’t believe it. I was a particularly good friend of his. He couldn’t have done it to me at least.

BYTRON: There are no friends in this game.

DESTUS: Then at least there should be a sense of honour.

BYTRON: Among thieves?

DESTUS: I resent that.

CRUGER: And I.

GLU: And I.

NEUBATEN: And I.

FREMULER: *(Comes forward slowly and heavily, pestle in hand, and emphasizes his points with pestle jabs at BYTRON)* B-B-

Bytron, up till now, I have remained silent. I have done my best t-t-to close my ears to the number of d-d-diseased words you have uttered in this place, but there are some things which a man like myself cannot let pass. You may not believe this sir, but there are some of us who take our work rather seriously. There are some of us who believe that we are doing humanity a great service by burying ourselves in this room. There is a natural order in heaven, and there is one on earth. And no accidents of little b-b-bombs will be allowed to destroy this order. I am proud to be seeking after the soap of truth. I am proud to be seeking after the fool-proof, easily recognisable, mass p-p-productible method of placing mutated man in his p-p-proper racial class. And worms like you will not stop me.

BYTRON: In case you were too busy to hear it, a signal went off a few minutes ago. It was the Inventor's signal to signify his success. Both you and your soap are redundant.

FREMULER: I do not care. I respect that man behind there. I am convinced that his work p-p-possibly – is more important than mine; that it is – possibly again – more beneficial to the State. When the Invention has been tried, proved and officially sanctioned, I shall retire quite happily.

BYTRON: Shake hands then. As far as the retiring with grace is concerned, you'll find I agree with you ... And while we are on the subject of retirement, can you recommend a suitable job for an old hand at ...

CRUGER: Listen! Something is happening in the Inventor's vaults.

(Noises of confusion have been coming from the next room. Unwilling human beings are obviously being dragged into the place, and sobs are audible coming from one of the male victims. Another man raises his voice in indignant protest.)

1st VOICE: I don't want to be a guinea pig. I don't want to be a guinea-pig. I am only a simple farmer but I know what happens to guinea-pigs.

AUTOMATED VOICE: Quiet everyone. Quiet everyone. This is the voice of the

Inventor's Genius. Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid. The Invention will give you a fair trial. Obey all instructions and all will be well. Obey all instructions.

1st VOICE: I am only a simple farmer. I do not understand inventions (*Breaks into louder sobs*) I do not trust inventions.

AUTOMATED VOICE: Keep quiet, little grub. Keep quiet, little grub. The Invention has been approved by the State. Therefore it will not lie. The Invention is the People. It will not lie. It will not lie. The People are about to try you.

2nd VOICE: This is an outrage. I tell you I am the Prime Minister's brother-in-law. Ring up the fortress and enquire. I will not be submitted to this indignity.

AUTOMATED VOICE: The autotector makes no class distinctions. This Invention admits of no class.

2nd VOICE: Turn that infernal thing off at once. Why don't you answer me yourself you dome-headed quack scientist! Do you know who is speaking to you at all? I am the Prime Minister's brother-in-law.

AUTOMATED VOICE: This laboratory admits of no class. Let me remind you that only eighteen years ago in the year nineteen hundred and fifty-eight, the private Secretary of the Prime Minister was sentenced to four months' imprisonment and six strokes of the cane for attempting to copulate with a black woman. This Institution admits of no class. Obey all instructions. Obey all instructions.

2nd VOICE: I'll make you answer for this, Mr Inventor. I'll make you pay for this indignity.

1st VOICE: (*Moaning*) I do not trust Inventions ... I am only a simple farmer ...

AUTOMATED VOICE: Mr Prime Minister's brother-in-law, do not try to escape. If

you are white, then you have nothing to fear. Rejoice in the great Invention. Rejoice all true sons of South Africa. Rejoice all lovers of the purity of races ...

1st VOICE: *(Faintly)* I am doing my best but I just cannot feel joyful. I tell you I simply don't trust ...

AUTOMATED VOICE: The test is about to commence. The test is about to commence.

GLU: I bet you it doesn't work.

DESTUS: What difference would it make?

BYTRON: You're right, my friend. Who will say it didn't work, the Inventor?

NEUBATEN: He won't get away with it, the dirty rat. I'll ruin him somehow.

BYTRON: I wish they'd put on some light. I want to see what is happening ...

AUTOMATED VOICE: The test is about to commence. Take off all your clothes.

3rd VOICE: What! Me too?

AUTOMATED VOICE: Take off your clothes. Take off all your clothes.

2nd VOICE: This is unspeakably undignified. Madness in the presence of all these ... I shall complain.

3rd VOICE: What's all this anyway? I was told to come here for a bloody test and I came here willingly enough. Not that there was any need for it. I could have got testimonials from the Minister of Interior himself, 'cause if I'm not white, then he's had it. He and all his friends in the Cabinet. But I'm damned if I'm going to be treated like a common slut ...

AUTOMATED

VOICE: : Take off your clothes. This is the final warning. Take off your clothes.

2nd VOICE: Mr Inventor, I demand that you put an immediate stop to all this nonsense.

3rd VOICE: Ay, that's right, Professor. Why don't you say something? Who is that zombie doing all the talking? I don't take that kind of cheek from any man, I can tell you that.

AUTOMATED

VOICE: If you don't obey me I shall undress you myself.

3rd VOICE: You come near me and I'll show you what's what.

BYTRON: (*Furiously*) Damn and blast it! Why don't they put on the light?

HARDIBURR: (*Standing on a desk*) I can see! I can see!

AUTO VOICE: If you don't obey me ...

