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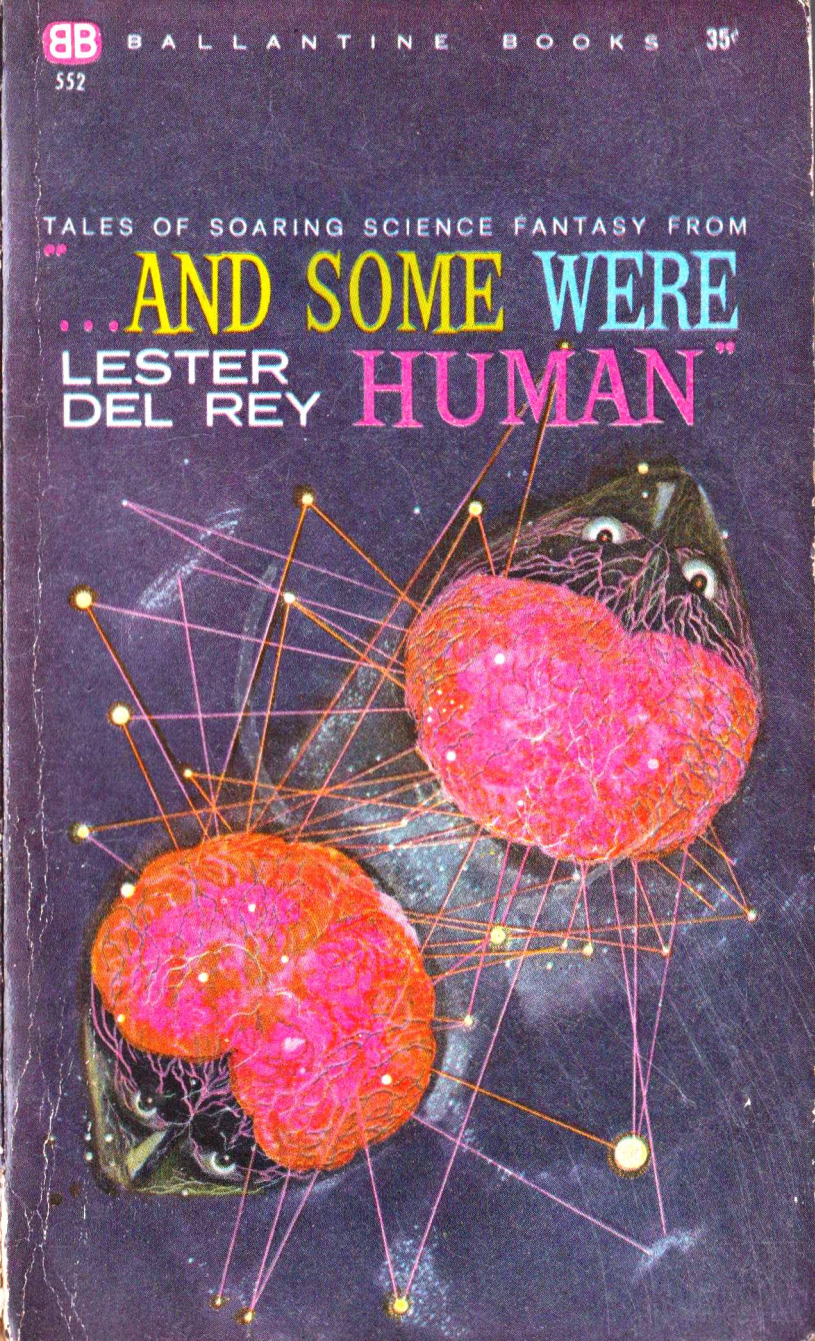
TALES OF SOARING SCIENCE FANTASY FROM

"...AND SOME WERE HUMAN"

LESTER DEL REY



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To

JOHN W. CAMPBELL, JR.

without whose encouragement and
assistance this book would
have been impossible.

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OF

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LESTER
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BALLANTINE BOOKS

NEW YORK

Published by arrangement with
Scott Meredith Literary Agency

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BALLANTINE BOOKS, INC.
101 Fifth Avenue, New York 3, N. Y.

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Foreword

THE PURPOSE OF A FOREWORD to an anthology has always puzzled me. It seems to be a chance for the writer to introduce, justify, and explain his stories to any possible readers; that, at least, is what I have been assured. But I can't quite believe it. Surely if it needed such an introduction, then the stories were failures, and the anthology should never have been published.

If these tales cannot speak for themselves, then most certainly no further words of mine can make them meaningful; and if they do stand on their own, then no further words are necessary.

So I'd like to offer a word of advice before going on. Forget all this, go ahead a few pages, and try the stories themselves. They're neither snooty nor formal; they have no objection to being perused without an introduction, because they were always intended for the entertainment of perfect strangers. Read them first, and then, if you *must* have an explanation, you can come back to this at your leisure, quite sure it will still be waiting.

And now I'll try to settle down to this strange business of trying to explain that which has no explanation and justifying that which I feel needs no justification. These are all old friends to me, and I see no reason to apologize for their appearance before the world in a new set of clothing.

To the best of my judgment, they represent the best of what I have written, and while no writer can be quite honest about his own material, the popularity polls in the magazines where they appeared and numerous fan letters seem to agree. Unfortunately, however, the statistical average man is purely a myth, and no two people ever quite agree on a matter of choice. Many will probably object to the inclusion of some particular story or the omission of another, and I can only plead guilty and apologize for being unable to please everyone. Having had the pleasure of swearing at other men's choices, I'm quite willing to be the object of similar invectives.

Probably, in the line of explaining things that seems to be expected, I should include a definition of fantasy here, but I can find none that is satisfactory. If you have read this book, you will know what I mean by fantasy; if you haven't, I can never give a satisfactory definition, so you'll still have to read on to find my own personal choice of meaning.

Actually, the word is used to describe almost anything outside the limits of what the average man considers "normal." Fantasy ranges from the sadistic savagery of pure horror to the delightful elfin bugling of the one and only Lord Dunsany. It includes all of the old superstitions and whatever new ones a writer can invent, and goes into the future to include cowboys on Mars and green men from another era of time who have come to conquer this fairly insignificant little planet.

But my own personal preference has dictated a somewhat more limited field, without horror for the sake of horror or slugging matches between a gullible hero and a bold bad villain for the sake of mere blood. I prefer my mythology in a more delicate style and my future with at least as much common sense as the present may hold; more, if I were able to extend my own senses to provide it.

After all, ghosts are rather purposeless things, hanging around a place for a millennium in punishment for some horrible crime, and then blithely committing further horrors to show their contrition. Mad scientists may be popular among those who cannot conceive that anyone sur-

passing their own intelligence can be sane, but mad politicians are far more common, though they can hardly be included in fantasy. And villains, while they do exist, always require a rather stupid hero to make them function properly; if the said hero had the ability he should have, he'd either turn them over to the police or, failing the ability to do so, shoot them quietly in the back in self-defense and get it over with. Human villains are really rather stupid, from what experience I have had, and can only exist because they find someone more stupid upon whom to prey.

So, since a man seldom writes well of what neither interests nor convinces him, you'll find none of these things in this anthology.

To me, the real villains of life are stupidity and the unconquered limitations of that life, or the blind whims of a savage environment that is as yet only partially tamed. The real victories are those that contribute to the advancement of intelligence over its weaknesses and the tempering of character in the heat of adversity. Real satisfaction comes from the sense of having done a good job and done it well, rather than from having finally beaten some worthless human villain to a pulp.

I have chosen to write of such victories and problems of life and intelligence, whether I placed those attributes in a human being or in a form drawn from future possibility or mythology. And in place of the conflict between man and invading races, I have been interested in the difficult problem of cooperation between different forms of life. There has always been trouble enough in the mere business of living and living together, and I can feel no need for artificially introduced villainies.

If this attitude makes my fantasy worlds an escape mechanism from a real world, that is always and already ugly enough, to a brighter vista where day-dreams can come true occasionally, I make no apology for it. And it was never deliberate.

In fact, none of this was ever deliberate. While I've tried to outline some ideas behind the stories, and to arrange the anthology itself into a rough pattern, all that is purely hindsight. I wrote them one by one, over a

period of several years, with no particular purpose or point-of-view in mind. If villains or ghouls had ever caught my interest, there would undoubtedly be ghouls and villains in the stories, in spite of my perfectly good reasons for objecting to them.

I wrote the stories because I enjoyed writing them, and the fact that I could receive payment for doing what I would have done in any event only added to my pleasure. I never had any other reasons behind my creation of them, and I cannot see why any other reason is necessary. Of course, some of my things have been written for purely financial reasons, but none of these are included here, and none will be missed.

And I'd like to wind up this plethora of perpendicular pronouns with the hope that any readers may get at least one-tenth as much pleasure from reading them as I had from writing them.

LESTER DEL REY

Hereafter, Inc.

PHINEAS THEOPHILUS Potts, who would have been the last to admit and the first to believe he was a godly man, creaked over in bed and stuck out one scrawny arm wrathfully. The raucous jangling of the alarm was an unusually painful cancer in his soul that morning. Then his waking mind took over and he checked his hand, bringing it down on the alarm button with precise, but gentle, firmness. Would he never learn to control these little angers? In this world one should bear all troubles with uncomplaining meekness, not rebel against them; otherwise——But it was too early in the morning to think of that.

He wriggled out of bed and gave his thoughts over to the ritual of remembering yesterday's sins, checking to make sure all had been covered and wiped out the night before. That's when he got his first shock; he couldn't remember anything about the day before—bad, very bad. Well, no doubt it was another trap of the forces conspiring to secure Potts' soul. Tch, tch. Terrible, but he could circumvent even that snare.

There was no mere mumbling by habit to his confession; word after word rolled off his tongue carefully with full knowledge and unctuous shame until he reached the concluding lines. "For the manifold sins which I have committed and for this greater sin which now afflicts me, forgive and guide me to sin no more, but preserve me in

righteousness all the days of my life. Amen." Thus having avoided the pitfall and saved himself again from eternal combustion, he scrubbed hands with himself and began climbing into his scratchy underclothes and cheap black suit. Then he indulged in a breakfast of dry toast and buttermilk flavored with self-denial and was ready to fare forth into the world of temptation around him.

The telephone jangled against his nerves and he jumped, grabbing for it impatiently before he remembered; he addressed the mouthpiece contritely. "Phineas Potts speaking."

It was Mr. Sloane, his lusty animal voice barking out from the receiver. " 'Lo, Phin, they told me you're ready to come down to work today. Business is booming and we can use you. How about it?"

"Certainly, Mr. Sloane. I'm not one to shirk my duty." There was no reason for the call that Potts could see; he hadn't missed a day in twelve years. "You know——"

"Sure, okay. That's fine. Just wanted to warn you that we've moved. You'll see the name plate right across the street when you come out—swell place, too. Sure you can make it all right?"

"I shall be there in ten minutes, Mr. Sloane," Phineas assured him, and remembered in time to hang up without displaying taste. Tch, poor Sloane, wallowing in sin and ignorant of the doom that awaited him. Why, the last time Phineas had chided his employer—mildly, too—Sloane had actually laughed at him! Dear. Well, no doubt he incurred grace by trying to save the poor lost soul, even though his efforts seemed futile. Of course, there was danger in consorting with such people, but no doubt his sacrifices would be duly recorded.

There was a new elevator boy, apparently, when he came out of his room. He sniffed pointedly at the smoke from the boy's cigarette; the boy twitched his lips, but did not throw it away.

"Okay, bub," he grunted as the doors clanked shut, grating across Phineas' nerves, "I don't like it no better'n you will, but here we are."

Bub! Phineas glared at the shoulders turned to him and shuddered. He'd see Mrs. Biddle about this later.

Suppressing his feelings with some effort, he headed across the lobby, scarcely noting it, and stepped out onto the street. Then he stopped. That was the second jolt. He swallowed twice, opened his eyes and lifted them for the first time in weeks, and looked again. It hadn't changed. Where there should have been a little twisted side street near the tenements, he saw instead a broad gleaming thoroughfare, busy with people and bright in warm golden sunshine. Opposite, the ugly stores were replaced with bright, new office buildings, and the elevated tracks were completely missing. He swung slowly about, clutching his umbrella for support as he faced the hotel; it was still a hotel—but not his—definitely not his. Nor was the lobby the same. He fumbled back into it, shaken and bewildered.

The girl at the desk smiled up at him out of dancing eyes, and she certainly wasn't the manager. Nor would prim Mrs. Biddle, who went to his church, have hired this brazen little thing; both her lips and fingernails were bright crimson, to begin with, and beyond that he preferred not to go.

The brazen little thing smiled again, as if glorying in her obvious idolatry. "Forget something, Mr. Potts?"

"I . . . uh . . . no. That is . . . you know who I am?"

She nodded brightly. "Yes indeed, Mr. Potts. You moved in yesterday. Room 408. Is everything satisfactory?"

Phineas half nodded, gulped, and stumbled out again. Moved in? He couldn't recall it. Why should he leave Mrs. Biddle's? And 408 was his old room number; the room was identical with the one he had lived in, even to the gray streak on the wallpaper that had bothered his eyes for years. Something was horribly wrong—first the lack of memory, then Sloane's peculiar call, now this. He was too upset even to realize that this was probably another temptation set before him.

Mechanically, Phineas spied Sloane's name plate on one of the new buildings and crossed over into it. "Morning, Mr. Potts," said the elevator boy, and Phineas jumped. He'd never seen this person before, either. "Fourth

floor, Mr. Potts. Mr. Sloane's office is just two doors down."

Phineas followed the directions automatically, found the door marked "G. R. Sloane—Architect," and pushed into a huge room filled with the almost unbearable clatter of typewriters and Comptometers, the buzz of voices, and the jarring thump of an addressing machine. But this morning the familiarity of the sound seemed like a haven out of the wilderness until he looked around. Not only had Sloane moved, but he'd apparently also expanded and changed most of his office force. Only old Callahan was left, and Callahan——Strange, he felt sure Callahan had retired or something the year before. Oh, well, that was the least of his puzzles.

