Lazarus Come Forth
Ray Bradbury

Logan's way of laughing was bad. "There's a new body up in the air-lock, Brandon. Climb the rungs and have a look."

Logan's eyes had a green shine to them, eager and intent. They were ugly, obscene.

Brandon swore under his breath. This room of the Morgue Ship was crowded with their two personalities. Besides that, there were scores of cold shelves of bodies freezing quietly, and the insistent vibration of the coroner tables, machinery spinning under them. And Logan was like a little machine that never stopped talking.

"Leave me alone." Brandon rose up, tall and thinned by the years, looking as old as a pocked meteor. "Just keep quiet."

Logan sucked his cigarette. "Scared to go upstairs? Scared it might be your son we just picked up?"

Brandon reached Logan in about one stride, and while the Morgue Ship slipped on through space, he clenched the coroner's blue uniform with the small bones inside it and hung it up against the wall, pressing inward until Logan couldn't breathe. Logan blew air, his eyes looked helpless. He tried to speak and could only grunt like a stuck pig. He waved his short arms, flapping.

Brandon kept him there, crucified on a fist.

"I told you. Let me search for my own son's body in my own way. I don't need your tongue."

Logan's eyes were losing their shine, were getting blind and glazed. Brandon stepped back, releasing the little assistant. Logan bumped softly against metal flooring, his mouth hungry for air, his nostrils flaring for breath. Brandon watched the little face of Logan over the crouched, gasping body, with red color and anger shooting up into it with every passing second.

"Coward!" he threw it out of himself, Logan did. "Got yellow—neon-tubing—for your spine. Coward. Never went to war. Never did anything for Earth against Mars."

Brandon said the words in slow motion. "Shut up."

"Why?" Logan crept back, inching up the metal hull. The blood pumps under the skirts of the

tables pulsed across the warm silence. "Does it hurt, the truth? Your son'd be proud of you, okay. Ha!" He coughed and spat. "He was so damn ashamed of you he went and signed up for space combat. So he got lost from his ship during a battle." Logan licked his lips very carefully. "So, to make up for it, you signed on a Morgue Ship. Try to find his body. Try to make amends. I know you. You wouldn't join the Space Warriors to fight. No guts for that. Had to get a nice easy job on a morgue ship—"

Lines appeared in Brandon's gaunt cheeks, his eyes were closed, the lids pale. He said, and tried to believe it himself, "Someone has to pick up the bodies after the battle. They can't go flying on forever in their own orbits. They deserve burial."

The bitterness of Logan struck even deeper. "Who are you tryin' to convince?" He was on his feet now. "Me, it's different. I got a right to running this ship. I was in the other war."

"You're a liar," Brandon retorted. "You hunted radium in the asteroids with a mineral tug. You took this Morgue Ship job so you could go right on hunting radium, picking up bodies on the side."

Logan laughed softly, but not humorously. "So what? Least I'm no coward. I'll burn anybody gets in my way." He thought it over. "Unless," he added, "they give me a little money."

Brandon turned away, feeling ill. He forced himself to climb up the rungs toward that air-lock, where that fresh body lay, newly still-born from space by the retrieving-claw. His palms let wet shining prints on the rungs. His climbing feet made a soft noise in the cold metal silence.

The body lay in the cold air-lock's center, as thousands had lain before. Its posture was one of easy slumber, relaxed and not speaking ever again.

Brandon took in his breath. Numbly he realized it was not his son. Every time a new body was found he feared and yet hoped it would be Richard. Richard of the easy laughter and good smile and dark curly hair. Richard who was now floating off somewhere toward some far eternity.

Brandon's eyes dilated. He went to his knees and with efficient darts of his eyes, he covered the vital points of this strange uniform with the young body inside it. His heart pounded briefly, and when he got up again he acted like he had been struck in the face. He walked unsteadily to the rungs.

"Logan," he called down the hole in a numbed voice. "Logan, come up here. Quick."

Logan climbed lazily up, emitting grunts and smoke.

"Look here," said Brandon, kneeling again by the body.

Logan looked and didn't believe it. "Where in hell'd you get that?"

Lying there, the face of the body was like snow framed by the ebon-black of the hair. The eyes were blue jewels caught in the snow. There were slender fingers reclining against the hips. But, most important of all, was the cut of the silver metal uniform, the grey leather belt and the bronze triangle over the silent heart with the numerals 51 on it.