(A heavy door is heard to slide apart. Jangling footsteps tread slowly across the floor. The PRIME MINISTER'S BROTHER IN-LAW swears. The woman screams, the farmer calls on Jesus Christ.)

BYTRON: (*Pulling HARDIBURR down and taking his place*) Give somebody else a chance.

3rd VOICE: Stop him! Stop him! Don't let him touch me with his filthy hands. I'm going to do it myself. I'll undress, only keep him away from me.

(Confused noises, clothes ripped. Sobs. Chairs upturned as the suspects try to escape. Robot is heard to walk back to his place. Door slides back.)

BYTRON: (*Furiously to HARDIBURR*) What do you mean, you could see? It's pitch dark!

HARDIBURR: *(As he tries to regain his place and is pushed aside by someone else)*
Well I could.

AUTOMATED
VOICE: : Take your places now. Take your places. Stand on the metal plates within the red circle stand on the metal plates within the red circle. Stick your fingers in your nostrils and say, Bah!

ALL THREE: Bah!

AUTOMATED
VOICE: Repeat!

ALL THREE: Bah!

AUTOMATED
VOICE: Keep your eyes on the flashing bulb. This is very important. Keep your eyes on the flashing bulb. Open your mouth wide and run your tongue all over your gums ... Once ... Twice ... and now a third time ...

(There is an almighty explosion and the debris continues to fall for some seconds after. HARDIBURR, who has regained his place after the last occupier vacated it in despair, leaps down and stares madly into space. Absolute silence follows and lasts several seconds.)

CRUGER: We're saved!

GLU: *(Unbelieving)* Do you mean, it never worked?

DESTUS: What do you say now, oh Bytron? We're on the run again.

CRUGER: *(Suddenly beginning to run)* Bodies! Bodies! Fresh specimens for research!

(There is a stampede for the door. Only BYTRON and FREMULER are left, HARDIBURR being the last out.)

FREMULER: A g-g-genius just the same. A d-d-dedicated, intrepid genius!

BYTRON: *(With puzzlement)* I don't understand it ... I just cannot fathom it ... Do you mean that he was actually making something?

(There may be a scene-ending here. Alternatively a few moments' pause, and then the researchers come back on stage one after the other.)

(DESTUS and CRUGER are fighting for the possession of one head.)

CRUGER: Finder's keepers!

DESTUS: Don't make a fuss, old boy. It's mine!

CRUGER: Finder's keepers!

DESTUS: You saw me making for it and then like the cad you are, you ran past me and grabbed it.

KRUGER: Why shouldn't I? Wasn't it my idea in the first place? I was the first to think of the bodies.

DESTUS: Then you should have kept your mouth shut.

BYTRON: *(Irritably)* This gets worrying. Must you squabble over everything? You don't even know that you can keep that head legitimately.

GLU: *(Entering)* Eh, I hadn't thought of that. They are not really treasure trove, are they? The Invention didn't say what they were before it blew up.

BYTRON: *(Blandly)* Of course when you consider it more carefully, it could have been a broad hint. Perhaps the autotector's sense of decency was so outraged at being confronted by three native pretenders that it blew up in protest.

FREMULER: *(Turning round)* No c-c-convenient theories please. This is not a matter for levity or approximation. You will have to take up the investigation where the Invention left off.

DESTUS: That can easily be arranged. (*Rips some hair off the head and rushes to his microscope.*)

CRUGER: O ho! Two can play at that game! (*Picks up the head, seizes his spatula and begins to scrape out the nostrils. Examines the spatula and throws it down in disgust*) Just my luck! The man hasn't suffered from a cold since he was born.

(*Glances suddenly at DESTUS to make sure he is unobserved. Takes out a pair of tweezers from an inner pocket, inserts them in the nostril and pulls out a hair. He examines this with satisfaction and proceeds to deal with it.*)

(*All except HARDIBURR are now back and the activity mounts to a feverish pitch. Burners are turned on full, beakers bubble, flesh is ripped and bones are cracked etc. etc. FREMULER, who still has not stepped out of the room, gathers every bit of material that the others discard and pounds them up in his mortar. The concentration of all is maximum, GLU muttering to himself all the time.*)

GLU: What a boon! What a boon! Business has been slack ...

HARDIBURR: (*Enters with the head of a bald man with bushy eyebrows. He is shaking his head in self-pity*) Not a drop, not a single drop.

BYTRON: Is that not the Inventor's head?

HARDIBURR: Ay, the late Inventor that was.

BYTRON: You're a fool. How can you expect tears from him?

HARDIBURR: (*Beginning to cry*) But how am I to work without tears? This was the only head I could find. Not that it would have made the slightest difference. Every time a suspect is sent here to be tested I am the only man who gets nothing out of him. Shed some tears please, I say to him. Just a couple of drops. But no. You all get your hair, your fingernails, even Neubaten last week got some urine from a man who had been starving for seven days. But me, I beg for a couple of tears, and what happens? They all laugh at me.

GLU: Somebody take that idiot out of here.

HARDIBURR: You don't care what happens to me do you? Well I'll have you know that I have my theories same as you. It is the first time in my life that I ever found myself cut out for a particular kind of job. I didn't even ask for it mind you, I was chosen. I was sitting on a dead horse one day when the Committee man came to me and said, 'Are you the village idiot?' And I said to him, 'of course'. So he said, 'the Government wants you to work in a secret laboratory'. I told him that I knew nothing of science, but he said that I was known to have second sight and would see things which others might miss. So here I am. But don't think that because I am not a trained scientist like the rest of you, I haven't my own theories same as you ...

BYTRON: For God's sake put on a record, Hardiburr.