Callahan seemed to sense his stare, for he jumped up and brought a hamlike fist down on Phineas' back, almost knocking out the ill-fitting false teeth. "Phin Potts, you old doom-monger! Welcome back!" He thumped again and Potts coughed, trying to reach the spot and rub out the sting. Not only did Callahan have to be an atheist—an argumentative one—but he had to indulge in this gross horseplay. Why hadn't the man stayed properly retired?

"Mr. Sloane?" he managed to gurgle.

Sloane himself answered, his rugged face split in a grin. "Hi, Phin. Let him alone, Callahan. Another thump like that and I'll have to hire a new draftsman. Come on, Phin, there's the devil's own amount of work piled up for you now that you're back from your little illness." He led around a bunch of tables where bright-painted hussies were busily typing, down a hall, and into the drafting room, exchanging words with others that made Phineas wince. Really, his language seemed to grow worse each day.

"Mr. Sloane, would you please——"

"Mind not using such language," Sloane finished, and grinned. "Phin, I can't help it. I feel too good. Business is terrific and I've got the world by the tail. How do you feel?"

"Very well, thank you." Phineas fumbled and caught the thread of former conversation that had been bothering him. "You said something about—illness?"

"Think nothing of it. After working for me twelve years, I'm not going to dock your pay for a mere month's absence. Kind of a shame you had to be off just when I needed you, but such things will happen, so we'll just forget it, eh?" He brushed aside the other's muttered attempt at questioning and dug into the plans. "Here, better start on this—you'll notice some changes, but it's a lot like what we used to do; something like the Oswego we built in '37. Only thing that'll give you trouble is the new steel they put out now, but you can follow specifications on that."

Phineas picked up the specifications, ran them over, and blinked. This would never do; much as he loathed the work, he was an excellent draftsman, and he knew enough of general structural design to know this would never do. "But, two-inch I-beams here——"

" 'Sall right, Phin, structural strength is about twelve times what you're used to. Makes some really nice designing possible, too. Just follow the things like I said, and I'll go over it all later. Things changed a little while you were delirious. But I'm in a devil of a rush right now. See you." He stuck his body through the door, thrust his head back inside and cocked an eyebrow. "Lunch? Need somebody to show you around, I guess."

"As you wish, Mr. Sloane," agreed Phineas. "But would you please mind——"

"Not swearing. Sure, okay. And no religious arguments this time; if I'm damned, I like it." Then he was gone, leaving Phineas alone—he douldn't work with the distraction of others, and always had a room to himself.

So he'd been sick had he, even delirious? Well, that might explain things. Phineas had heard that such things sometimes produced a hiatus in the memory, and it was a better explanation than nothing. With some relief, he put it out of his mind, remembering only to confess how sinfully he'd lost his trust in divine guidance this morning, shook his head mournfully, and began work with dutiful resignation. Since it had obviously been ordained that he should make his simple living at drafting, draft he would, with no complaints, and there would be no fault to be found with him there.

Then the pen began to scratch. He cleaned and adjusted it, finding nothing wrong, but still it made little grating sounds on the paper, lifting up the raw edges of his nerves. Had Phineas believed in evolution, he'd have said the hair his ancestors had once grown was trying to stand on end, but he had no use for such heretical ideas. Well, he was not one to complain. He unclenched his teeth and sought forbearance and peace within.

Then, outside, the addressograph began to thump again, and he had to force himself not to ruin the lines as his body tried to flinch. Be patient, all these trials would be rewarded. Finally, he turned to the only anodyne he knew, contemplation of the fate of heretics and sinners. Of course, he was sorry for them roasting eternally and crying for water which they would never get—very sorry for the poor deluded creatures, as any righteous man should be. Yet still they had been given their chance and not made proper use of it, so it was only just. Picturing morbidly the hell of his most dour Puritan ancestors—something very real to him—he almost failed to notice the ache of his bunion where the cheap shoes pinched. But not quite.

Callahan was humming out in the office, and Phineas could just recognize the tune. Once the atheist had come in roaring drunk, and before they'd sent him home, he'd cornered Phineas and sung it through, unexpurgated. Now, in time with the humming, the words insisted in trickling through the suffering little man's mind, and try as he would, they refused to leave. Prayer did no good. Then he added Callahan to the tortured sinners, and that worked better.

"Pencils, shoestrings, razor blades?" The words behind him startled him, and he regained his balance on the stool with difficulty. Standing just inside the door was a one-legged hunch-back with a handful of cheap articles. "Pencils?" he repeated. "Only a nickel. Help a poor cripple?" But the grin on his face belied the words.

"Indeed no, no pencils." Phineas shuddered as the fellow hobbled over to a window and rid himself of a chew of tobacco. "Why don't you try the charities? Furthermore, we don't allow beggars here."

"Ain't none," the fellow answered with ambiguous cheerfulness, stuffing in a new bite.

"Then have faith in the Lord and He will provide." Naturally, man had been destined to toil through the days of his life in this mortal sphere, and toil he must to achieve salvation. He had no intention of running this uncouth person's small chance to be saved by keeping him in idleness.

The beggar nodded and touched his cap. "One of them, eh? Too bad. Well, keep your chin up, maybe it'll be better later." Then he went off down the hall, whistling, leaving Phineas to puzzle over his words and give it up as a bad job.

Potts rubbed his bunion tenderly, then desisted, realizing that pain was only a test, and should be borne meekly. The pen still scratched, the addressing machine thumped, and a bee had buzzed in somehow and went zipping about. It was a large and active bee.

Phineas cowered down and made himself work, sweating a little as the bee lighted on his drafting board. Then, mercifully, it flew away and for a few minutes he couldn't hear it. When it began again, it was behind him. He started to turn his head, then decided against it; the bee might take the motion as an act of aggression, and declare war. His hands on the pen were moist and clammy, and his fingers ached from gripping it too tightly, but somehow, he forced himself to go on working.

The bee was evidently in no hurry to leave. It flashed by his nose, buzzing, making him jerk back and spatter a blob of ink into the plans, then went zooming around his head and settled on his bald spot. Phineas held his breath and the bee stood pat. Ten, twenty, thirty seconds. His breath went out suddenly with a rush. The insect gave a brief buzz, evidently deciding the noise was harmless, and began strolling down over his forehead and out onto his nose. It tickled; the inside of his nose tickled, sympathetically.

"No, no," Phineas whispered desperately. "N—A*che-e*OO! EEOW!" He grabbed for his nose and jerked

violently, bumping his shins against the desk and splashing more ink on the plans. "Damn, oh, da——"

It was unbelievable; it couldn't be true! His own mouth had betrayed him! With shocked and leaden fingers he released the pen and bowed his head, but no sense of saving grace would come. Too well he could remember that even the smallest sin deserves just damnation. Now he was really sweating, and the visions of eternal torment came trooping back; but this time he was in Callahan's place, and try as he would, he couldn't switch. He was doomed!

Callahan found him in that position a minute later, and his rough, mocking laugh cut into Phineas' wounded soul. "Sure, an angel as I live and breathe." He dumped some papers onto the desk and gave another back-breaking thump. "Got the first sheets done, Phin?"

Miserably, Phineas shook his head, glancing at the clock. They should have been ready an hour ago. Another sin was piled upon his burden, beyond all hope of redemption, and of all people, Callahan had caught him not working when he was already behind. But the old Irishman didn't seem to be gloating.

"There now, don't take it so hard, Phin. Nobody expects you to work like a horse when you've been sick. Mr. Sloane wants you to come out to lunch with him now."

"I——uh——" Words wouldn't come.

Callahan thumped him on the back again, this time lightly enough to rattle only two ribs. "Go along with you. What's left is beginner's stuff and I'll finish it while you're eating. I'm ahead and got nothing to do, anyhow. Go on." He pratically picked the smaller man off the stool and shoved him through the door. "Sloane's waiting. Heck, I'll be glad to do it. Feel so good I can't find enough to keep me busy."

Sloane was flirting with one of the typists as Phineas plogged up, but he wound up that business with a wink and grabbed for his hat. " 'Smatter, Phin? You look all in. Bad bruise on your nose, too. Well, a good lunch'll fix up the first part, at least. Best damned food you ever ate, and right around the corner."

"Yes, Mr. Sloane, but would you . . . uh!" He couldn't

ask that now. He himself was a sinner, given to violent language. Glumly he followed the other out and into the corner restaurant. Then, as he settled into the seat, he realized he couldn't eat; first among his penances should be giving up lunches.

"I . . . uh . . . don't feel very hungry, Mr. Sloane. I'll just have a cup of tea, I think." The odors of the food in the clean little restaurant that brought twinges to his stomach would only make his penance that much greater.

But Sloane was ordering for two. "Same as usual, honey, and you might as well bring a second for my friend here." He turned to Phineas. "Trouble with you, Phin, is that you don't eat enough. Wait'll you get a whiff of the ham they serve here—and the pie! Starting now, you're eating right if I have to stuff it down you. Ah!"

Service was prompt, and the plates began to appear before the little man's eyes. He could feel his mouth watering, and had to swallow to protest. Then the look in Sloane's eye made him decide not to. Well, at least he could fast morning and night instead. He nodded to himself glumly, wishing his craven appetite wouldn't insist on deriving so much pleasure from the food.

"And so," Sloane's voice broke in on his consciousness again, "after this, you're either going to promise me you'll eat three good meals a day or I'll come around and stuff it down you. Hear?"

"Yes, Mr. Sloane, but——"

"Good. I'm taking that as a promise."

Phineas cringed. He hadn't meant it that way; it couldn't go through as a promise. "But——"

"No buts about it. Down there I figured you had as good a chance of being right as I did, so I didn't open my mouth on the subject. But up here, that's done with. No reason why you can't enjoy life now."

That was too much. "Life," said Phineas, laying down his knife and preparing for siege, "was meant to give us a chance to prepare for the life to come, not to be squandered in wanton pleasure. Surely it's better to suffer through a few brief years, resisting temptations, than to be forever damned to perdition. And would you sacrifice

heaven for mere mundane cravings, transient and worthless?"

"Stow it, Phin. Doesn't seem to me I sacrificed much to get here." Then, at Phineas' bewildered look. "Don't tell me you don't realize where you are? They told me they were sending a boy with the message; well, I guess he just missed you. You're dead, Phin! *This* is heaven! We don't talk much about it, but that's the way it is!"

"No!" The world was rolling in circles under Phineas' seat. He stared uncomprehendingly at Sloane, finding no slightest sign of mockery on the man's face. And there was the hole in the memory of sins, and the changes, and —Callahan! Why, Callahan had died and been buried the year before; and here he was, looking ten years younger, and hearty as ever. But it was all illusion; of course, it was all illusion. Callahan wouldn't be in heaven. "No, it can't be."

"But it is, Phin. Remember? I was down your way to get you for overtime work, and yelled at you just as you came out of your house. Then you started to cross, I yelled again——Come back now?"

There'd been a screeching of tires, Sloane running toward him suddenly waving frantically, and—blackout! "Then it hit? And this . . . is ——"

"Uh huh. Seems they picked me up with a shovel, but it took a month to finish you off." Sloane dug into the pie, rolling it on his tongue and grinning. "And this is hereafter. A darned good one, too, even if nobody meets you at the gate to say 'Welcome to Heaven'."

Phineas clutched at the straw. "They didn't tell you it was heaven, then? Oh." That explained everything. Of course, he should have known. This wasn't heaven after all; it couldn't be. And though it differed from his conceptions, it most certainly could be the other place; there'd been that bee! Tch, it was just like Callahan and Sloane to enjoy perdition, misguided sinners, glorying in their unholiness.

Slowly the world righted itself, and Phineas Potts regained his normal state. To be sure, he'd used an ugly word, but what could be expected of him in this vile place? They'd never hold it against him under the circum-

stances. He lowered his eyes thankfully, paying no attention to Sloane's idle remarks about unfortunates. Now if he could just find the authorities of this place and get the mistake straightened out, all might yet be well. He had always done his best to be righteous. Perhaps a slight delay, but not long; and then—no Callahan, no Sloane, no drafting, or bees, or grating noises!

He drew himself up and looked across at Sloane, sadly, but justly doomed to this strange Gehenna. "Mr. Sloane," he asked firmly, "is there some place here where I can find . . . uh . . . authorities to . . . umm——"

"You mean you want to register a complaint? Why sure, a big white building about six blocks down; Adjustment and Appointment office." Sloane studied him thoroughly. "Darned if you don't look like you had a raw deal about something, at that. Look, Phin, they made mistakes sometimes, of course, but if they've handed you the little end, we'll go right down there and get it put right."

Phineas shook his head quickly. The proper attitude, no doubt was to leave Sloane in ignorance of the truth as long as possible, and that meant he'd have to go alone. "Thank you, Mr. Sloane, but I'll go by myself, if you don't mind. And . . . uh . . . if I don't come back . . . uh——"

"Sure, take the whole afternoon off. Hey, wait, aren't you gonna finish lunch?"

But Phineas Potts was gone, his creaking legs carrying him out into the mellow noon sunlight and toward the towering white building that must be his destination. The fate of a man's soul is nothing to dally over, and he wasn't dallying. He tucked his umbrella close under his arm to avoid contact with the host of the damned, shuddering at the thought of mingling with them. Still, undoubtedly this torture would be added to the list of others, and his reward be made that much greater. Then he was at the "Office of Administration, Appointments and Adjustments."

There was another painted Jezebel at the desk marked *Information,* and he headed there, barely collecting his

thoughts in time to avoid disgraceful excitement. She grinned at him and actually winked! "Mr. Potts, isn't it? Oh, I'm so sorry you left before our messenger arrived. But if there's something we can do now——"

"There is," he told her firmly, though not too unkindly; after all, her punishment was ample without his anger. "I wish to see an authority here. I have a complaint; a most grievous complaint."

"Oh, that's too bad, Mr. Potts. But if you'll see Mr. Alexander, down the hall, third door left, I'm sure he can adjust it."