Logan held onto the rungs. "Three hundred years old," he whispered it. "Three hundred years old," he said.

"Yes." The Numerals 51 were enough for Brandon. "After all these centuries, and in perfect condition. Look how calm he is. Most corpse faces aren't—pretty. Something happened, three hundred years ago, and he's been drifting, alone, ever since. I—" Brandon caught his breath.

"What's wrong?" snapped Logan.

"This man," said Brandon, wonderingly, "committed suicide."

"How do you figure?"

"There's not a mark of decompression, centrifugal force, disintegrator or ray-burn on him. He simply *stepped* out of a ship. Why should a Scientist of the 51 Circle commit suicide?"

"They had wars back there, too," said Logan. "But this is the first time I ever seen a stiff from one of them. It can't happen. He shoulda been messed up by meteors."

A strange prickling crept over Brandon. "When I was a kid, I remember thumbing through history books, reading about those famous 51 Scientists of the Circle who were doing experimental work on Pluto back in the year 2100. I memorized their uniforms, and this bronze badge. I couldn't mistake it. There was a rumor that they were experimenting with some new universal power weapon."

"A myth," said Logan.

"Who knows? Maybe. Maybe not. But before that super weapon was completed, Earth fell beneath Mar's assault. The 51 Scientists destroyed themselves and their Base when the

Martians came. The—myth—says that if the Martians had been only a month later—the weapon would have been out of blueprint and into metal.”

Brandon stopped talking and looked at the long-boned, easily slumbering Scientist.

“And now he shows up. One of the original 51. I wonder what happened? Maybe he tried to reach Earth and had to leap into space to escape the Martians. Logan, we’ve got history with us, pulled in out of space, cold and stark under our hands.”

Logan laughed uneasily. “Yeah. Now, if we only had that weapon. Baby, that’d be something to sing about, by God.”

Brandon jerked.

Logan looked at him. “What’s eating you?”

Brandon laid his fingers on the dead Scientist’s skull.

“Maybe—just maybe—we *have* got the weapon,” he said.

His hand trembled.

The coroner pumps throbbed warmly under the table, while manipulating tendrils darted swiftly, effectively over the dead Scientist’s body. Brandon moved, too, like a machine. In a regular fury he had forced Logan to hurry the body down into the preparations room, inject adrenalin, thermal units, apply the blood pump and accomplish a thousand other demanding and instantaneous tasks.

“Now, out of the way, Logan. You’re more trouble than help!”

Logan stumbled back. “Okay, okay. Don’t get snotty. It won’t work. I keep telling you. All these years.”

Brandon could see nothing. Logan’s voice was muffled, far away. There was only the surge of pumps, the sweating heat of the little cubicle, and niche number 12 waiting to receive this body if he failed. Brandon swallowed, tightly. Niche number 12 waiting, cold, ready, waiting for a body to fill it. He’d have to fight to keep it empty.

He began to sing-song words over and over as he injected stimulants into the body. He didn’t know where the words came from, from childhood, maybe, from his old religious

memories:

"Lazarus come forth," Brandon said softly, bending close, adjusting the manipulatory tendrils. "Lazarus, come forth."

Logan snorted. "Lazarus! Will you can that!"

Brandon had to talk to himself. "Inside his brain he's got that energy weapon that Earth can use to end the war. It's been frozen in there three hundred years. If we can thaw it out—"

"Who ever heard of reviving a body after that long?"

"He's perfectly preserved. Perfectly frozen. Oh, God, this is Fate. I know it. I feel it. Came to find Richard and I found something bigger! Lazarus! Lazarus, come forth from the tomb!"

The machines thrummed louder, beating into his ears. Brandon listened, watched for just one pulse, just one beat, one word, one moment of life.

"Air for the lungs," and Brandon attached oxygen cones over the fine nose and relaxed lips. "Pressure on the ribs." Metal plates pressuring the rib case slowly out and in. "Circulation." Brandon touched the control at the foot of the table and the whole table tilted back and forth in a whining teeter-tauter.

A report clipped through on the audio:

"Morgue Ship. Battle Unit 766 calling Morgue Ship. Off orbit of Pluto 234CC, point zero-two, off 32, one by seven, follow up. Battle just terminated. Six Martian ships destroyed. One Earth ship blasted apart and bodies thrown into space. Please recover. 79 men. Bodies in orbit heading toward sun at 23456 an hour. Check."