HARDIBURR: No I shan't. I want my tears. All suspects will have to give me tears or I shall resign from this place.

BYTRON: Hardiburr, a record. You haven't played the other side today have you? Don't you want to hear it?

HARDIBURR: All right, Mr Bytron, anything you say.

BYTRON: Just wait until I'm gone, won't you. I'm going to find something for myself in that vault, now that these hogs have picked the choicest specimens ... (*exit*)

(The voice on the record is American. The style is gravely oratorical, and as before, it sounds as though it is coming from the depth of a tunnel.)

HARDIBURR: Here it comes. Silence for the Ambassador's speech.

RECORD: 'Four score and seven hours ago, our fathers brought forth on this continent a new rocket, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great human task, testing whether in spite of this misadventured holocaust, the friendship of two nations so conceived and so dedicated can still endure. We are met on

a great battlefield of that adversity. We have come to dedicate a portion of that crater as a final resting place of those who here give their lives that those nations that might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But in a larger sense, we cannot desecrate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave bomb, erring and true, has consecrated it far above our power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what we did here. It is for us the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work, that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom ... for we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights.'

(BYTRON *enters and lifts the pick-up suddenly.*)

BYTRON: Look what I brought you, Hardiburr.

HARDIBURR: What is it?

BYTRON: Tears, Hardiburr, tears! Tears from the head of the Inventor's robot.

HARDIBURR: You think it might weep?

BYTRON: I don't see why not.

HARDIBURR: (*Taking it*) Thank you, Bytron. Thank you. It should weep. Greater things have been known to happen. I once saw a man stand by a large rock and hit it with his staff until it brought out water.

BYTRON: You did?

HARDIBURR: Yes, but every time I tell it to anyone, they say I'm lying. They tell me I read it in the Book of Moses.

BYTRON: Well, did you?

HARDIBURR: How could I? I can neither read nor write.

BYTRON: Oh? Well, never mind. You get to work on that and beat some tears out of it. You'll find a stick in that corner, I think.

(BYTRON goes to his table. HARDIBURR brings out a slice of onion from his pocket and begins to rub the eyes of the robot with it. They continue to work in silence.)

BYTRON: *(Holds out a piece of clothing)* Look at that! Charred beyond human or autotectic recognition. *(Sniffs)* Even the smells are confused. *(Sniffs again)* Ah, wait a minute. That fellow was telling the truth. He was the Prime Minister's brother-in-law.

GLU: What makes you so sure?

BYTRON: Simple. This piece of clothing smells of soap made from the fat of the body of dead natives. Only the empire-builders and their relations are supplied with that brand.

(BYTRON continues to sniff, NEUBATIN to taste. FREMULER to pound, HARDIBURR to squeeze etc., etc.)

BYTRON: *(Sniffing)* Ha! Ha! Some dirty work has been going on here. This woman was pregnant.

CRUGER: Yah! We saw the evidence in there.

BYTRON: You did? I saw nothing.

FREMULER: It's in here, B-B-Bytron. You can look in the mortar before it's completely ground up. A rare piece of luck. Something t-t-tells me it was the missing ingredient in my soap of truth.

BYTRON: Ah, an idea has just struck me. The newly-born children. Will they be normal or mutated, think you?

NEUBATEN: That's a thought. I haven't seen a baby since we were brought down here.

CRUGER: Who has seen one?

DESTUS: Nobody. Not unless someone has successfully sneaked into the open air.

BYTRON: Doesn't matter anyway. Obviously the babies must be born normal. So that takes care of a small section of the population. All we have to do is to wait until the baby is born, and that should establish the race of the mother.

DESTUS: Too many obvious snags. Suppose she has been having an affair with a black man?

IN UNISON: She might as well be dead!

BYTRON: Answered. That's the only possible objection taken care of. I think I'll open up another branch of research.

DESTUS: Don't be greedy, old boy.

BYTRON: Don't get worried. You'll all be able to come in on this. I'll explain. We will start from the assumption that all newly-born children are normal. Right? Then all the Committee has to do is to keep a stud of men who are certified white – the members of this laboratory for example. When the suspected woman is sent here ...

DESTUS: Impracticable old boy. Think what would happen to you when the suspect turns out to be guilty.

BYTRON: A little thing, my friend. What after all, is sacrifice for humanity without the risk of pollution. Eh? What do you say? What does everyone think of my plan? Nothing? What about you, Fremuler of the busy mortar?

FREMULER: Since you ask me, Sir, I'd say that you have the filthiest mind ever to d-d-disgrace an Institution of this class. And I'll t-t-tell you also ...

(A continuous ringing like a fire engine's bursts suddenly through the loudspeaker.)

GLU: The Director!

BYTRON: Wouldn't it be funny if the lift got stuck half-way, and the Director stepped out of it before he knew?

CRUGER: Shut up! He's already here!

(Armed guards precede the DIRECTOR, march smartly and stand to attention.)

(Murmurs of 'Good afternoon, Sir!' etc.)

DIRECTOR: Relax, Gentlemen. Relax. We are in a mess. But I suppose you have guessed that already. We are in a terrible mess ... *(points to the Inventor's head.)* Is that he?

BYTRON: It's his head, all right.

DIRECTOR: *(Picks it up)* I thought I recognised the brain. A fine mess you've got us into. *(Dashes it on the ground)* Gentlemen, I have a very serious matter to discuss with you. You no doubt heard the signal which our late Inventor gave to announce his success to the nation. What you do not know, however, is that the second signal was intended for certain friendly nations who have been following our humanitarian endeavours in this laboratory with the greatest interest. They have been hanging, literally, on the hope of an early achievement, and many of them even held up their internal and colonial policies until the Invention could become a reality. That was why, in order that no time may be lost, they were connected directly to the Inventor, from whom they received minute-by-minute information of his progress. They had their aeroplanes ready to take off as soon as they received the signal ... Well, you can guess the rest. That fool placed his incompetent finger on the button even before he had tested it. The envoys should be here any moment.