He waited no longer, but hurried where she pointed. As he approached, the third door opened and a dignified-looking man in a gray business suit stepped to it. The man held out a hand instantly. "I'm Mr. Alexander. Come in, won't you? Katy said you had a complaint. Sit right over there, Mr. Potts. Ah, so. Now, if you'll tell me about it, I think we can straighten it all out."

Phineas told him—in detail. "And so," he concluded firmly—quite firmly, "I feel I've been done a grave injustice, Mr. Alexander. I'm positive my destination should have been the other place."

"The other place?" Alexander seemed surprised.

"Exactly so. Heaven, to be more precise."

Alexander nodded thoughtfully. "Quite so, Mr. Potts, Only I'm afraid there's been a little misunderstanding. You see . . . ah . . . this is heaven. Still, I can see you don't believe me yet, so we've failed to place you properly. We really want to make people happy here, you know. So, if you'll just tell me what you find wrong, we'll do what we can to rectify it."

"Oh." Phineas considered. This might be a trick, of course, but still, if they could make him happy here, give him his due reward for the years filled with temptation resisted and noble suffering in meekness and humility, there seemed nothing wrong with it. Possibly, it came to him, there were varying degrees of blessedness, and even such creatures as Callahan and his ilk were granted the lower ones—though it didn't seem quite just. But certainly his level wasn't Callahan's.

"Very well," he decided. "First, I find myself living in

that room with the gray streak on the wallpaper, sir, and for years I've loathed it; and the alarm and telephone; and——"

Alexander smiled. "One at a time please. Now, about the room. I really felt we'd done a masterly job on that, you know. Isn't it exactly like your room on the former level of life? Ah, I see it is. And didn't you choose and furnish that room yourself?"

"Yes, but——"

"Ah, then we were right. Naturally, Mr. Potts, we assumed that since it was of your own former creation, it was best suited to you. And besides, you need the alarm and telephone to keep you on time and in contact with your work, you know."

"But I loathe drafting!" Phineas glanced at this demon who was trying to trap him, expecting it to wilt to its true form. It didn't. Instead, the thing that was Mr. Alexander shook its head slowly and sighed.

"Now that is a pity; and we were so pleased to find we could even give you the same employer as before. Really, we felt you'd be happier under him than a stranger. However, if you don't like it, I suppose we could change. What other kind of work would you like?"

Now that was more like it, and perhaps he had even misjudged Alexander. Work was something Phineas hadn't expected, but—yes, that would be nice, if it could be arranged here. "I felt once I was *called*," he suggested.

"Minister, you mean? Now that's fine. Never get too many of them, Mr. Potts. Wonderful men, do wonderful work here. They really add enormously to the happiness of our Hereafter, you know. Let me see, what experience have you had?" He beamed at Potts, who thawed under it; then he turned to a bookshelf, selected a heavy volume and consulted it. Slowly the beam vanished, and worry took its place.

"Ah, yes, Phineas Theophilus Potts. Yes, entered training 1903. Hmmm. Dismissed after two years of study, due to a feeling he might . . . might not be quite temperamentally suited to the work and that he was somewhat too fana . . . ahem! . . . overly zealous in his criticism of

others. Then transferred to his uncle's shop and took up drafting, which was thereafter his life's work. Umm. Really, that's too bad." Alexander turned back to Phineas. "Then, Mr. Potts, I take it you never had any actual experience at this sort of work?"

Phineas squirmed. "No, but ——"

"Too bad." Alexander sighed. "Really, I'd like to make things more to your satisfaction, but after all, no experience—afraid it wouldn't do. Tell you what, we don't like to be hasty in our judgements; if you'll just picture exactly the life you want—no need to describe it, I'll get it if you merely think it—maybe we can adjust things. Try hard now."

With faint hope, Phineas tried. Alexander's voice droned out at him. "A little harder. No, that's only a negative picture of what you'd like not to do. Ah . . . um, no. I thought for a minute you had something, but its gone. I think you're trying to picture abstractions, Mr. Potts, and you know one can't do that; I get something very vague, but it makes no sense. There! That's better."

He seemed to listen for a few seconds longer, and Phineas was convinced now it was all sham; he'd given up trying. What was the use? Vague jumbled thoughts were all he had left, and now Alexander's voice broke in on them.

"Really, Mr. Potts, I'm afraid there's nothing we can do for you. I get a very clear picture now, but it's exactly the life we'd arranged for you, you see. Same room, same work. Apparently that's the only life you know. Of course, if you want to improve we have a great many very fine schools located throughout the city."

Phineas jerked upright, the control over his temper barely on. "You mean—you mean, I've got to go on like that?"

"Afraid so."

"But you distinctly said this was heaven."

"It is."

"And I tell you," Phineas cried, forgetting all about controlling his temper, "that this is hell!"

"Quite so, I never denied it. Now, Mr. Potts, I'd like

to discuss this further, but others are waiting, so I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to leave."

Alexander looked up from his papers, and as he looked, Phineas found himself outside the door, shaken and sick. The door remained open as the girl called Katy came up, looked at him in surprise, and went in. Then it closed, but still he stood there, unable to move, leaning against the wooden frame for support.

There was a mutter of voices within, and his whirling thoughts seized on them for anchor. Katy's voice first. "—seems to take it terribly hard, Mr. Alexander. Isn't there something we can do?"

Then the low voice of Alexander. "Nothing, Katy. It's up to him now. I suggested the schools, but I'm afraid he's another unfortunate. Probably even now he's out there convincing himself that all this is merely illusion, made to try his soul and test his ability to remain unchanged. If that's the case, well, poor devil, there isn't much we can do, you know."

But Phineas wasn't listening then. He clutched the words he'd heard savagely to his bosom and went stiffly out and back toward the office of G. R. Sloane across from the little room, No. 408. Of course he should have known. All this was merely illusion, made to try his soul. Illusion and test, no more.

Let them try him, they would find him humble in his sufferings as always, not complaining, resisting firmly their temptations. Even though Sloane denied him the right to fast, still he would find some other way to do proper penance for his sins; though Callahan broke his back, though a thousand bees attacked him at once, still he would prevail.

"Forgive and guide me to sin no more, but preserve me in righteousness all the days of my life," he repeated, and turned into the building where there was more work and misery waiting for him. Sometime he'd be rewarded. Sometime.

Back in his head a small shred of doubt sniggered gleefully.

* * * * *

The Day Is Done

HWOOGH SCRATCHED THE HAIR on his stomach and watched the sun climb up over the hill. He beat listlessly on his chest and yelled at it timidly, then grumbled and stopped. In his youth, he had roared and stumped around to help the god up, but now it wasn't worth the effort. Nothing was. He found a fine flake of sweaty salt under his hair, licked it off his fingers, and turned over to sleep again.

But sleep wouldn't come. On the other side of the hill there was a hue and cry, and somebody was beating a drum in a throbbing chant. The old Neanderthaler grunted and held his hands over his ears, but the Sun-Warmer's chant couldn't be silenced. More ideas of the Talkers.

In his day, it had been a lovely world, full of hairy grumbling people; people a man could understand. There had been game on all sides, and the caves about had been filled with the smoke of cooking fires. He had played with the few young that were born—though each year fewer children had come into the tribe—and had grown to young manhood with the pride of achievement. But that was before the Talkers had made this valley one of their hunting grounds.

Old traditions, half told, half understood, spoke of the land in the days of old, when only his people roamed over the broad tundra. They had filled the caves and gone out in packs too large for any animals to withstand. And

the animals swarmed into the land, driven south by the Fourth Glaciation. Then the great cold had come again, and times had been hard. Many of his people had died.

But many had lived, and with the coming of the warmer, drier climate, again, they had begun to expand before the Talkers arrived. After that—Hwoogh stirred uneasily—for no good reason he could see, the Talkers took more and more of the land, and his people retreated and diminished before them. Hwoogh's father had made it understood that their little band in the valley was all that was left, and that this was the only place on the great flat earth where Talkers seldom came.

Hwoogh had been twenty when he first saw them, great long-legged men, swift of foot and eye, stalking along as if they owned the earth, with their incessant mouth noises. In the summer that year, they pitched their skin-and-wattle tents at the back of the hill, away from the caves, and made magic to their gods. There was magic on their weapons, and the beasts fell their prey. Hwoogh's people had settled back, watching fearfully, hating numbly, finally resorting to begging and stealing. Once a young buck had killed the child of a Talker, and been flayed and sent out to die for it. Thereafter, there had been a truce between Cro-Magnon and Neanderthaler.

Now the last of Hwoogh's people were gone, save only himself, leaving no children. Seven years it had been since Hwoogh's brother had curled up in the cave and sent his breath forth on the long journey to his ancestors. He had always been dispirited and weak of will, but he had been the only friend left to Hwoogh.

The old man tossed about and wished that Keyoda would return. Maybe she would bring food from the Talkers. There was no use hunting now, when the Talkers had already been up and killed all the easy game. Better that a man should sleep all the time, for sleep was the only satisfying thing left in the topsy-turvy world; even the drink the tall Cro-Magnons made from mashed roots left a headache the next day.

He twisted and turned in his bed of leaves at the edge of the cave, grunting surlily. A fly buzzed over his head provocatively, and he lunged at it. Surprise lighted his fea-

tures as his fingers closed on the insect, and he swallowed it with a momentary flash of pleasure. It wasn't as good as the grubs in the forest, but it made a tasty appetizer.

The sleep god had left, and no amount of lying still and snoring would lure him back. Hwoogh gave up and squatted down on his haunches. He had been meaning to make a new head for his crude spear for weeks, and he rummaged around in the cave for materials. But the idea grew farther away the closer he approached the work, and he let his eyes roam idly over the little creek below him and the fleecy clouds in the sky. It was a warm spring, and the sun made idleness pleasant.

The sun god was growing stronger again, chasing the cold fog and mist away. For years, he had worshiped the sun god as his, and now it seemed to grow strong again only for the Talkers. While the god was weak, Hwoogh's people had been mighty; now that its long sickness was over, the Cro-Magnons spread out over the country like the fleas on his belly.

Hwoogh could not understand it. Perhaps the god was mad at him, since gods are utterly unpredictable. He grunted, wishing again for his brother who had understood such things better.

Keyoda crept around the boulder in front of the cave, interrupting his brooding. She brought scraps of food from the tent village and the half-chewed leg of a horse, which Hwoogh seized on and ripped at with his strong teeth. Evidently the Talkers had made a big kill the day before, for they were lavish with their gifts. He grunted at Keyoda, who sat under the cave entrance in the sun, rubbing her back.

Keyoda was as hideous as most of the Talkers were to Hwoogh, with her long dangling legs and short arms, and the ungainly straightness of her carriage. Hwoogh remembered the young girls of his own day with a sigh; they had been beautiful, short and squat, with forward-jutting necks and nice low foreheads. How the flat-faced Cro-Magnon women could get mates had been a puzzle to Hwoogh, but they seemed to succeed.

Keyoda had failed, however, and in her he felt justified in his judgment. There were times when he felt almost in

sympathy with her, and in his own way he was fond of her. As a child, she had been injured, her back made useless for the work of a mate. Kicked around by the others of her tribe, she had gradually drifted away from them, and when she stumbled on Hwoogh, his hospitality had been welcome to her. The Talkers were nomads who followed the herds north in the summer, south in the winter, coming and going with the seasons, but Keyoda stayed with Hwoogh in his cave and did the few desultory tasks that were necessary. Even such a half-man as the Neanderthaler was preferable to the scornful pity of her own people, and Hwoogh was not unkind.

"Hwunkh?" asked Hwoogh. With his stomach partly filled, he felt more kindly toward the world.

"Oh, they come out and let me pick up their scraps—me, who was once a chief's daughter!—same as they always do." Her voice had been shrewish, but the weariness of failure and age had taken the edge from it. " 'Poor, poor Keyoda,' thinks they, 'let her have what she wants, just so it don't mean nothin' we like.' Here." She handed him a roughly made spear, flaked on both sides of the point, but with only a rudimentary barb, unevenly made. "One of 'em give me this—it ain't the like of what they'd use, I guess, but it's good as you could make. One of the kids is practicing."

Hwoogh examined it; good, he admitted, very good, and the point was fixed nicely in the shaft. Even the boys, with their long limber thumbs that could twist any which way, made better weapons than he; yet once, he had been famous among his small tribe for the nicety of his flint work.

Making the sign of horses, he got slowly to his feet. The shape of his jaw and the attachment of his tongue, together with the poorly developed left frontal lobe of his brain, made speech rudimentary, and he supplemented his glottals and labials with motions that Keyoda understood well enough. She shrugged and waved him out, gnawing on one of the bones.

Hwoogh wandered about without much spirit, conscious that he was growing old. And vaguely, he knew that

age should not have fallen upon him for many snows; it was not the number of seasons, but something else, something that he could feel but not understand. He struck out for the hunting fields, hoping that he might find some game for himself that would require little effort to kill. The scornful gifts of the Talkers had become bitter in his mouth.

But the sun god climbed up to the top of the blue cave without Hwoogh's stumbling on anything. He swung about to return, and ran into a party of Cro-Magnons returning with the carcass of a reindeer strapped to a pole on their shoulders. They stopped to yell at him.

"No use, Hairy One!" they boasted, their voices light and gay. "We caught all the game this way. Turn back to your cave and sleep."

Hwoogh dropped his shoulders and veered away, his spear dragging limply on the ground. One of the party trotted over to him lightly. Sometimes Legoda, the tribal magic man and artist, seemed almost friendly, and this was one of the times.

"It was my kill, Hairy One," he said tolerantly. "Last night I drew strong reindeer magic, and the beast fell with my first throw. Come to my tent and I'll save a leg for you. Keyoda taught me a new song that she got from her father, and I would repay her."

Legs, ribs, bones! Hwoogh was tired of the outer meat. His body demanded the finer food of the entrails and liver. Already his skin was itching with a rash, and he felt that he must have the succulent inner parts to make him well; always before, that had cured him. He grunted, between appreciation and annoyance, and turned off. Legoda pulled him back.