Logan flipped his cigarette away. "That's us. We got work to do. Come on. Let that stiff cool. He'll be here when we come back."

"No!" Brandon fairly shouted it, eyes wild. "He's more important than all those men out there. We can help them later. He can help us now!"

The table came to a halt, bringing absolute silence.

Brandon bent forward to press his ear against the warmed rib-casing.

"Wait."

There it was. Unbelievably, there it was. A tiny pulse stirring like a termite down under, softly and sluggishly moving through the body, jabbing the heart and—NOW! Brandon cried out. He was shaking all over. He was setting the machine in operation again, and talking and laughing and going crazy with it.

"He's alive! He's alive! Lazarus has come from the tomb! Lazarus reborn again! Notify Earth immediately!"

At the end of an hour, the pulse was timing normal, the temperature was lowering down from a fever, and Brandon moved about the preparations' room watching every quiver of the body's internal organs through the tubular-fluoroscope.

He exulted. This was having Richard alive again. It was compensation. You roared into space looking somewhere for your lost self-respect, your pride, looking for your son who is shooting on some soundless orbit into nothing, and now the biggest child of Fate is deposited in your arms to warm and bring to life. It was impossible. It was good. Brandon almost laughed. He almost forgot he had ever known fear of death. This was conquering it. This was like bringing Richard back to life, but even more. It meant things to earth and humanity; things about weapons and power and peace.

Logan interrupted Brandon's exultant thinking by blowing smoke in his face. "You know something, Brandy? This is damn good! You done something, Mister. Yeah."

"I thought I told you to notify Earth."

"Ah, I been watching you. Like a mama hen and her chick. I been thinking, too. Yeah." Logan shook ashes off his smoke. "Ever since you pulled in this prize fish, I been turning it over in my mind."

"Go up to the radio room and call Earth. We've got to rush the Scientist to Moon Base immediately. We can talk later."

There was that hard green shine to Logan's narrow eyes again. He poked a finger at Brandon. "Here's the way I get it. Do we get rewarded for finding this guy? Hell, no. It's our routine work. We're *supposed* to pick up bodies. Here we got a guy who's the key to the whole damn war."

Brandon's lips hardly moved. "Call Earth."

"Now, hold on a moment, Brandy. Let me finish this. I been thinking, maybe the Martians'd

like to own him, too. Maybe they'd like to be around when he starts talking."

Brandon made a fist. "You heard what I said."

Logan put his hand behind him. "I just want to talk peaceable with you, Brandy. I don't want trouble. But all we'll get for finding this stiff is a kiss on the cheek and a medal on the chest. Hell!"

Brandon was going to hit him hard, before he saw the gun in Logan's fingers, whipped out and pointing.

"Take a look at this, Brandy, and don't lose your supper."

In spite of himself, Brandon quailed. It was almost an involuntary action. His whole body plunged back, aching, pulling with it.

"Now, let's march up to the radio room. I got a little calling to do. Get on with you. Hup!"

In the radio-room, Logan touched studs, raised a mike to his lips and said:

"Beam to Mars. Beam to Mars. Morgue Ship of Earth calling. Mars Beam answer."

After an interval, Mars gave answer. Logan said:

"I've just picked up the body of a 51 Circle Scientist. He's been resuscitated. Give me your fleet commander. I got things to talk over with him." Logan smiled. "Oh, *hello*, commander!"

Half an hour later, the discussions were over, the plans made. Logan hung up, satisfied. Brandon looked at him as if he couldn't believe he was serious.

Back down in the control room, Logan set a course, and then forced Brandon to get the body ready. He bragged about the deal. "A half ton of radium, Brandy. Not bad, eh? Good pay. More than Earth'd ever give me for my routine duty."

Brandon shuddered. "You fool. The Martians will kill us."

"Uh-uh." Logan pantomimed him into moving the body onto a rollered table and taking it to the emergency life-craft air-lock. "I'm not that dumb. I'm having you wire this emergency life-boat with explosive. We collect the minerals first. We blow up the body if the Martians

act funny. We make them wait until we've collected our half and gotten five hours' start toward Earth before we allow them to pick up the body. Nice, huh?"

Brandon swayed over the task of wiring the life-boat with explosive. "You're cutting your own throat. Handing over a weapon like that to the Martian enemy."