DESTUS: I say, you are in a pickle, Director!

DIRECTOR: *I am?*

GLU: What can we do?

DIRECTOR: That is what I came to ask you.

(Silence)

- DIRECTOR: Well?
(Fidgeting. Looks exchanged)
- DIRECTOR: Did any of you know anything at all of the Inventor's work?
- BYTRON: Ha! Ha! I knew it would come to that.
- NEUBATEN You know damn well that he kept his information to himself – locked behind that door – Sir!
- DIRECTOR: *(Almost imploring)* But you were all his colleagues. Surely he must have dropped a hint to someone? Some clue about his line of work?
- BYTRON: Of course he did. I'm certain he did. But you'll have to ask the Special Committee which investigated his claims. They ought to know.
(Approving titters from everyone.)
- DIRECTOR: *(Sternly)* I wish to remind you that we are all in this together. We have a position to maintain. As the spiritual leader of the world in the philosophy of racial purity, we cannot afford to let our disciples down. It would be an act of bad faith, especially after all the money which they have poured into our coffers. *(Pauses)* You moan then that after over fourteen days of costly research we have nothing at all to show our comrades? *(He pauses, again in vain.)*
- DIRECTOR: So be it then ... Our friends will have to go away empty handed. *(Turns to go)* Oh, by the way someone will have to write an official obituary for our late Inventor. Was there any of you who admired him? Anyone who shared his broad ideals, his methods, his devotion to the Great Cause?
- FREMULER: *(Turns round)* I d-d-did, Director. I maintained the integrity of the Inventor's p-p-purpose only this afternoon.
- DIRECTOR: Excellent. This is a sign of hope at last. Mr Fremuler, allow me to congratulate you. You are the new Inventor.

FREMULER: Sir, my heart is f-f-full of the unexpected honour.

DIRECTOR: I'm sure you deserve it. I wish you every luck.

FREMULER: I shall do my best to be worthy.

DIRECTOR: (*Brusquely*) You'll have to be more than worthy, Mr Fremuler. I'm afraid you haven't much time before the delegation arrives. You'd better get into the vault at once and start inventing.

(FREMULER *gasps, cannot find any words.*)

DIRECTOR: Well don't stare at me as if I was a mad beast. Did you hear me? Get in there and invent.

FREMULER: B-but, b-but ...

DIRECTOR: The Invention must be ready by the time the delegation arrives. And it must work. Do you hear me Mr Fremuler? It must work. If it blows up, please save me a lot of unnecessary action by blowing up with it.

FREMULER: (*Suddenly calmer*) How many minutes have I got?

DIRECTOR: Fifteen, ten, five, maybe even less. I wouldn't waste any more of it if I were you. If you are not ready on time, I shall have to crucify you. Nothing less would satisfy them, especially the delegation from America. I will have to declare that you were after all a native, and that you had deliberately sabotaged your own efforts. I'm sorry, Fremuler, you are a faithful worker, but the times are hard. Guards, remove the bolts!

FREMULER: That won't be necessary. The walls were blown open by the explosion. I can get in that way.

DIRECTOR: No Sir. You must tread the same path as your predecessor. That way inspiration may come to you almost at once.

(*A little fox hole is unbarred in the wall, and FREMULER crawls through.*)

DIRECTOR: If he blows up before the delegation arrives, one of you had better get ready to take his place. You may have to cast lots for it, I don't really mind who goes. When they arrive, I shall bring them straight to you. Perhaps you will think of a way of entertaining them until the Inventor is ready to show us something.

BYTRON: How about testing the envoys themselves?

DIRECTOR: This is no time for clever remarks ... You'll all be glad to know that I have brought you a replacement. He will take Fremuler's place to avoid any gap in your work. Orderly! Fetch the Public Prosecutor.

(Doors slide open. PUBLIC PROSECUTOR walks in.)

DIRECTOR: I'm sorry I kept you waiting. These are your new colleagues.

PUBLIC

PROSECUTOR: How do you do? I have not met most of you personally, but I am familiar with you through your forensic reports on would-be racial cheats. I feel that we have met, not once, but a million times in the highest plane of existence.

DIRECTOR: The Public Prosecutor, I ought to inform you, has just himself scored a personal victory against the cult of racial masqueraders.

CRUGER: By himself, did you say?

DIRECTOR: Yes.

CRUGER: Do you mean he prosecuted and obtained a conviction independent of this laboratory?

DIRECTOR: Well, well, I know it's a bit unusual, but it's all in the family now, isn't it? And he has earned a place in that select family, I assure you. Go on, tell them how you did it.

PUBLIC

PROSECUTOR: *(Ceremoniously clears his throat.)* It was a pure stroke of luck really ... I have the man outside here ... Can he enter?

DIRECTOR: But of course. He is your equipment you know. Guards!
Bring in the bishop.

BYTRON: A bishop? That's an excellent catch.

PUBLIC

PROSECUTOR: I'm glad you approve.

BYTRON: You still haven't told us how you did it.

PUBLIC

PROSECUTOR: In a minute ... Ah, here he is!