"Nay, stay, Hairy One. Sometimes you bring good fortune to me, as when I found the bright ocher for my drawing. There is enough in the camp for all. Why hunt today?" As Hwoogh still hesitated, he grew more insistent, not from kindness, but more from a wish to have his own way. "The wolves are running near today, and one is not enough against them. We carve the reindeer at the camp as soon as it comes from the pole. I'll give you first choice of the meat!"

Hwoogh grunted a surly acquiescence and waddled after the party. The dole of the Talkers had become gall to him, but liver was liver—if Legoda kept his bargain. They were chanting a rough marching song, trotting easily under the load of the reindeer, and he lumbered along behind, breathing hard at the pace they set.

As they neared the village of the nomads, its rough skin tents and burning fires threw out a pungent odor that irritated Hwoogh's nostrils. The smell of the long-limbed Cro-Magnons was bad enough without the dirty smell of a camp and the stink of their dung-fed fires. He preferred the accustomed moldy stench of his own musty cave.

Youths came swarming out at them, yelling with disgust at being left behind on this easy hunt. Catching sight of the Neanderthaler, they set up a howl of glee and charged at him, throwing sticks and rocks and jumping at him with play fury. Hwoogh shivered and crouched over, menacing them with his spear, and giving voice to throaty growls. Legoda laughed.

"In truth, O Hairy Chokanga, your voice should drive them from you. But see, they fear it not. Kuch, you two-legged pests! Out and away! Kuch, I say!" They leaped back at his voice and dropped behind, still yelling. Hwoogh eyed them warily, but so long as it suited the pleasure of Legoda, he was safe from their pranks.

Legoda was in a good mood, laughing and joking, tossing his quips at the women until his young wife came out and silenced it. She sprang at the reindeer with her flint knife, and the other women joined her.

"Heya," called Legoda. "First choice goes to Chokanga, the Hairy One. By my word, it is his."

"O fool!" There was scorn in her voice and in the look she gave Hwoogh. "Since when do we feed the beasts of the caves and the fish of the river? Art mad, Legoda. Let him hunt for himself."

Legoda tweaked her back with the point of his spear, grinning. "Aye, I knew thou'dst cry at that. But then, we owe his kind some pay—this was his hunting ground when we were but pups, straggling into this far land. What harm to give to an old man?" He swung to Hwoogh and ges-

tured. "See, Chokanga, my word is good. Take what you want, but see that it is not more than your belly and that of Keyoda can hold this night."

Hwoogh darted in and came out with the liver and the fine sweet fat from the entrails. With a shrill cry of rage, Legoda's mate sprang for him, but the magic man pushed her back.

"Nay, he did right! Only a fool would choose the haunch when the heart of the meat was at hand. By the gods of my father, and I expected to eat of that myself! O Hairy One, you steal the meat from my mouth, and I like you for it. Go, before Heya gets free."

Tomorrow, Hwoogh knew, Legoda might set the brats on him for this day's act, but tomorrow was in another cave of the sun. He drew his legs under him and scuttled off to the left and around the hill, while the shrill yells of Heya and the lazy good humor of Legoda followed. A piece of liver dangled loose, and Hwoogh sucked on it as he went. Keyoda would be pleased, since she usually had to do the begging for both of them.

And a little of Hwoogh's self-respect returned. Hadn't he outsmarted Legoda and escaped with the choicest meat? And had Keyoda ever done as well when she went to the village of the Talkers? Ayeee, they had a thing yet to learn from the cunning brain of old Hwoogh!

Of course the Talkers were crazy; only fools would act as Legoda had done. But that was none of his business. He patted the liver and fat fondly and grinned with a slight return of good humor. Hwoogh was not one to look a gift horse in the mouth.

The fire had shrunk to a red bed of coals when he reached the cave, and Keyoda was curled up on his bed, snoring loudly, her face flushed. Hwoogh smelled her breath, and his suspicions were confirmed. Somehow, she had drunk of the devil brew of the Talkers, and her sleep was dulled with its stupor. He prodded her with his toe, and she sat up bleary-eyed.

"Oh, so you're back. Ayeee, and with liver and fat! But that never came from your spear throw; you been to the village and stole it. Oh, but you'll catch it!" She grab-

bed at the meat greedily and stirred up the fire, spitting the liver over it.

Hwoogh explained as best he could, and she got the drift of it. "So? Eh, that Legoda, what a prankster he is, and my own nephew, too." She tore the liver away, half raw, and they fell to eagerly, while she chuckled and cursed by turns. Hwoogh touched her nose and wrinkled his face up.

"Well, so what if I did?" Liquor had sharpened her tongue. "That no-good son of the chief come here, after me to be telling him stories. And to make my old tongue free, he brings me the root brew. Ah, what stories I'm telling—and some of them true, too!" She gestured toward a crude pot. "I reckon he steals it, but what's that to us? Help yourself, Hairy One. It ain't ever' day we're getting the brew."

Hwoogh remembered the headaches of former experiments, but he smelled it curiously, and the lure of the magic water caught at him. It was the very essence of youth, the fire that brought life to his legs and memories to his mind. He held it up to his mouth, gasping as the beery liquid ran down his throat. Keyoda caught it before he cound finish and drained the last quart.

"Ah, it strengthens my back and puts the blood a-running hot through me again." She swayed on her feet and sputtered out the fragments of an old skin-scraping song. "Now, there you go—can't you never learn to drink it all to once? That way, it don't last so long, and you're out before you get to feeling good."

Hwoogh staggered as the brew took hold of him, and his knees bent ever farther under him. The bed came up in his face, his head was full of bees buzzing merrily, and the cave spun around him. He roared at the cave, while Keyoda laughed.

"Heh! To hear you a-yelling, a body might think you was the only Chokanga left on earth. But you ain't—no, you ain't!"

"Hwunkh?" That struck home. To the best of Hwoogh's knowledge, there were no others of his kind left on earth. He grabbed at her and missed, but she fell and rolled against him, her breath against his face.

"So? Well, it's the truth. The kid up and told me. Legoda found three of 'em, just like you, he says, up the land to the east, three springs ago. You'll have to ask him —I dunno nothing about it." She rolled over against him, grunting half-formed words, and he tried to think of this new information. But the brew was too strong for his head, and he was soon snoring beside her.

Keyoda was gone to the village when he awoke, and the sun was a spear length high on the horizon. He rummaged around for a piece of the liver, but the flavor was not as good as it had been and his stomach protested lustily at going to work again. He leaned back until his head got control of itself, then swung down to the creek to quench a thirst devil that had seized on him in the night.

But there was something he should do, something he half remembered from last night. Hadn't Keyoda said something about others of his people? Yes, three of them, and Legoda knew. Hwoogh hesitated, remembering that he had bested Legoda the day before; the young man might resent it today. But he was filled with an overwhelming curiosity, and there was a strange yearning in his heart. Legoda must tell him.

Reluctantly, he went back to the cave and fished around in a hole that was a secret even from Keyoda. He drew out his treasures, fingering them reverently, and selecting the best. There were bright shells and colored pebbles, a roughly drilled necklace that had belonged to his father, a sign of completed manhood, bits of this and that with which he had intended to make himself ornaments. But the quest for knowledge was stronger than the pride of possession; he dumped them out into his fists and struck out for the village.

Keyoda was talking with the women, whining the stock formula that she had developed, and Hwoogh skirted around the camp, looking for the young artist. Finally he spotted the Talker out behind the camp, making odd motions with two sticks. He drew near cautiously, and Legoda heard him coming.

"Come near, Chokanga, and see my new magic." The

young man's voice was filled with pride, and there was no threat to it. Hwoogh sighed with relief, but sidled up slowly. "Come nearer, don't fear me. Do you think I'm sorry of the gift I made? Nay, that was my own stupidity. See."

He held out the sticks and Hwoogh fingered them cautiously. One was long and springy, tied end to end with a leather thong, and the other was a little spear with a tuft of feather on the blunt end. He grunted a question.

"A magic spear, Hairy One, that flies from the hand with wings, and kills beyond the reach of other spears."

Hwoogh snorted. The spear was too tiny to kill more than rodents, and the big stick had not even a point. But he watched as the young man placed the sharp stick to the tied one, and drew back on it. There was a sharp twang, and the little spear sailed out and away, burying its point in the soft bark of a tree more than two spear throws away. Hwoogh was impressed.

"Aye, Chokanga, a new magic that I learned in the south last year. There are many there who use it, and with it they can throw the point farther and better than a full-sized spear. One man may kill as much as three!"

Hwoogh grumbled; already they killed all the good game, and yet they must find new magic to increase their power. He held out his hand curiously, and Legoda gave him the long stick and another spear, showing him how it was held. Again there was a twang, and the leather thong struck at his wrist, but the weapon sailed off erratically, missing the tree by yards. Hwoogh handed it back glumly —such magic was not for his kind. His thumbs made the handling of it even more difficult.

Now, while the magic man was pleased with his superiority, was a good time to show the treasure. Hwoogh spread it out on the bare earth and gestured at Legoda, who looked down thoughtfully.

"Yes," the Talker conceded. "Some of it is good, and some would make nice trinkets for the women. What is it you want—more meat, or one of the new weapons? Your belly was filled yesterday; and with my beer, that was stolen, I think, though for that I blame you not. The

boy has been punished already. And this weapon is not for you."

Hwoogh snorted, wriggled and fought for expression, while the young man stared. Little by little, his wants were made known, partly by signs, partly by the questions of the Cro-Magnon. Legoda laughed.

"So, there is a call of the kind in you, Old Man?" He pushed the treasure back to Hwoogh, except one gleaming bauble. "I would not cheat you, Chokanga, but this I take for the love I bear you, as a sign of our friendship." His grin was mocking as he stuck the valuable in a flap of his clout.

Hwoogh squatted down on his heels, and Legoda sat on a rock as he began. "There is but little to tell you, Hairy One. Three years ago I did run onto a family of your kind —a male and his mate, with one child. They ran from us, but we were near their cave, and they had to return. We harmed them not, and sometimes gave them food, letting them accompany us on the chase. But they were thin and scrawny, too lazy to hunt. When we returned next year, they were dead, and so far as I know, you are the last of your kind."

He scratched his head thoughtfully. "Your people die too easily, Chokanga; no sooner do we find them and try to help them than they cease hunting and become beggars. And then they lose interest in life, sicken and die. I think your gods must be killed off by our stronger ones."

Hwoogh grunted a half assent, and Legoda gathered up his bow and arrows, turning back toward camp. But there was a strange look on the Neanderthaler's face that did not escape the young man's eyes. Recognizing the misery in Hwoogh's expression, he laid a hand on the old man's shoulder and spoke more kindly.

"That is why I would see to your well-being, Hairy One. When you are gone, there will be no more, and my children will laugh at me and say I lie when I spin the tale of your race at the feast fire. Each time that I kill, you shall not lack for food."

He swung down the single street toward the tent of his family, and Hwoogh turned slowly back toward his cave. The assurance of food should have cheered him, but

it only added to his gloom. Dully he realized that Legoda treated him as a small child, or as one whom the sun god had touched with madness.

Hwoogh heard the cries and laughter of children as he rounded the hill, and for a minute he hesitated before going on. But the sense of property was well developed in him, and he leaped forward grimly. They had no business near his cave.

They were of all ages and sizes, shouting and chasing each other about in a crazy disorder. Having been forbidden to come on Hwoogh's side of the hill, and having broken the rule in a bunch, they were making the most of their revolt. Hwoogh's fire was scattered down the side of the hill into the creek, and they were busily sorting through the small store of his skins and weapons.

Hwoogh let out a savage yell and ran forward, his spear held out in jabbing position. Hearing him, they turned and jumped back from the cave entrance, clustering up into a tight group. "Go on away, Ugly Face," one yelled. "Go scare the wolves! Ugly Face, Ugly Face, waaaah!"

He dashed in among them, brandishing his spear, but they darted back on their nimble legs, slipping easily from in front of him. One of the older boys thrust out a leg and caught him, tripping him down on the rocky ground. Another dashed in madly and caught his spear away, hitting him roughly with it. From the time of the first primate, the innate cruelty of thoughtlessness had changed little in children.

Hwoogh let out a whooping bellow, scrambled up clumsily and was in among them. But they slipped nimbly out of his clutching hands. The little girls were dancing around gleefully, chanting: "Ugly Face ain't got no mother, Ugly Face ain't got no wife, waaaah on Ugly Face!" Frantically he caught one of the boys, swung him about savagely, and tossed him on the ground, where the youth lay white and silent. Hwoogh felt a momentary glow of elation at his strength. Then somebody threw a rock.

The old Neanderthaler was tied down crudely when he

swam back to consciousness, and three of the boys sat on his chest, beating the ground with their heels in time to a victory chant. There was a dull ache in his head, and bruises were swelling on his arms and chest where they had handled him roughly. He growled savagely, heaving up, and tumbled them off, but the cords were too strong for him. As surely as if grown men had done it, he was captured.

For years they had been his enemies, ever since they had found that Hwoogh-baiting was one of the pleasant occupations that might relieve the tedium of camp life. Now that the old feud was about finished, they went at the business of subduing him with method and ingenuity.

While the girls rubbed his face with soft mud from the creek, the boys ransacked the cave and tore at his clothes. The rough bag in which he had put his valuables came away in their hands, and they paused to distribute this new wealth. Hwoogh howled madly.

But a measure of sanity was returning to them, now that the first fury of the fight was over, and Kechaka, the chief's eldest son, stared at Hwoogh doubtfully. "If the elders hear of this," he muttered unhappily, "there will be trouble. They'd not like our bothering Ugly Face."

Another grinned. "Why tell them? He isn't a man, anyway, but an animal; see the hair on his body! Toss old Ugly Face in the river, clean up his cave, and hide these treasures. Who's to know?"