It was no again from Logan. "After the Martians pick up the body and we're safely on our way home to Earth, I press a button and the whole damn thing blows up. They call it double-crossing."

"Destroy the body?"

"Hell, yes. Think I want a weapon like that turned over to the enemy? Guh!"

"The war'll go on for years."

"So Earth'll wind up winning, anyhow. We're getting along, slow but sure. And when the war's over, I got a load of radium to set myself up in business and a big future in front of me."

"So you kill millions of men, for that."

"What'd they do for me? Ruined my guts in the last war!"

There had to be some argument, something to say, quick, something to do to a man like Logan. Brandon thought, quickly. "Look, Logan, we can work this, but save the body."

"Don't be funny."

"Put one of the *other* bodies in the ship we send out. Save Lazarus' body and run back to Earth with it!" insisted Brandon.

The little assistant shook his head. "The Martians'll have an intra-material beam focused on the emergency ship when they get within one hundred thousand miles of her. They'll be able to tell then if the body's dead or alive. No dice, Brandy."

It was hardly like leaping himself, thought Brandon. It was just frustration and rage and unthinking action. Brandon jumped. Logan hardly flicked an eyelid as he pressed the trigger of his paragun. It paralyzed the legs from under Brandon and he collapsed. The gun sprayed over his groin and chest and face, too, in a withering shower of red-hot needles. The lights went out.

There was a loose sensation of empty space, and acceleration minus power. Pure soundless momentum. Brandon forced his eyes open painfully, and found himself alone in the preparations' room, lying stretched upon one of the coroner tables, bound with metal fibre.

"Logan!" he bellowed it up through the ship. He waited. He did it again. "Logan!"

He fought the metal fibre, knotting his fists, twisting his arms. He yanked himself back and forth. It pretty well held, except for a looseness in the right hand binding. He worked on that. Upstairs, a queer, detached Martian bass voice intoned itself.

"500,000 miles. Prepare your emergency craft with the body of the Scientist inside of it, Morgue Ship. At 300,000 miles, release the emergency craft. We'll release *our* mineral payment ship now, giving you a half hour leeway to pick it up. It contains the exact amount you asked for."

Logan's voice next:

"Good. The Scientist is alive, still, and doing well. You're getting a bargain."

Brandon's face whitened, bringing out all the hard, scared bones of it, the cheeks and brow and chin bones. He jerked against the binding and it only jumped the air from his lungs so he sobbed. Breathing deeply, he lay back. They were taking his child back out into space. Lazarus, his second son, whom he had birthed out of space with a metal retriever, they were taking back out and away from him. You can't have your real son; so you take the second best and you slap him into breathing life, into breathing consciousness, and before he is a day old they try to tear him away from you again. Brandon fairly yelled against his manacles of wire. Sweat came down his face, and the stuff from his eyes wasn't all sweat.

Logan tiptoed down the hard rungs, grinning.

"Awake, Sleeping Beauty?"

Brandon said nothing. His right hand was loosened. It was wet and loosened, working like a small white animal at his side, slipping from its wire trap.

"You can't go ahead with it, Logan."

"Why not?"

"The Earth Tribunal will find out."

"You won't tell them." Logan was doing something across the room. He was the only moving thing in front of a hundred cold shelves of sleeping warriors.

Brandon gasped, tried to get up, fell back. "How'll you fake my death?"

"With an injection of sulfacardium. Heart failure. Too much pulse on a too old heart. Simple." Logan turned and there was a hypodermic in his hand.

Brandon lay there. The ship went on and on. The body was upstairs, lying breathing in its metal cradle, mothered by him and jerked to life by him, and now going away. Brandon managed to say:

"Do me a favor?"

"What?"

"Give me the drug now. I don't want to be awake when you send Lazarus out. I don't want that."

"Sure." Logan came walking across the deck, raising the hypodermic. It glittered hard and silver fine, and sharp.

"One more thing, Logan."

"Hurry it up!"

Only one arm free, one leg able to move slightly. Logan was pressing against the table, now. The hypodermic hesitated in his fingers.

"This!" said Brandon.

With one foot, Brandon kicked the teeter-tauter control at the base of the board. The board, whining, began to elevate swiftly. With his free arm, instantly pulling the last way free from the wire, Brandon clutched Logan's screaming head and jammed it down under the table, under the descending board. Board and metal base ground together and kept on going three inches. Logan screamed only once. The sounds after that were so horrible that Brandon retched. Logan's body slumped and hung, arms slack, hypo dropped and shattered on the deck.