(BISHOP KALINGA *is marched in.*)

PUBLIC

PROSECUTOR: Take a look at him, gentlemen. Take a good look at him. I found this man walking up and down a back street and declaiming furiously against the state and what he called their heaven-cursed policy. For that, as you all know, I could have had him hanged. Capital treason. But of course, I am not one for taking the easy way out. I had him arrested nevertheless, and then I began to look up his antecedents. He said that his name was Kalinga, and I said, that's a funny name for a white bishop. So I searched the nearest telephone directory, and sure enough there was no mention there of any such name. You wouldn't believe it, would you, but this man actually tried to feign madness so that he could claim ecclesiastical immunity. But I was one too many for him. The jury found him guilty in three seconds.

DESTUS: Amazing. I never thought I'd live to see a man of God actually guilty of such a crime.

PUBLIC

PROSECUTOR: He was a sly one, believe me. Wouldn't make a straight statement if he could help it. When I asked him, are you a white or a black bishop he replied ...

BYTRON: (*Quickly*) Is this a ruddy game of chess?

PUBLIC

PROSECUTOR: How did you guess? These were his very words.

DIRECTOR: Well, I'm glad to see you safe and settled, Mr Prosecutor. If you will excuse me now, I must go and meet our visitors. Bang on the wall from time to time to remind the Inventor that his time is running out ...
Guards!

(*Exit*)

PUBLIC

PROSECUTOR: (*Priming his wig and uniform*) Make no mistake about it, gentlemen. I really am glad to be with you. When the case of this bishop was over, I felt that I had reached the climax of my legal career. Previously as you all know, I had only prosecuted on the evidence that you gentlemen were good enough to supply me with. How I envied you your knowledge, your position as First Citizens of the State. Need I tell you that I promised myself that at the first opportunity I would win a body for myself and join you in the noble work.

BYTRON: You've picked a wrong moment, sir. The Invention has failed once, but I doubt if it will fail this time.

PUBLIC

PROSECUTOR: That doesn't worry me. If I have been First State Citizen for only one hour, I shall die contented.

CRUGER: In that case, welcome.

NEUBATEN: Your laboratory name, by the way, is Fremuler.

GLU: You understand, don't you? When you come in here, it is important to lose your identity. Fremuler was the name of your predecessor.

DESTUS: Forget all you've ever been, old boy.

CRUGER: Think of the task, the task only, and nothing but the task, so help you God.

PUBLIC

PROSECUTOR: Fremuler ... that will suit me very well.

CRUGER: Your table is over there. Fremuler liked to work with his back turned on the world.

PUBLIC

PROSECUTOR: I simply cannot wait to begin. Come here, bishop. Mm, yes, I think I'll start from the top. Give me a handful of your hair.

(Reaction of indulgent shock from everyone.)

PUBLIC

PROSECUTOR: Bishop Kalinga, a handful of your hair please.

DESTUS: *(Sharply)* That is my department, sir.

PUBLIC

PROSECUTOR: Beg your pardon?

DESTUS: I said – my department.

PUBLIC

PROSECUTOR: But I only wanted to study it. He's already condemned.

DESTUS: Just the same – my department.

BYTRON: My dear friend, before you make any foolish blunders and offend against our etiquette, I would advise you to examine your predecessor's methods and try to adapt them for yourself.

GLU: Thou shalt not trespass.

PUBLIC

PROSECUTOR: But do I have to follow my predecessor? I think I would like to develop my own branch of thought.

NEUBATEN: I'm sorry that is not permitted. Five days ago we had a man here who did just that. You won't believe it, but this man used to be a Professor of Medicine in the University of Natal. And he claimed to discover that the blood of the common Kaffir is the same as that of a white man. Independence of thought only leads to madness.

GLU: Take a look in Fremuler's mortar and take up pounding where he left off.

PUBLIC

PROSECUTOR: I must admit I was wrong. I shall do as you say...
(Examines FREMULER'S mortar) Hmm, he was inclined to go for bulk, wasn't he?

GLU: Ah, you've found that out?

PUBLIC

PROSECUTOR: Then there is no choice. Come here, Bishop. I regret I cannot wait twenty-four hours for you to carry out your sentence. I must ask you to commit suicide immediately.

(They immediately close in on the BISHOP. One clicks his scissors, another sharpens his razor. CRUGER whips out his spatula.)

HARDIBURR: *(Clutching a beaker)* You may weep, bishop. You may weep if you want to. Nobody will hold it against you.

DESTUS: *(Bringing out a phial)* This, Sir, is the favourite poison of those who come here.

GLU: The last sacrament, so to speak.

BYTRON: Shall I order the music?

(They all nod solemnly. BYTRON presses a button. At once, a funeral organ piece comes through the loudspeaker. It is short-lived, however, interrupted suddenly by the clanging of the DIRECTOR'S warning bell.)

DESTUS: Damn! He would time his arrival to spoil the fun.

(They hurry back to their places, KALINGA is pushed to one side, where he stands impassive, arms folded.)

(The laboratory is blacked out and the right front stage revealed, darkly. There the EX-RACIAL SECURITY OFFICER, in part-

uniform, squats, mumbling earnestly to himself. He carries a large dossier under one arm, and in the other hand, a pencil. His manner changes as soon as he hears the approach of a party of people. He straightens himself out instantly, adjusts his tie, buttons his coat etc. Backs slowly centre stage. The party stops on seeing him. He steps smartly forward, scrutinising them. Then suddenly he lunges forward with the pencil at BRIKLEMAINE passing the pencil smoothly through his hair. MRS HIGGINS collapses from fright, BRIKLEMAINE swears, grapples with the man and throws him down. The DIRECTOR rushes to intervene.)

DIRECTOR: No, no, he's quite harmless. I apologise for this.