There were half-hearted protests, but the thought of the beating waiting for them added weight to the idea. Kechaka nodded finally, and set them to straightening up the mess they had made. With broken branches, they eliminated the marks of their feet, leaving only the trail to the creek.

Hwoogh tossed and pitched in their arms as four of them picked him up; the bindings loosened somewhat, but not enough to free him. With some satisfaction, he noted that the boy he had caught was still retching and moaning but that was no help to his present position. They waded relentlessly into the water, laid him on it belly down, and gave him a strong push that sent him gliding out through the rushing stream. Foaming and gasping, he

fought the current, struggling against his bonds. His lungs ached for air, and the current buffeted him about; blackness was creeping up on his mind.

With a last desperate effort he tore loose the bonds and pushed up madly for the surface, gulping in air greedily. Water was unpleasant to him, but he could swim, and struck out for the bank. The children were disappearing down the trail, and were out of sight as he climbed from the water, bemoaning his lost fire that would have warmed him. He lumbered back to his cave and sank soddenly on the bed.

He, who had been a mighty warrior, bested by a snarling pack of Cro-Magnon brats! He clenched his fists savagely and growled, but there was nothing he could do. Nothing! The futility of his own effort struck down on him like a burning knife. Hwoogh was an old man, and the tears that ran from his eyes were the bitter, aching tears that only age can shed.

Keyoda returned late, cursing when she found the fire gone, but her voice softened as she spied him huddled in his bed, staring dully at the wall of the cave. Her old eyes spotted the few footprints the boys had missed, and she swore with a vigor that was almost youthful before she turned back to Hwoogh.

"Come, Hairy One, get out of that cold, wet fur!" Her hands were gentle on the straps, but Hwoogh shook her aside. "You'll be sick, lying there on them few leaves, all wet like that. Get off that fur, and I'll go back to the village for fire. Them kids! Wait'll I tell Legoda!"

Seeing there was nothing he would let her do for him, she turned away down the trail. Hwoogh sat up to change his furs, then lay back. What was the use? He grumbled a little, when Keyoda returned with the fire, but refused the delicacies she had wheedled at the village, and tumbled over into a fitful sleep.

The sun was long up when he awoke to find Legoda and Keyoda fussing over him. There was an unhappy feeling in his head, and he coughed. Legoda patted his back. "Rest, Hairy One. You have the sickness devil that burns the throat and runs at the nose, but that a man

can throw off. Ayeee, how the boys were whipped! I, personally, attended to that, and this morning not one is less sore than you are. Before they bother you again, the moon will eat up the sun."

Keyoda pushed a stew of boiled liver and kidneys at him, but he shoved it away. Though the ache in his head had gone down, a dull weight seemed to rest on his stomach, and he could not eat. It felt as though all the boys he had fought were sitting on his chest and choking him.

Legoda drew out a small painted drum and made heavy magic for his recovery, dancing before the old man and shaking the magic gourd that drove out all sickness. But this was a stronger devil. Finally the young man stopped and left for the village, while Keyoda perched on a stone to watch over the sick man. Hwoogh's mind was heavy and numb, and his heart was leaden in his breast. She fanned the flies away, covering his eyes with a bit of skin, singing him some song that the mothers lulled their children with.

He slept again, stirring about in a nightmare of Talker mockery, with a fever flushing his face. But when Legoda came back at night, the magic man swore he should be well in three days. "Let him sleep and feed him. The devil will leave him soon. See, there is scarce a mark where the stone hit him."

Keyoda fed him, as best she could, forcing the food that she begged at the village down his throat. She lugged water from the creek as often as he cried for it, and bathed his head and chest when he slept. But the three days came and went, and still he was not well. The fever was little higher, and the cold little worse than he had gone through many times before. But he did not throw it off as he should have done.

Legoda came again, bringing his magic and food, but they were of little help. As the day drew to a close, he shook his head and spoke low words to Keyoda. Hwoogh came out of a half stupor and listened dully.

"He tires of life, Keyoda, my father's sister." The young man shrugged. "See, he lies there not fighting. When a man will not try to live, he cannot."

"Ayyeah!" Her voice shrilled dolefully. "What man will not live if he can? Thou are foolish, Legoda."

"Nay. His people tire easily of life, O Keyoda. Why, I know not. But it takes little to make them die." Seeing that Hwoogh had heard, he drew closer to the Neanderthaler. "O Chokanga, put away your troubles, and take another bite out of life. It can still be good, if you choose. I have taken your gift as a sign of friendship, and I would keep my word. Come to my fire, and hunt no more; I will tend you as I would my father."

Hwoogh grunted. Follow the camps, eat from Legoda's hunting, be paraded as a freak and a half-man! Legoda was kind, sudden and warm in his sympathy, but the others were scornful. And if Hwoogh should die, who was to mourn him? Keyoda would forget him, and not one Chokanga would be there to show them the ritual for burial.

Hwoogh's old friends had come back to him in his dreams, visiting him and showing the hunting grounds of his youth. He had heard the grunts and grumblings of the girls of his race, and they were awaiting him. That world was still empty of the Talkers, where a man could do great things and make his own kills, without hearing the laughter of the Cro-Magnons. Hwoogh sighed softly. He was tired, too tired to care what happened.

The sun sank low, and the clouds were painted a harsh red. Keyoda was wailing somewhere, far off, and Legoda beat on his drum and muttered his magic. But life was empty, barren of pride.

The sun dropped from sight, and Hwoogh sighed again, sending his last breath out to join the ghosts of his people.

* * * * *

Forsaking All Others

EVERY SUNDAY, just as the sun touched the far hills, the tall young man came up the path from fishing. Sylva, the little oak dryad, had watched his comings and goings all during the summer, and now she crept out of her tree, glanced at the sun, and looked wistfully down the path that led to the brook.

He was on time again, his curly head and broad shoulders poking up over the summit of the hill, and she swayed toward him, while the old oak rustled gently above her in the still air. In supplication, she raised her hands toward the east and repeated her usual plea.

"Mother Goddess," she prayed, "make me be seen, this once. I have been dutiful to thy instructions, O Mother, and my tree has grown old and mighty in my care. The mortal has seen it, and rested under it, and the leaves tell me that he has found favor in its presence. Draw back the veil from his eyes and let me be visible to him."

A soft, sighing little wind wafted in from the east, stirring the green leaves of the oak, and she leaned back against the bole of her tree, willing herself to be seen. So intent was she that the sound of firm, light steps drew nearer and stopped behind her before she caught his presence.

"O Mother Ishtar," she whispered, "hear thy daughter, Sylva, and open his eyes to me."

But her prayers had already been answered. The bronzed

young man had seen her and found the sight pleasing in his eyes, for he smiled with more than casual warmth in his greeting. "Hi, there. Where'd you come from?"

She caught breathlessly at her acorn necklace, and a light flush ran up her face. "I . . . I live here," she answered softly. "So long I've lived here, and so lonely! Could you . . . would you stop and talk with me a little while, and tell me of yourself? Tell me what your name is and where you go?"

"Whoa, wait a minute!" His eyes ran over her lithe young figure, took in the youthful curves that showed above the brief line of a single garment, and ran up to her face. Then the elfin naïveté of her smile and the frankness of her eyes assured him, and he grinned again.

"You know, you're a funny kid. I *was* going home to supper, but I guess Mom won't care if I take half an hour more. The name's Paul Brandon."

"Mine's Sylva." She dropped down beside him on the mossy ground at the foot of the tree. "I don't know any men, but I like you—you're so nice. What does one say to men? Tell me about yourself, Paul."

He stared at her again, his eyes crinkling up in amusement. "You're doing all right," he answered. "Mind the pipe? Fine. Well, I'm pretty much ordinary, Sylva. See that little white house down there where the highway enters the village? That's where I live, with Mom and Pete, my dog. When Dad died, I left college to take care of Mom. Winters I sell things in the store, summers I work the truck garden and Mom runs the roadside stand for tourists. Sundays I fish. That suit you?"

"Uh-huh." She dropped her head back in the crook of Paul's elbow and twisted over to face him. An odor of leather and tobacco blended with the comforting effluvium of masculinity, and her little nose wrinkled in appreciation of his nearness. This was nice, she decided.

"Your family around here?" he asked. "What're you doing, anyway—camping out?"

"I have no family. I just live here in this tree."

Paul tamped the ashes down in his pipe. "Orphan, eh? Sounds like you're hard up against it for a fact, sleeping in trees. If you'd like to come down, Mom might put you

up. No? Well, have it your way. Maybe I could bring you up some food or something tomorrow night."

"No food," she wiggled her toes against his ankles in lazy comfort. "Just come."

"Wood sprite," he chuckled. She looked up sharply, and smiled again, her usual half-serious little smile, as she read only gentle mockery in his eyes. "Just a crazy little kid running wild. I'll bet you grew up on 'Peter Pan' and 'Babes in the Woods'. Okay, see you tomorrow, sprite."

"Tomorrow." She watched him gather up his tackle and waved at him as he turned down the path toward the little white house. Then she leaned back against her tree and hugged her knees gleefully.

A sharp voice broke in on her reverie. "Sucker! You've been playing with fire, Sister Sylva, and you're burned!"

She swung about quickly and found Verda, the pine dryad, staring at her with hard eyes. Verda had lived in a pine tree located in one of the mortal villages once, and she regarded herself as superior to the unsophisticated dryads here in the grove. There were even rumors of an affair with a mortal poet, until the townspeople burned the pine.

Sylva shrank back before the other's scorn. "I was only talking to him," she protested. "He's so strong and young, not like those horrid mortals with axes who come and kill our homes."

"And so handsome," Verda mocked. "You'd like to be a mortal yourself, wouldn't you? Like to go down there and live in a . . . in a house, actually, and have children, and cook for him! And watch him grow old, and his hair and teeth fall out, while his skin puckered up like an apple left too long on the tree. Let the mortal alone, Sylva!"

"But you . . . I mean, I've heard——"

"That I tried it once. I did." Verda's eyes were less hard now, and she came over beside Sylva, dropping her hand on her sister's shoulder. When she spoke again, her voice was soft and almost pitying. "It's hard, little one. But you must forget him. Mother Ishtar made me tell the boy I worshipped that I was only a dryad, and he finally believed me. After that——" She shrugged. "Let the man alone, Sylva. That way lies only misery and heartbreak,

cheap regrets, and bitter wounds. Better to mate with a faun than a human, and better yet to remain true to your tree. Go to sleep, little one, and think no more of mortals."

But Sylva did not obey; she sat with her back to the bole of the oak, staring down the valley toward a light that gleamed in the little house where he was, wondering and wishing, not knowing for what she wished. Finally the light blinked out, and a cloud over the moon covered the house from view. She sighed again, and stepped into her tree.

It was Sunday again, and this day he had not gone fishing. Now, as the sun edged steathily toward the shelter of the hills in the west, Paul gathered the remains of his lunch together, and tucked the bundle under his head for a pillow, motioning Sylva down beside him. She dropped willingly into the shelter of his arm, and sniffed at the wisp of tobacco smoke that strayed vagrantly toward her.

He broke the silence. "I wish you'd come down and put up with Mom. This living in trees and eating only fruits sounds romantic, but it's not the life for a girl. I have an awful time when Mom asks questions that I can't answer about you, and there are so darned many things I don't know."

She nuzzled against his shoulder, delaying what she knew must be done. "You told your mother about me, Paul dear? But she must have hated me."

"Not Mom. She told me you sounded like a cross between a baby and an angel, sprite. If you want to keep your past from Mom and me, we won't ask foolish questions: it's what you are that counts with us, and she'll take my judgment of you."

"Your mother must be wonderful." Sylva crossed her fingers and bit her lips, gathering courage to keep her promise to Verda. "You won't believe what I'm going to tell you, Paul, but you must know the truth. I'm not what I seem."

He grinned. "I won't believe you're anything but sweet and good, sprite. Nothing else matters much."

"Paul." Her voice was serious. She pulled him to her,

hid her face on his shoulder. "That's just it. It does matter. You see, I'm not . . . well, I'm not like you. I never lived in a house; I never knew any humans until I met you, never went to school or did any of the things you talk about. I'm just what you called me—a sprite of the woods."

He looked down at her, pulling her face up; then seeing that she wanted to continue, he wisely refrained from interrupting. "I grew here, with this oak; all my life I've tended it, watching the acorns come in the fall, seeing that it was watered, that the leaves were clean, that no trouble should come to it. My whole life has centered here. When the autumn comes, I wear red and russet, gray in the winter, green in the spring and summer. Don't you see, I'm part of the tree.

"I never had a mother or father, Paul. No dryad has. That's reserved for mortals, and I'm not a mortal. Ishtar created me and gave me my duties, and all I know was born in me. I'm something out of your storybooks, something that shouldn't be, according to the world you know. People don't believe in dryads any more." There, it was done. She clung to him, her body shaking with the effort of her confession, while she waited for the things Verda had hinted.

But he only held her firmly and smiled slowly. "You believe that, don't you, honey? Then I won't laugh at you. But I don't believe it. Know what I think?"

She shook her head, and he went on. "I think you had trouble sometime, somewhere, and some shock that left you without your memory; amnesia, we call it. When you first became aware of yourself, you were here by the tree, and your mind fixed on some fairy tale you half-remembered. All this imaginary life of yours could become quite real to you, that way. Poor little sprite."

"But suppose what I said is true?"

"It isn't. And even if such things could be, what difference would it make? You'd still be you. No, Sylva, if it pleases you, believe it." His pipe had gone out, and he paused to light it again. "Of course, I should take you to a doctor, in the hope that he might ferret out your trouble and find that lost past of yours. But I won't.

"If you had friends or relatives, they'd have traced you or gone to the papers and police; you couldn't have wandered far in your condition. So your past must have been as empty as your present, and I'm selfish enough to want you as you are. We'll let the past bury itself, and hope it never shows up—you might have had a husband who deserted you, or something."

"No, Paul." There was no use trying to convince him. In the mortal world everything had an explanation, and nothing could exist without one. Verda's mortal had been a poet, and poets are supposed to be credulous; Paul was practical in his beliefs.