The whole table kept going up and down, up and down.

It made Brandon sicker with each movement. The whole room revolved, tipped, spun sickishly. The corpses in all their niches seemed to shiver with it.

He managed to kick the control to neutral and the table poised, elevated at the heels, so blood pounded hotly into Brandon's pale face, lighting, coloring it. His heart was pounding furiously and the chronometer upon the hull-wall clicked out time passing, time passing and miles with it, and Martians coming so much the closer....

He fought the remaining wires continuously, cursing, bringing threads and beads of blood from raw wrist, ankle and hips. Red lights buzzed like insects on the ceiling, spelling out:

"ROCKET COMING ... UNKNOWN CRAFT ... ROCKET APPROACHING...."

Hold on, Lazarus. Don't let them wake you all the way up. Don't let them take you. Better for you to go on slumbering forever.

The wire on his left wrist sprang open. It took another five minutes to bleed himself out of the ankle wires. The ship spun on, all too quickly.

Not looking at Logan's body, Brandon sprang from the table and with an infinite weariness tried to speed himself up the rungs. His mind raced ahead, but his body could only sludge rung after rung upward into the radio room. The door to the emergency rocket boat was wide and inside, living quietly, cheeks pink, pulse beating softly in throat, Lazarus lay unthinking, unknowing that his new father had come into his presence.

Brandon glanced at his wrist chronometer. Almost time to slam that door, shoving Lazarus out into space to meet the Martians. Five minutes.

He stood there, sweating. Then, decided, he put a tight audio beam straight on through to green Earth. Earth.

"Morgue Ship coming home. Morgue Ship coming home! Important cargo. Important cargo. Please meet us off the Moon!"

Setting the ship controls into an automatic mesh, he felt the thundering jets explode to life under him. It was not alone their shaking that pulsed through his body. It was something of himself, too. He was sick. He wanted to get back to Earth so badly he was violently ill with the desire. To forget all of war and death.

He could give Lazarus to the enemy and then turn homeward. Yes, he supposed he could do that. But, give up a second son where you already have given up one? No. No. Or, destroy the body now? Brandon fingered a ray-gun momentarily. Then he threw it away from him, eyes closed, swaying. No.

And if he should try to run away to Earth now? The Martians would pursue and capture him. There was no speed in a Morgue Ship to outdistance superior craft.

Brandon walked unsteadily to the side of the sleeping Scientist. He watched him a moment, touching him, looking at him with a lost light in his eyes.

Then, he began the final preparations, lifting the Scientist, going toward the life rocket.

The Martians intercepted the emergency life-rocket at 5199CVZ. The Morgue Ship itself was nowhere visible. It had already completed its arc and was driving back toward Earth.

The body of Lazarus was hurried into the hospital cubicle of the Martian rocket. The body was laid upon a table, and immediate efforts were made to bring it out of its centuries of rest.

Lazarus reclined, silver uniform belted across the middle with soft mouse-grey leather, bronze symbol 51 over the heart.

Breathlessly, the Martians crowded in about the body, probing, examining, trying, waiting. The room got very warm. The little purple eyes blinked hot and tensed.

Lazarus was breathing deeply now, sighing into full aware life, Lazarus coming from the tomb. After three hundred years of avoid death.

Armed guards stood on both sides of the medical table, weapons poised, torture mechanisms ready to make Lazarus speak if he refused to tell.

The eyes of Lazarus fluttered open. Lazarus out of the tomb. Lazarus seeing his companions, iris widening upon itself, forcing shape out of mist. Seeing the curious blue skulls of anxious Martians collected in a watching crowd about him. Lazarus living, breathing, ready to speak.

Lazarus lifted his head, curiously, parted his lips, wetted them with his tongue, and then spoke. His first words were:

"What time is it?"

It was a simple sentence, and all of the Martians bent forward to catch its significance as one of the Martians replied:

"23:45."

Lazarus nodded and closed his eyes and lay back. "Good. He's safe then, by now. He's safe."

The Martians closed in, waiting for the next important words of the waking dead.

Lazarus kept his eyes closed, and he trembled a little, as if, in spite of himself, he couldn't help it.

He said:

"*My name is Brandon.*"

Then, Lazarus laughed....