BRIKLEMAINE: (*Picks up the pencil*) Well, I'll be damned! Did he think he could kill me with this?

DIRECTOR: (*He is helping up the woman*) Are you all right?

MRS HIGGINS Is anybody killed? Is he an assassin?

DIRECTOR: No, Madam. I was just going to explain. He is quite harmless, I assure you. You see, he used to be one of our Racial Security Officers. Before the ... the disaster, one of our methods of telling a black native from someone who was merely coloured was to pass a pencil through his hair. If it went right through, he was coloured. If the hair stopped it, he was pure native. It is quite a time-tested method. I remember it was in use as far back as 1959 ... yes, I'm sure of it... Are you all right now, Mrs Higgins?

MRS HIGGINS Yes, yes I'm OK. He did give me quite a fright, though.

DIRECTOR: I am very sorry. This way please ...

(The man has run off mid way of the DIRECTOR'S explanation. As the party goes off stage, the scene returns to the laboratory. Shortly afterwards, the GUARDS fling the door open, and the party re-enters.)

DIRECTOR: Gentleman, I have the honour to present our guests. But first,

I have to inform you that a very large number of the expected envoys will not be arriving at all. As you all know, the shock-waves created by the explosion are world-wide and perpetually active, and a few aeroplanes do get sucked into the depressions from time to time. This, I'm afraid, has been the fate of a large contingent of our expected guests. However, we are happy to welcome those who have survived the rough passage ... On my right, the American envoy, Mr Briklemaine, worth a hundred stones in diamonds alone (BRIKLEMAINE *bows acknowledgement*) and on my left, the British delegate, Mrs Higgins, secretary of the Association of British Landlords, Landladies and Landowners.

(He claps. Others follow suit. MRS HIGGINS smiles coy acknowledgement.)

I am sure that our guests are very anxious to see the Invention, but first, I think you ought to see our old methods, which will be slowly discarded over the next few weeks, as the Invention becomes mass produced and available to every Racial Security Officer.

MRS HIGGINS: Pleased to meet you all. Very pleased and happy to be here today.

BRIKLEMAINE: I – I am simply lost for words. I feel overwhelmed and unable to convey my admiration for you and your work. I can only request one thing of you, which I hope you will be good enough to grant me ... Please carry on with your work. Please continue as if I wasn't here at all.

DIRECTOR: Would you like to walk round and watch the gentlemen at work?

BRIKLEMAINE: But of course. But first ... with your permission, Mr Director, I would like to give them a message from my people. I would like to let them know that although this Invention is going to mean the end of their particular field of work, they must never cease to think of themselves as the pioneers of this science, as the very team in fact which gave birth to the Invention. You will all remember that ten years ago, we in the Southern States broke

away from the rest of the United States of America, elected our own government and began to run our affairs the way we've always wanted to run it, without any interference from Washington and other interfering, nigger-loving fuss-bodies. We have progressed since then, and we are now able to boast that we are the only country in the world which has learnt to condition the negro from birth, no sir, from his very conception, so that he grows up respecting the white man, and keeping himself in his place. Lynching, I am happy to say, is now a thing of the past, except of course with the kids – boys will be boys you know. And of course at Yuletide we like to burn a nigger or two, just to remind us of old times ... But this bomb gentlemen, has set us back nearly fifty years. This accursed mutation, gentlemen, is as frightening, as disgusting as – I shudder to say the word, gentlemen, but facts have got to be faced – it is as intolerable as miscegenation – please forgive the ugly word. Do you realise, fellow sufferers, that in twenty years, the President of our young Southern Federation may be a nigger, and no one would be any the wiser? That, Sirs, is why your laboratory is important to us. That is why you men are demi-gods in our estimation, and the Inventor, needless to say, is God himself ... I have here, Mr Director and gentlemen scientists, I have here a cheque for twenty-five million dollars ... Take it, Sir, take it with the promise of more to come. And I have a present for the Inventor myself, but I must do myself the honour of delivering it in person ... Here it is ... What do you think of it?

MRS HIGGINS: It's cute.

BRIKLEMAINE: It is an exact replica in velvet and satin, of our national flag ... the hood of the immortal Ku Klux Klan ... I am done, Sir. I thank you for this honour. I thank you, Gentlemen.

(They all clap.)

DIRECTOR: Thank you. Thank you. You may tell your people that we will never let them down. We shall prove ourselves worthy of their generosity ... And now, if you would like to walk round ...

MRS HIGGINS: Just a minute. Oh dear, I am not used to making pretty speeches like our friend the American envoy, and I certainly

haven't twenty-five million dollars to dish out like him. But at our last meeting – the Union of British Landlords, Landladies, and Landowners that is, – of which I have the honour to be secretary – well we did sort of pass the hat round, and well, it is not up to much when you consider, but here it is ... Fourteen pounds, two shillings and eight pence. We did expect a little more support from a lot of big people. For instance the League of Empire Loyalties did promise something but you know how it all is ... anyway, it's the spirit that counts, here it is ...

DIRECTOR: (*Offering to take it*) We really appreciate ...

MRS HIGGINS: Wait, I haven't quite finished yet. I was especially instructed to add that the Invention means a lot to us, far more than you can ever imagine. Mind you, we have nothing against those black boys, in fact some of them are rather nice to know, but the fact remains that we have to think of the tenants, and we don't like to offend them. And now what with all this business, we really don't know who's who ... well, I think I've said all I have to say. But I too would like to express my own love and admiration for this man you call the Inventor. Here it is! (*She brings out a little black 'bracelet' case and opens it.*) It's a complete set of false teeth, and you will notice, it wears a perpetual smile. That's all, Mr Director, I have finished.