"No," he agreed. "I can't see that in your past. And I suppose I'll have to let you stay here in this tree again? I thought so. For such a sweet little sprite, you're remarkably stubborn. I'll tell Mom about the amnesia so she won't ask questions when you come down to visit us Tuesday."

"Visit you?"

"Uh-huh. Mom figures it's about time she sees you, so she told me you were to come for lunch, at least, Tuesday."

"But I can't." There was fright in her eyes again. Paul chose to disregard it.

"You're coming. I'll tell Mom you agreed." His tone held absolute finality. "Mom doesn't bite, and she's a scrumptious cook. Which reminds me, it's time I went down to supper." He gathered up his possessions, and began brushing the moss off his jacket.

"You'll come tomorrow?"

"I'll come at the usual time."

She watched him go, and this time there was a haunted look on her face as she gazed on the little white house toward which his figure was moving; just so she might have looked on a jail. Verda, who had come to berate her and to learn the result of her confession, paused and turned silently away.

That night Sylva sat up long after the last light had been turned out in the house where he lived. Then she crept quietly into her tree without her usual words of good night to it. But it seemed to understand, for the

leaves above were rustling a soothing little lullaby.

Verda stood back and surveyed her handiwork with a critical eye. Sylva *was* pretty, no two ways about it, gowned in a hastily contrived dress that managed to cover her adequately. Paul had brought the materials from the village the day before, and the two dryads had worked on it half the night, adjusting and fitting it—work to which they were ill accustomed.

"You'll pass," Verda admitted grudgingly. "If you must make a fool of yourself, you might as well do a good job of it. Though what Mother Ishtar would think if your running off this way and visiting around with humans, I'd hate to guess. I never deserted my tree, and she almost refused to give me a new one when they burned the other!"

Sylva's answer carried the determination of stubbornness which fears its own results. "But he wants me to go."

"So, of course, you have to!" Verda's smile was as dry as her voice. "Mortal women don't jump and run at the call of men. They make the men do things for them, and then laugh behind their backs, calling the poor males fools and weaklings. What's to come of it all, Sylva? Go back to your tree and pray for the Mother to draw back the veil over his eyes that he no longer may see you."

Sylva was watching the path. "He's coming," she whispered. "Oh, Verda, I'm scared! Suppose I fail? What if his mother should hate me? I never did this before, and everything will go wrong; I know it will! And I don't want him to be ashamed of me."

"Chin up, little one. You won't fail." Verda drew back to her pine. "If he isn't proud of you, I'll tear my tree up by the roots and throw it on him." She had reverted to her maternal mood, and her eyes sparkled fiercely. "You just show them, Sylva. You're too good for mortals, anyway. I'll try to take care of your tree as well as I can while you're gone."

Sylva glanced guiltily toward the oak, then caught her breath, set her lips firmly, and turned down the path toward him. Already, she was farther from her tree than she had ever gone before, and she was still farther when she met him on the trail.

"I'm re-ready." She swallowed her heart twice, but it still came back to her throat.

His smile was gentle. "So I see, and very lovely. I fixed it with Mom for you to leave in an hour or so, since you don't want to stay long. Mom's going to love you."

"Suppose she can't see me? Maybe you're the only human who can."

"I thought we'd agreed to forget about that. Even suppose you are a sprite—which you're not, really—when she knows where to look for you, and what to see, you'd be visible anyway. The dryads are invisible, according to what I could find out, only because disbelief on our part makes them so."

She nodded glumly, and they completed the walk in silence. As the little white house drew nearer, her steps grew slower, and the voice within shouted for her to turn back while there was yet time. But they reached the flagstone walk, then the door, and he was greeting a little plump women with streaks of white in her hair and a hint of a smile tucked in the corners of her eyes.

"Back so soon, son? But where—" She passed her hand over her eyes and looked again. "How stupid of me! There you are, of course, my dear. Come in. Paul, she's charming!"

"Meet the wood sprite, Mom." Under his banter, there was pride in both of them, and some of the fear left the little dryad. She hesitated at the threshold, fighting some unseen barrier. Then his hand found her arm and she was in the house between hard walls and glazed windows that kept out the fresh winds that had been her tutors. Some of the fear returned, and she felt wilted, like a flower in the hot sun. But she shrugged, and it passed.

Pete, the dog, walked around her slowly, his hackles lifted. She reached out timidly to touch him; he sniffed her hand, relaxed, and wagged his tail, while Paul laughed. "Pete approves of you, too."

"Of course, he does," Mom seconded. "Why shouldn't he?"

There was tea and fruit, and little cakes that Sylva tried gingerly, and found delicious. And there was light talk, while under it one could sense a series of barriers

that dropped away and were forgotten. Mortal though they were, she found in them nothing to fear, and for Mom there could be only love. The tight closeness of the room thawed slowly to show the comfort that comes from that neatness which does not offend by being too strait-laced. Still, the hour was slow in passing, and she was glad when her feet were again on the path that led back to her tree.

"Mom likes you," Paul said contentedly. "I knew she would. She told me before we left that she felt as if you were the daughter she'd wanted but couldn't have."

"She's sweet, your mother. I wish I were her daughter."

He hesitated only a fraction of a second. "You could be, you know. Will you, honey?"

"You mean—"

"Yes."

The difference between them, which she had almost forgotten, came rushing back to her mind. "Paul, dear, I couldn't." There was a tenseness under the words that he only partly sensed. "You're a mortal, and I'm not. Oh, I know you don't believe me; but I know."

"Angel sprite," he said gently, "does it matter, even if you are what you think? Surely you know what I think of you. And I've been hoping you felt the same."

"I do, Paul. But the children of such a cross are fauns, wilder even than I."

"You mean satyrs—half goat, half man? Curious; the mythology I've read didn't mention it that way." He brushed it out of his mind. "Well, then, we won't have children. See how simple it is."

It was her turn to be gentle. "No, dear one, it won't work. You laugh at my ideas, but underneath you're beginning to believe me. Such things never succeed."

They reached the tree, and he looked at it doubtfully. The leaves had hung down limply when he had first spied it from the path, but now they were rustling again in the wind. "Perhaps I do begin to believe, a little. But such things have happened before, back in the days of Greece. Don't answer now, but think it over. Tomorrow, your answer may be changed."

"Perhaps. If you find me here, I'll go with you; otherwide, it's best we see no more of each other." She turned her back hastily, and he went down the path and passed slowly beyond her hearing.

"Verda!" she called, tearing the dress off. As it came over her head, the other was beside her. "Verda, it's happened—happened to me!"

"I know, little one. Perhaps I've known it before this, but wouldn't stop fighting." Verda's arms were soft and soothing as she drew Sylva's head against her breast and stroked the silky hair. "We two were cast in the lot of fools, but at least you chose more worthily than I. And it's too late for fighting now; in this emotion, the mortal maids are stronger than we."

"But what can I do now?"

"Go to him, child. With him there may be yet some grains of happiness, but without, there can be none; that I know full well." The muscles on Verda's arms were bunched in long knots, but her hands were still gentle on the tired little brow. "But first, go to the grove. Perhaps Mother Ishtar may visit you, and she sometimes grants favors. Not without a price, since the gods barter rather than give—but kindness still."

The crescent of the moon was rising in the east as Sylva crept out of the thicker woods into the grove, and the little folk were busy at their labors. She passed to the center of the clearing that was there and seated herself before the boulder that bore a rough looped cross, etched in it by the passing of wind and water. She made no prayer, for a shred of outer knowledge told her that this rested on the whims of the gods, not on prayers.

Upon the rock there was a stronger gleam of moonlight, and as she watched, it thickened and became a halo above. A wisp of mist drew into it and slowly took form, and the birds nesting in the trees chirped sleepily. Before her eyes, the shape became that of a women, designed beyond the plan of flesh, and with a great soft light shining through it, as from some outer sphere. Above was a crescent of pearly nascence, and Sylva heard the faint murmurings of doves from a great distance. The dryad

lowered her eyes and caught at the hem of translucent drape that clothed the figure.

The voice she heard was low and soft, but there was power to its infinite compassion that burned through the brain. "No, my daughter, wait. There is yet another who must come this night." Ishtar turned her head to the shadows that lay thick at the edge of the clearing, and her low voice seemed to ripple across the moonlit grass. "Come out, Pan, Father of All Gods!"

This time the shadows coalesced and became substance, and the moon fell on another figure that came dancing across the grass toward the goddess in the rhythm of wild and stately steps. Pan was caproid no more than antropomorphic, and his figure seemed to shape itself at the pleasure of the wind. But the forest rocked to his steps, and the trees in the grove shook and rustled with the sound of a great flute. With a bound, he was beside Ishtar, gazing down from his red eyes at Sylva.

"Moon Mother, you called and I am come. Bid our handmaiden and daughter arise and face our presence."

Sylva rose at a gesture from the goddess, and Ishtar began. "Sylva, little dryad, thou art come before the gods with troubled heart, and we see upon it the image of one who is not of us. And it comes to us that there is a favor thou'dst have of us."

Sylva genuflected. "Surely the gods must know it. O Mother, give me a soul and let me become a mortal!"

Pan's great bellow answered. "As to the soul, that lies beyond the gods. Each must grow and shape his own, and never find it done."

"Aye." Ishtar inclined her head lightly. "As a mortal, thou wouldst find the seed of that soul within thee; it grows from thy thoughts and is shaped before the smiles and frowns of others. As to the other matter, there is a price."

"I know, Mother. Give it to me and let me pay it."

The Mother shook her head. "One above us demands it, and only that one can reveal it; the one thou dost know as Time. But his price is as great as the gift, and perhaps greater. Remember, Sylva, that as dryad or as mortal, Pan's breath was upon thee as I shaped thee long ago.

And whom Pan has breathed upon remains always of the wild. . . . Still, if it is thy true desire, beyond all else, and forsaking all others, then that desire shall be a boon from us."

Sylva spoke surely. "It is my desire, Mother."

Ishtar's scepter of light stretched forth, and something filmy floated to it from the dryad, and vanished; Pan's long arm reached out to her breast, and a little green amulet appeared in his palm. He spoke to Ishtar again, his goat face smiling with a queer tenderness.

"That which is of us is returned again unto us. Send her forth to rove among mortals and seek the soul she has asked of us."

Sylva bowed low and softly withdrew. But as she left, she could hear their voices, first the great rumble of Pan behind her.

"Moon Mother, she is weak, and the gift we have given is heavy!"

And Ishtar's voice followed. "Aye, Pan. Yet she is like her tree, the oak, strong and deep-rooted in this storm. Perchance the price of our favor is not greater than she can pay." Then there came the low sound of the doves and the piping of a pagan dance, which faded away, and left Sylva standing beneath her tree.

But now the leaves drooped again, and her presence did not abate the doom of the tree. She was mortal. The wind that blew upon her no longer caressed, and the oak no longer was her home. She looked down at the little house in the village and her sigh was long as its lights went out.

The sun was barely up when Paul found her in the morning, standing with her back to the tree. He stopped to gaze eagerly, and laughed away his doubts of her humanness; plainly she was a girl, flesh and blood, and by her presence, promised as his. He sprang forward in great bounds toward her, a glad cry on his lips.

She checked it with a gesture. "Yes, Paul, I've chosen. But let us save our words till later. We can talk in your —our home."

At his nod, she went quietly up to the oak and threw her arms about it; a faint murmur came from its leaves,

and she kissed the wrinkled bark, patted the bole tenderly, and turned her back on it resolutely. Then she gave Paul her hand, and turned with him toward the village.

"I've told Mom to expect you," he said. "She has the preacher ready, and a few friends. I thought you'd prefer a quiet wedding at home, and Mom agreed."

Sylva smiled briefly. "You were sure of my answer, weren't you? I'm glad. And yet, I'm so ignorant of your ways. Perhaps my answer was wrong. But I will try—"

He pressed her hand lightly. "It was very right, wood sprite."

She wanted to turn back, to look behind; but that way there was only the past to see, and ahead lay the future. There was the white house, its neat yard, and behind it the truck garden. Below it was the roadside stand where she could help Mom run the business during the summer —the next summer.

And after that, perhaps, there would be boys to work in the garden with Paul, and girls to run to her and to Mom with their little troubles. Maybe in time, a mellow age, and certainly death. She had not thought of death when she asked for mortality, and yet she was not sorry; as a creature of the wild, she had known it, and learned that it can be merciful more often than cruel.

The path twisted its way slowly down toward the house, and their steps dragged as they approached. Paul had caught her mood and was humoring her, though his desire was to rush onward toward the future.

At last they reached the gate, and she paused, gazing at the house. Again, the sense of being shut up away from the wind and the rain swept over her, and she saw only the walls standing guard against all the world that she had known. There would be only mortals in the life ahead, humans whose imagination, like the dwellers in the house, were guarded by firm-built walls that refused to let in any breath of whimsy that came from beyond their own little worlds.

And she would have to mix with them, to become one of them—was already one of them. She would have to check her thoughts, and turn to the new gods that they

followed, for Ishtar and Pan, with Verda and her oak, lay far behind her.

Paul's voice broke in on her thoughts. "Angel sprite, are you sure you love me? Quite sure?"

She turned back then toward the woods on the hill. Up there, by the tree that had formed her life, she saw the form of Verda looking down, and the sister dryad was waving something at her. Then her eyes made out two other shapes near the tree, hanging suspended above the earth. Pan was there, for once standing quietly looking at her, and beside him was Ishtar. In benediction, the *crux ansata* in the goddess' hand stretched forth, then faded. As Sylva watched, the figures of Pan and the Mother disappeared, and Verda, too, was growing dim. Then there was only the dying tree, standing forsaken, its leaves wilted and drooping. And in her mind, the cool voice of Ishtar seemed to whisper faintly: "There is a price."

She knew the price now, such a price as only one born of the wild could know. But her voice was without a quaver, her hand steady in Paul's; and Sylva was facing the house with a little smile when she made answer to his question.