DIRECTOR: Thank you. Thank you both. We will never forget this day as long as we live ... Well then, shall I introduce you to our working methods ... Please feel free to ask any questions.

MRS HIGGINS: (*Pointing to the PUBLIC PROSECUTOR*) What is he doing?

PUBLIC

PROSECUTOR: Grinding madam, grinding.

DIRECTOR: That, Mrs Higgins, is Fremuler, the grinding researcher. His method is to grind together anything he can lay his hands on – bones, skull – kidneys – unborn babies, spine, anything in fact that is part of the human body. He used to work in a soap factory, or to be more accurate, his predecessor did. He worked in the senior service soap factory, where the dead natives are turned into soap. And the theory is that by pounding together

these members, applying to it a tincture of iodine, and then bombarding it all with electro rays, he will discover the soap of truth.

BRIKLEMAINE: The soap of truth?

DIRECTOR: Yes, the soap of truth. You see, it is hoped, or rather it was hoped before the Invention became a reality that this soap would be possessed of such a quality that, on its application to the human body, the user will regain his original colour for twenty-four hours at least.

MRS HIGGINS: Twenty-four hours only?

DIRECTOR: Well, it's a start. All we had to do then would be to legislate that everybody take a bath once every twenty-four hours, using this brand of soap.

MRS HIGGINS: That would never have caught on at home. It is the policy of our union to allow our tenants only one bath per week. No more.

DIRECTOR: *(He has slipped aside and now taps on the wall.)* I say, how are we doing?

(A very heavy object hits the wall from the other side.)

BRIKLEMAINE: What in the name of tarnation was that?

DIRECTOR: Nothing. Only the Inventor asking when to expect you.

MRS HIGGINS: Oh, I'd forgotten him. Shall we go and see him now?

DIRECTOR: By no means. There is no hurry ... What I mean is, you will appreciate the Invention all the more if we worked gradually towards it ... Over here please, Mrs Higgins. I want to show you another method of great interest ... This gentleman here, Mr Bytron, is examining the clothing of suspects. He believes that the secret lies in the sweat of the human body.

MRS HIGGINS: Really?

- BYTRON: Yes, Madam, I do. By sniffing these pieces of clothing – note by the way, that I carefully select the portions underneath the armpits, the back of the neck and the genitals. You'd be surprised what you can learn from such a simple system.
- DIRECTOR: You will please observe that Mr Bytron, like Fremuler of the grinding mortar, is applying his civilian experiences. He used to be a manufacturer of perfumes.
- BRIKLEMAINE: Astounding. Astounding. Our time and notion experts ought to come and borrow a leaf from you.
- DIRECTOR: And now you must meet Mr Cruger, whose theories are based on the human nose. He believes that the nostril contains enough matter to furnish a hundred juries with a thousand convictions a day. Sometimes his department overlaps that of Mr Destus, whose main business is the analysis of the invisible components of the human hair. But they always manage to work in harmony.
- MRS HIGGINS: And how are you getting on, Mr Cruger?
- CRUGER: Business is rather dry at the moment, madam. But winter should improve things.
- BRIKLEMAINE: It is a pity that the hair was also affected. It was a fool-proof way of telling the nigger apart.
- MRS HIGGINS: (*Giggling*) The explosion certainly took the kink out of the black man's hair.
- DIRECTOR: (*Close against the wall*) Are you making progress?
- VOICE
FROM WITHIN: Go to hell!
- MRS HIGGINS: Did someone speak?
- DIRECTOR: (*Hastily*) No, no, I don't think so. Now where were we? Ah, yes, I've still to show you Mr Neubaten's work. He, like Mr

Bytron, believes that the secret lies in the waste liquids which flow from the human body, in this case, the urine.

(NEUBATEN *continues calmly to place a drop from a beaker on the tip of his tongue with the aid of a pipette. He rolls it round and round in his mouth, thinks hard, makes some notes, adds some solution and continues tasting.*)

BRIKLEMAINE: Good God! What's he doing? Doesn't he use chemical analysis?

DIRECTOR: Good gracious no. South Africa, you realise, is very famous for her wines and sherries. Well, we owe that reputation to men like Neubaten. He was our foremost professional wine taster.

BRIKLEMAINE: (*Laughs hard*) Sure glad to make your acquaintance, mister.

MRS HIGGINS: O-o-o-oh it's all so thrilling. I simply can't wait to see the Invention itself.

DIRECTOR: (*Desperately*) Think of something quick.

BYTRON: Tell them what's happened and send them packing.

DIRECTOR: Are you mad? The idea is ridiculous.

BYTRON: Well, I can't help you.

PUBLIC

PROSECUTOR: (*Comes forward*) Do you think Mr Director, that our guests would like to watch us demonstrate on a complete specimen?

DIRECTOR: Why, yes of course. (*Laughs with relief*) Why ever did I not think of that?

PUBLIC

PROSECUTOR: We were just about to begin when you came in, but I really don't see why they shouldn't watch the process from the beginning to end, if they want to, that is.

MRS HIGGINS: If we want to? Of course we'd love it. Just think, I'll be able to return home and tell the children all about it.

DIRECTOR: And you, Sir?

BRIKLEMAINE: Me, Director? Can you doubt it?

DIRECTOR: In that case, kindly proceed with the demonstration.

PUBLIC

PROSECUTOR: Mr Destus, can you lend me that ...

DESTUS: Most certainly.

(Again they crowd together.)

PUBLIC

PROSECUTOR: *(Offering the phial)* Here you are, Bishop. The guests have been invited; the bridegroom must not delay.