"Yes, my dear, quite sure. More sure than you can ever know."

* * * * *

The Luck of Ignatz

MAYBE IT WAS SUPERSTITION, but Ignatz knew it was all his fault. For the last three days, Jerry Lord had sat in that same chair, his eyes conjuring up a vision of red hair and a dimple on the wall, and there was nothing Ignatz could do about it.

He grunted and grumbled his unhappiness, dug his tail into the carpet, and shoved forward on his belly plate until his antennae touched the Master's ankle. For the hundredth time he tried to mumble human words, and failed. But Jerry sensed his meaning and reached down absently to rub the horn on his snout.

"Ignatz," the Master muttered, "did I tell you Anne star-hops on the *Burgundy* tonight? Bound for South Venus." He sucked on his cold pipe, then tossed it aside in disgust. "Pete Durnall's to guide her through Hellonfire swamps."

It was no news to Ignatz, who'd heard nothing else for the last three days, but he rumbled sympathetically in his foghorn voice. In the rotten inferno north of Hellas, any man who knew the swamps could be a hero to a mudsucker. Even veteran spacemen were usually mudsuckers on Venus, and Anne was earthbound, up to now.

Ignatz knew those swamps—none better. He'd lived there some hundred odd years until the Master caught him for a mascot. Oh, the swamp animals were harmless enough, most of them, but Anne wouldn't think so when

she saw them. She'd screamed the first time she saw him —even a Venusian *zloaht,* or snail-lizard was horrible to an Earthman; the other fauna were worse.

But the memory of the swamps suggested heat to Ignatz. He crawled up the portable stove and plunked down into a pan of boiling water; after a few minutes, when the warmth took full effect, he relaxed comfortably on the bottom to sleep. Jerry'd have to solve his own problems, since he couldn't learn zloaht language. What was the sense of solving problems if he couldn't boast about it?

There was a thud and clank outside, and a chorus of shrieks rent the air. By the time Ignatz was fully awake, a man was pounding on the door, grumbling loudly. Jerry threw it open, and the hotel manager plunked in, face red and temper worse.

"Know what that was?" he shrieked. "Number two elevator broke the cable—brand-new it was, too. Stuck between floors, and we've got to cut through with a blow torch. Now!"

"So what? I didn't do it." The old weariness in Jerry's voice was all too familiar to Ignatz. He knew what was coming.

"No, you didn't do it; you didn't *do* it. But you were here." The red face turned livid, and the fat chest heaved convulsively. He threshed his fist in front of Jerry's face, and shrilled out in a quavering falsetto: "Don't think I haven't heard of you! I felt sorry for you, took you in for only double rates, and look what happens. Well, I'm through. Out you go—hear me? Out, now, at once."

Jerry shrugged. "Okay." He watched with detached interest as Ignatz climbed out of the pan and dropped over onto the manager's leg. With a wild shriek of confused profanity, the man jerked free and out. He went scurrying down the hall, his fat hands rubbing at the burned flesh.

"You shouldn't have done that, Ignatz," Jerry remarked mildly. "He'll probably have blisters where you touched him. But it's done now, so go cool off and help me pack." He put a pan of cold water on the floor and began opening closets and dragging out clothes. Ignatz

climbed into the water and let his temperature drop down to a safe limit, considering this latest incident ruefully.

Not that there was anything novel about it; the only wonder was that they had been in the hotel almost a week before it happened. And it was all his fault; he never did anything, but he was there, and troubled followed blissfully after. Of course, Jerry Lord should have known better than to catch a snail-lizard, but he did it, and things started.

The luckiest man in the star fleet, the Master had been head tester for the new rocket models until the O. M. decided he needed a rest and sent him to Venus. Any normal man would have been killed when the ship cracked up over the swamps, but Jerry came walking into Hellas with two hundred ounces of gold under one arm and Ignatz under the other.

Naturally, the Venusians had warned him. They knew, and had known for generations, that it was good luck to have a zloaht around in the swamps, but horribly bad outside. The members of Ignatz's tribe were plain Jonahs, back to the beginning. Ignatz knew it, too, and tried to get away; but by the time they were well out of the swamps, he liked the master too well to leave.

To any other man, Ignatz would have spelled personal bad luck, with general misfortune left over. But Jerry's personal luck held out; instead of getting trouble himself, others around him were swamped with it. The test ships cracked up, one after another, while Jerry got away without a scratch. Too many cracked up, and the O. M. gave Jerry another vacation, this time a permanent one.

His reputation waxed great, and doors closed silently but firmly before him. "Sorry, Mr. Lord, we're not taking on new men this year." They weren't to be blamed; hadn't something gone wrong by the time he left the office—not just something, but everything? Nowadays, an ambulance followed casually wherever he went walking with Ignatz, and some innocent bystander usually needed it.

Then Jerry met Anne Barclay, and the inevitable happened. Anne was the O. M.'s daughter, and as cute

a yard engine as ever strode down the training field of the Six World Spaceport. Jerry took one look at her, said "Ah," and developed a fever. He still had some of his money left, and he could dance, even if the orchestra always missed their cues when he was on the floor. By the time he'd known her three weeks she was willing to say yes; that is, she was until the O. M. put her wise. Then she remembered that she'd lost the ring her mother had given her, had tooth trouble, sinus trouble, and a boil on her left shoulder, all since she met Jerry. With the O. M. helping her imagination along, she did a little thinking about what married life might lead to; they decided that a little trip to Venus, with Pete Durnall, the Old Man's favorite, was just the answer, and that Jerry could cool his heels and rot.

Not that they were superstitious, any more than all starjumpers and their daughters were; Ignatz understood that. But when too many coincidences happen, it begins to look a bit shady. Now she was gone, or at least going, and Jerry was going out on his ear, from her life and from the hotel. Ignatz swore lustily in lizard language and crawled out of the pan. He rolled over in a towel, then began helping Jerry pack—a simple thing, since most of Jerry's wardrobe rested comfortably in old Ike's pawnshop.

"We'll go to the dock," Jerry decided. "I'm practically broke, fellow, so we'll sleep in a shed or an outbuilding if we can slip past the watch. Tomorrow, I'll look for work again."

He'd been looking for work for months, any work, but the only job he knew was handling the star-jumpers, or spaceships; and they had enough natural bad luck without adding Luckless Jerry to the crew. Ignatz wondered what the chances of finding open garbage pails around the dock were, but he followed meekly enough.

A raw steam pipe led around the shed with the loose lock at the rear. It happened to be super-hot steam, so Ignatz's sleep was heavy and dreamless, and daylight came and went unknown. The first thing he knew was when Jerry knocked him down and dipped him in a cold puddle

to wake him up. At least, it smelled like Jerry, though the face and clothes were all wrong.

The Master grinned down at Ignatz as the water fizzed and boiled. Over night, apparently, he had grown a beard, and his straight hair was a mass of ringlets. Over one eye a scar ran down to his mouth, and pulled his lips up into a rough caricature of a smile; and the face was rough and brown, while his clothes might have been pulled off a refuse truck.

"Pretty slick, eh, Ignatz?" he asked. "Old Ike fixed me up for my watch and ring." He picked the zloaht up and chucked him into a traveling bag. "We can't let them see you now, so you'll have to stay under cover till we hit berth."

Ignatz hooted questioningly, and Jerry chuckled. "Sure, we've got a job—keeping the bearings oiled on a space-hopper. Remember that old tramp who was sleeping here last night? Well, he'd been a star-jumper till the weed hit him, and his papers were still clear. I got them for practically nothing, had Ike fix me up, and went calling today. Our luck's changed again. We're riding out tonight, bound for Venus!"

Ignatz grunted again. He might have known where they were bound for.

"Sure," Jerry was cocky again, banking on his luck. "Not another grunt from you, fellow. I can't take any chances on this trip."

The zloaht settled down on the clothes in the bag and chewed slowly on a piece of leather he'd found outside. Anything might happen now, but he had ideas of what that anything might be. The bag jerked and twisted as the Master slipped past the guards and out onto the rocket field where the hiss of rockets told Ignatz some ship was warming up, testing her exhaust. He stuck his eye to a crack in the bag and peered out.

It was an old freighter, but large and evidently well kept. They were moving the derricks back and battening down the hatches, so the cargo was all aboard. From the smell, he decided they were carrying raisins, peanuts and chocolate, all highly prized by the spore prospectors on Venus. Venus grew little that equalled old Earth foods,

and only the most concentrated rations could be carried by those wandering adventurers.

As he watched, Ignatz saw a big tanker run out on the tracks and the hose tossed over to fill the tanks with hydrogen peroxide to be burned into fuming exhaust gases by the atomic converters; the isotope plates were already in, apparently. Mechanics were scurrying around, inspecting the long blast tubes, and the field was swarming with airscrew tugs ready to pull the big freighter up where her blast could shoot out harmlessly and her air fins get a grip on the air.

These big freighters were different from the sleek craft that carried the passengers; the triangles were always neatly balanced on their jets, but the freighter was helpless in the grip of a planet unless buoyed up by the tugs until she reached a speed where the stubby fins supported her.

Evidently the Master had made it barely in time, for the crew plank was being unhitched. He ran up to it, presented his papers, and was ordered to his berth. As he turned to leave, there was a halloo from below, and the plank was dropped again. Blane, the freighter's captain, leaned over, swearing.

"Supercargo! Why can't he take a liner? All right, we'll wait for him twenty minutes." He stumped up the stairs to the conning turret, and words drifted down sulfurously. "Every damned thing has gone wrong on this trip. I'm beginning to think there's a Jonah in the crew."

Jerry waited to hear no more, but moved to his berth—a little tin hole in the wall, with a hard bunk, a pan of water, and a rod for his clothes. He tested the oxygen helmet carefully, nodded his satisfaction, and stretched out on the bunk.

"You stay there, Ignatz," he ordered, "and keep quiet. There might be an inspection. I'll let you out when I go on second shift. Anyway, there isn't a steam pipe in the hole, so it wouldn't do you any good."

The port above was closing with a heavy bang. "Supercargo must have come up early. Wonder who he was? Must have been somebody important to hold Blane wait-

ing for him—friend of the O. M.'s, I guess." He grinned comfortably, then wiped it off his face as a shout came down the stairwell.

"Hey, down there! Bring up some tools, and make it snappy. The crew port's stuck, and we're taking off in five minutes."

Jerry swore, and Ignatz turned over with a disgruntled snort. "Well," the Master reflected, "at least I won't get the blame for it this time. But it's funny, all the same. Darned funny!"

Ignatz agreed. This promised to be an interesting voyage, if they ever reached Venus at all. If the Master had to keep a zloaht for a pet, he might have stayed on the ground where their necks would have been safe, instead of running off on this crazy chase after a girl. For once he was glad that Venus knew no sex—unless the incubator cows were called females.

Jerry let Ignatz out when he came back from shift. He was tired and grouchy, but nothing had gone wrong in particular. There had been two minor accidents, and one of the tenders had his foot smashed by a loose coupling, but a certain amount of that had to be expected. At least no one had accused him of causing trouble.

"I found out who the supercargo is," he told the zloaht. "Nobody but the Old Man himself. So you lie low and I'll keep out of his way. The old buzzard has eyes like a hawk, and nobody ever called his memory bad."

The works of Robert Burns were unknown to Ignatz, but he did know the gist of the part that goes: "The best laid schemes o' mice and men gang aft agley." He waited results with foreboding, and they came when Jerry's next shift was half through.

It was the O. M. himself who opened the door and turned to a pair of brawny wipers. "All right, bring him in here, and lock the door. I don't know who he is, and I don't care. We can find that out later; but I do know he isn't the man his card says. That fellow has been rotten with weed for ten years.

"And Captain Blane," he addressed the officer as they tossed Jerry on the bunk, "in the future inspect your men more carefully. I can't make a tour of inspection on every

freighter, you know. Maybe there's no harm in him, but I don't want men working for me on fake cards."

As they locked the door and went down the hall, the captain's voice was placating, the O.M. raving in soft words that fooled nobody by their mildness. Ignatz crawled out from under the bunk, climbed up the rail, and nuzzled Jerry soothingly.

Jerry spat with disgust. "Oh, he came down, pottered around the generator room and wanted to see my card; said he didn't know any oiler with a scar. Then Hades broke loose, and he yelled for Blane. Anyway, he didn't recognize me. Thank the Lord Harry, you had enough sense to duck, or my goose would have been cooked."

Ignatz rooted around and rubbbed the horn on his snout lightly against the Master's chest. Jerry grinned sourly.

"Sure, I know. We haven't sunk yet, and we're not going to. Go on away, fellow, and let me think. There must be some way of getting off this thing after we reach Venus."

Ignatz changed the "after" to "if" in his mind, but he crawled back dutifully and tried to sleep; it was useless. In half an hour, Captain Blane rattled on the door and stalked in, his face pointing to cold and stormy. There was an unpleasant suggestion in the way he studied Jerry.

"Young fellow," he barked, "if the Old Man didn't have plans for you, I'd rip you in three pieces and strew you all over this cabin. Call that damned zloaht of yours out and take off those whiskers, Jerry Lord."

The Master grunted, as a man does after a blow to the stomach. "What makes you think I'm Lord?"

"Think? There's only one Jonah that big in the star fleet. Since you came aboard, every blamed thing's been one big mess. The O. M. comes on board as supercargo, the port sticks, three men get hurt fitting a new injector, I find Martian sand worms in the chocolate, and the O. M. threatens to yank my stars. Don't tell me you're anyone else!" He poked under the bunk. "Come out of there, you blasted zloaht!"

Ignatz came, with a rueful honk at Jerry, who pulled his false beard anxiously. "Well, captain, what if I am? Does the O. M. know?"

"Of course not, and he better hadn't. If he found I'd shipped you with the crew, I'd never draw berth again. When we hit Venus, I'll try to let you out in a 'chute at the mile limit. Or would you rather stay and let the Old Man figure out ways and means?"