DIRECTOR: *(Proudly)* He never quite loses the touch of the courtroom, does he?

HARDIBURR: P-p-please Director, do you mind if he says a short prayer first? After all, I need some tears and nobody ever thinks of me. If he reads a moving portion of the bible or says a prayer, it might make him weep for poor Hardiburr.

DIRECTOR: *(Between his teeth)* Did I not give orders that he was to be hidden away while the delegates were here?

(GUARD moves forward)

DIRECTOR: No, no you fool. You can't remove him now.

MRS HIGGINS: Who is this gentleman? You haven't introduced him.

DIRECTOR: *(Sweetly)* Oh please, please, don't talk to him. He doesn't like strangers, so we always leave him alone. Scientific temperament, you know. We always humour him.

MRS HIGGINS: I think he's sweet.

DIRECTOR: Please, please leave him alone. We'll let the bishop give his little sermon, of course.

BRIKLEMAINE: Sure, I'm all for it. We are a God-fearing nation and we'll never stand in the way of a man and his last prayer.

PROSECUTOR: I doubt if we'll get a word out of him. He didn't speak a word in court, not even when the sentence was delivered. But I'll try if you like ...

(Interruption again by the Inventor's signal. It is followed by an incredulous pause.)

DIRECTOR: He's done it!

BYTRON: Impossible.

DIRECTOR: He's done it! I knew he would. If anyone could, it is good old Fremuler.

BRIKLEMAINE: You all seem excited about something. Do you mind letting us in on it?

DIRECTOR: What ... oh. ... er ... that, you see is just an auxiliary invention about which we were keeping quiet ... You will keep the information to yourselves, won't you? I'm afraid I got rather carried away.

BRIKLEMAINE: Oh sure, sure. Anything you say.

(MRS HIGGINS seals her lips and crosses her heart.)

DIRECTOR: Thank you. And now to the real business of your visit which we've neglected somewhat. Too many distractions in this laboratory I'm afraid. *(Goes and knocks on the wall)* Shall I bring the envoys round to you?

INVENTOR: Open the door.

(Motions the guards to do so. The bolts are removed and the INVENTOR crawls out.)

BRIKLEMAINE
& HIGGINS: Is that he?

DIRECTOR: Yes, Mr Inventor, may I introduce ...

BRIKLEMAINE *(Rushes forward and grabs his hand)* I am Briklemaine, Envoy Extraordinary from the Federation of the United Southern States of America. May I be the first to congratulate ...

INVENTOR: *(Off-handedly, with his eyes on the door)* If you'll excuse me a moment ... I must operate the remote control.

BRIKLEMAINE: *(Making way)* Certainly. Are we really going to see them now?

INVENTOR: Open these doors as wide as possible. And get out of the way.

(The GUARDS obey. Everybody is strained towards the door.)

DIRECTOR: *(Bustling)* Please, Mrs Higgins, would you come over here.

INVENTOR: *(To BRIKLEMAINE)* Do you mind putting out your cigar?

BRIKLEMAINE: *(Stubs it out quickly)* I do beg your pardon.

MRS HIGGINS: I shall burst in a moment! It's unbearable, I'm too excited! I tell you I shall faint or do something silly!

INVENTOR: Here comes the first one. Please stay exactly where you are and don't move until I tell you to. There are models for the d-d-delegates to take back if they so wish.

(Three or four nothings are carefully manoeuvred into the room by the INVENTOR, followed closely by all present who observe the INVENTOR closely and see for all they are worth.)

After the third, the GUARD begins to shut the door.

INVENTOR: Not yet, you ass. There is another to come ... Kindly make room over there, Mr Bytron. That's better. You may shut the gates now.

(Gates are shut. One or two of them give a faint sigh.)

INVENTOR: Well, there it is gentlemen and delegates. The Invention is before your very eyes. My work is finished. If you had any questions, you may ask them of my assistant.

(A pause of several seconds)

MRS HIGGINS: *(Tearfully)* It is horrible! Horrible! Simply horrible!

BRIKLEMAINE: *(Disgustedly)* Yah! Did you have to give it such an unprepossessing appearance?

AUTO VOICE: That is a most unscientific statement. You must not judge the Invention by outward appearances.

BRIKLEMAINE: Well, back home we like things kinda – draped up – you know, made to look decent.

MRS HIGGINS: It's too disgusting. I couldn't bear to touch it.

AUTOMATED

VOICE: You have a dirty mind, lady. You have a dirty mind.

BRIKLEMAINE: *(Stubbing a new cigar into his mouth)* Ah well, I suppose we'll have to put up with it. Where are the instructions?

AUTOMATED

VOICE : You don't need any instructions. It is very simple to operate.

HARDIBURR: *(Whose grin has been growing wider and wider burst suddenly into idiotic laughter.)* The Emperor is naked ...!

DIRECTOR: *(Between his teeth)* Somebody shut him up before he says something dangerous.

HARDIBURR: They are always trying to call me a fool. He- he-he-he ... But I know what it is. I am going to lend the Emperor my coat ... I'm going to lend the Emperor my coat ...!

(Begins to take off his coat)

DIRECTOR: *(Fiercely)* Guards!

HARDIBURR: They can't make a fool of Hardiburr. I know.

(The guards hit him sharply behind the neck. He crumples and falls. They all look relieved.)

MRS HIGGINS: I hate scenes. For a moment I thought the man was going to make a scene.

DIRECTOR: He's merely had one of his attacks. We put him to sleep and when he wakes, he feels much better. Now, about this Invention. ...

THE END

The Detainee
A Radio Play
(1965)