Jerry shook his head. "Let me out on your 'chute," he agreed hastily. "I don't care how, as long as I get free to Venus."

Blane nodded. "I'll catch hell anyway, but I'd rather not have you around when we land. I never did trust my luck when a ship breaks up." He pointed at Ignatz. "Keep that under cover. If the O.M. finds out who you are, I'll put you off in a lead suit, *without* a 'chute, Savvy, mister?"

Jerry savvied plenty. He motioned Ignatz back under the bunk and moved over to the shelf where his grub lay. Blane turned to go. And then raw Hades broke loose.

There was a sick jarring, and a demon's siren seemed to go off in their ears. The shelf jumped across the room; Jerry hit the captain with his head. For half a second, there was complete silence, followed by bedlam, while the ship jerked drazily under their feet. Acting on instinct, both the captain and Master dashed for the oxygen helmet, and a private war started before either realized what had happened.

Jerry straightened up first. "That was the control engine," he yelled in Blane's ear. The man couldn't hear, but he caught the idea. "Get out of here and find out what happened."

There was no thought of prisoners. Jerry pounded along at the captain's heels, and Ignatz had only time to make a convulsive leap and slide down Jerry's neck under his jacket. Men were swarming down the stairwell and up from the main rocket rooms. A babble of voices blended with a shrilling of alarms and a thud of feet on cuproberyl decks.

The Old Man was in the engine room before them. "Blane! Blane—Hey, somebody find that lunkhead before these fools wreck the whole ship!"

Blane saluted roughly, his mouth open, his eyes darting

about the wreck of the steering engine. "Hu-whu-what happened?"

One quick glance had told Jerry. "Which one of you oilers let the main bearings run dry?"

A wiper pointed silently to a shapeless lump of bones and assorted cold cuts. While eyes turned that way, Ignatz slipped out and pushed from sight between a post and wall that were still partly whole.

Jerry Lord's mouth was set as he swung to Blane. "Got a spare engine? No. Well, dismantle one of your gyro-stablizer engines and hook it up. Send men to inspect what damage was done the controls. Get the doctor up here to look over these men who are still in one piece. Wake up, man!"

Blane shut his mouth slowly, wheeled back to the men and began shouting instructions, until some order came out of the milling mass of men. In the confusion, the O. M. hadn't noticed Jerry, but he swung to him now.

"Who let you out? Never mind; you're here. It's a good thing somebody has some sense, or that yellow-belly'd still be dreaming! Captain Blane, get that wreck out of here, put this prisoner to work. We can't waste time or men now. I'm going back to the control co-ordinators to inspect the damage."

Now that the shock of his first major accident was over, Blane snapped briskly into it. He glared at Jerry, but postponed it for later; Ignatz knew this was to be held against the Master, as all the other troubles were, and he mumbled uncomfortably.

With the engine in scattered parts, little dismantling was necessary. The men were cleaning the parts away, cutting such few bolts as were left in the base, and preparing the space for the new engine. The stabilizer motor came in, one part at a time, and Jerry oversaw its placement and assembly, set its governor, and hooked the controls to it as rapidly as the crew could cut away the bent rods and weld new ones in their place. In an emergency, no group of men on Earth can do the work that a space-crew can turn out in a scant half-hour, and these were all seasoned star-jumpers; to them the lack of gravity was

as help rather than a hindrance in the swift completion of the work.

By the time the O.M. was back, the walls were being welded over, the new engine was tuned, the controls hitched, and the captain was sweating and swearing, but satisfied that the work had been well done. Jerry came back from the stabilizer hold to report the motors retuned and set for the added load given by the loss of one of the five engines, with the juice feeding in evenly.

The Old Man motioned silently, his face blank and expressionless, and Blane gulped as he turned to follow. Jerry strung along without invitation, tucking Ignatz carefully out of sight under his clothes.

Back in the nerve center of the ship the control integrators were a hopeless mess. The main thrust rods that coupled the control turret to the engine were still intact, but the cables and complex units of gears and eveners that formed the nearly human brain of the ship were ruined beyond possibility of repair.

The O. M.'s voice was almost purring, but his eyelids twitched. "Have you repairs, captain?"

"Some. We might be able to jury-rig part of it, but not enough to couple the major rockets to the control panel. That looks to me like a one-way ticket to hell." Under the stress of danger, the man had relapsed into a numb hopelessness.

"How many hours to Venus, and where's the danger point?"

"Sixty hours, and we either get control in ten, or we fall straight into the sun. We're in orbit C-3 now, and we'll miss Venus entirely."

"Not a chance to get repairs sent out in time," the O. M. muttered. "Well, I guess that's that."

Jerry pushed past the captain, saluted the O. M. quietly. "Beg pardon, sir, but it might be possibly to control the ship manually from here, with observations relayed from the control turret."

Momentarily their eyes brightened, but only for a split second. "Not one man in a thousand knows the layout of the cables here, and the job would be physically impossible. I don't know whether this rod should be forced back

or that one forward. When the old manual controls were still in, we had them arranged logically in banks, but this is uncharted confusion."

"I know the layout," Jerry offered evenly. "It's simply a question of being able to move around fast enough to coordinate the thrust rods." Yet he looked at the mass of rods, levers, and cables with doubt large in his heart. It meant covering an eight-foot wall, and keeping the tangle of eveners clear in his mind every second of the time, thought it might be done.

There was a snort from Blane, but the O. M. silenced it. "We have to believe in miracles now. It's our only chance. Are you sure you can do it, mister?"

"Fairly sure, sir."

"How many helpers?"

Jerry grinned sourly. "None; it's easier and surer doing it than telling others how to do it, and maybe having them mess things up. Has to be a one-man job."

"Right." There was grudging approval on the scowling face. "Blane, you take orders from him; get the wrecked parts out, uncouple the remaining automatics. You and the navigators will take turns relaying the chart data to this room—and it'd better be right. Get a phone hooked up at once, and put this man to work. If we get to Venus, he's free, no questions asked, and a good job waiting for him. If we don't, he won't need the job."

When the O.M. was gone, the captain shook his fist under Jerry's nose. "Jonah! If you hadn't been along, this wouldn't have happened. You'd better be good, *Mr.* Lord." He stopped suddenly, a new thought hitting him. "Do you realize that means sixty hours of steady, solid work down here?"

"Naturally, since your navigators never learned more than they had to." Jerry shrugged with an entirely false optimism. "And you'll remember that hereafter every man on this ship will take orders from me, sir? I must insist on absolute cooperation."

"You'll get it, Jonah or not." Blane stuck out a hand. "I don't like your reputation, Lord, but I do like your guts. Good luck!"

In making an impressive exit, the captain forgot the

oil on the floor; he executed a jerky half twist before his back hit the deck. Ignatz backed further out of sight and prepared for the worst.

"Jonah!" said Blane, and it covered everything with no wasted syllables.

With the wreck carted out, the communications man came in, hooked up a phone and coupled it by a spring reel of wire to sponge-covered earphones. He handed over a chart of present position and estimated orbit, then cleared out.

Jerry cut in on the phone. "All clear?"

"Waiting for orders, sir. Stern rocket seven has a point-oh-six underblast you'll have to counteract, and the stablizers only work three-five. Venus now in position—" The navigator rattled off his co-ordinates, and Jerry set them up in his head as he reached for the main blast rods.

"Okay. Leave orders I'm not to be bothered by anyone but the mess boy." He pulled Ignatz out, patted his back, and grinned. "The room's yours, fellow—Stand to blast!"

"Clear to blast, sir. All-ll positions set! Trim-mm and stow all-ll!" The time-honored call rang down the stairwell as Jerry threw the manuals and braced himself for gravity-on.

The freighter shook like a cat coming out of a bathtub, groaned and bucked sullenly, as the controls were thrown one at a time; reluctantly she settled down to business. For a bottom-blaster, she was a sweet old bus, put out with the craftsmanship of men who longed for the stars and took out that longing in building ships to carry others. Even with the overworked stabilizers and slight underblast she answered her helm better than some of the new triangles. Jerry bit into her levers savagely at first, then gently as she became part of him, hard to reach, yet sweet and honest.

The navigator was shouting down co-ordinates, drift ratios, and unnecessary pep talk, and the O. M.'s voice came through occasionally, sounding almost pleasant. The crusty old scallawag had what it took, Jerry conceded;

no hysteria or nonsense about him. Under such an example, the captain and first navigator took heart, and the second navigator was jaunty with hope when he came on. Faith was dirt cheap in the conning turret at the moment; Jerry could have used more of it himself, but was careful not to show it in his voice.

The first ten hours were no worse than steady attention and driving work could make them, and he began to get the feel of the ship. His mind tuned in on the creaking of her girders, the sway of her deck, and the strange harmony that couples flesh to well-built metal. The pattern of the controls etched itself indelibly into his brain, short cuts came, and ways of throwing his combinations in less time and with less effort, until he became a machine integral with the parts he handled.

When food was brought down, he grinned confidently at the mess boy and snatched it in mouthfuls as the coordinates were sent down and the movement felt sent him dancing across the room. Watching him, the boy grinned back, and snapped his fingers gleefully. Hop to Venus with ruined controls? A cinch!

Ignatz waited doubtfully, but nothing more seemed likely to happen. He honked hopefully—and an answering bark came out of the vent tubes. The exhaust blower went on noisily, but the current of cool air stopped.

Jerry cut in on the phone. "What happened?"

"Dust explosion in the filter chamber, sir. I'm afraid it'll take some time to fix it."

It did. While the hours passed, heat leaked in from the engine and refused to go out. Normal perspiration gave way to rivulets of sweat that tried to get in the Master's eyes and made his hands wet and slippery.

Ice and water, brought down at hourly intervals, helped, but did not alleviate the temperature. Men were working on the air ducts, but it promised to be a long job. Ignatz had secretly crawled up the maze of vent pipes to find the obstruction, nearly got lost, and came down without success.

When the twenty-hour period was up, Jerry was rocking on his heels, cursing the heat with every labored breath. He wore ice packs on every safe place, and still

couldn't keep cool. The blowers were working again, keeping a steady current of air moving, but it was hot. Under the Master's shoes were heavy pads of rubberoid, and he wore stiff space mittens on his hands, but still the heat came through from the hot floor and control rods. A few more degrees would spell the limit.

Then the temperature reached a mark and held it. The heat seeping in and the air going out balanced, and Jerry settled down to a regular routine of ice packs and heat; even the air he breathed was filtered through an ice mask.

The phone buzzed and the O. M.'s voice came over. "One of the refrigerators overheated and burned a bearing. You'll have to cut down to half rations of ice."

"Okay." The Master stared thoughtfully at Ignatz, then caught him up and draped him over his shoulders. "Not enough ice, fellow. You like heat, but you'll have to cool me off. Come on, pal, show your stuff."

Ignatz did his best. He had the finest heat-regulating system on nine planets, and he put it to work, soaking up the heat from Jerry's sweaty body, dissipating it out into the air. Jerry never understood how it was done, but he knew Ignatz could absorb heat or radiate it off at high efficiency; now the zloaht was absorbing on his flexible belly-plate and radiating from his back.

Jerry sighed with relief. "Ah, fine, fellow. You've got the ice packs beat three ways from Sunday." His eyes pulled shut and he relaxed against the control bars. Ignatz prodded him with the sharp end of his tail, waking him to his duties.

"Regular two-man crew we've got, fellow," the Master muttered. "You'll make me win this thing through yet, maybe." His beard was peeling off in the humid heat, and he pulled it away, along with the scar. The brown pigment had gone hours before.

But now things were letting up a little. The freighter had settled into the groove of her orbit, was balanced nicely, and required little more attention until they reached Venus. Jerry had an insulated chair rigged up and dropped into it when the pressure of the work would let him, while Ignatz listened for the opening buzz of the

phone or watched gravely for a flash from the extension feed indicators. Fifteen minutes here, twenty there, once even a whole hour; Jerry's over-worked system grabbed greedily at each minute, sucking up relief and rest like a dry sponge. If only the drugging, tiring heat would lift.

And then, miraculously, a shot of cold air *whooshed* out of the vent ports, and Jerry jerked up from his stupor. "They've got it, Ignatz; it's fixed!" He shivered gratefully under the draft, drew back from it while his body begged for coolness, afraid of too sudden a drop in temperature. "Now you can forget the heat, fellow; just wake me when I need it."

The air was dropping down smoothly, a degree every five minutes, and life seemed to flow back into the Master. Ignatz muttered softly and relaxed. The two-way heat control had been a heavy nervous strain on him, requiring hard mental disicipline; he was thankful to fall back to normal.

The three-quarters mark came and went, with only fifteen hours ahead—and the hardest part of the job was still to do. Under his breath, Jerry was talking to himself, ordering his muscles as he might a crew of men, trying to forget the dull ache that found every muscle of his body, the hot acid pain in his head, the feeling of an expanding balloon against his brain. Another five hours, and they'd be teetering down through the heavy gravity zone, where every tube would have to be balanced until the tugs came to take over.

Old Man Barclay came down in place of the mess boy, a serious, worried O. M., but with a smile on his lips—until he saw Ignatz and Jerry's normal face. Then something hard shot into his eyes. He whistled.

"I had a hunch," he said softly. But his voice was even, his face relaxed. "You always were a fool, Jerry, even if you happen to be the best man that ever rode a starhopper. This, and our cursed luck, should have told me. What is it—Anne?"

Jerry nodded, patted Ignatz back into place as the zloaht moved to avoid the O.M.'s look. "Anne," he agreed. He thrust back into the machinery as the navi-

gator sent down fresh data, backed out, and faced the other quietly. "Well?"

"Of course." The old face never moved a muscle. "What I can't understand is how your luck can reach out ten million miles and hit another ship, though. Never mind, I'll tell you later—maybe."

Jerry dropped limply back into his chair, and the other moved over with a drink. Noting the trembling hands that lifted the glass, the Old Man's face softened. "Too much work for one man, son. I used to be pretty much up on the layout here. Maybe I can spell you."

"Maybe. It's routine stuff now, Mr. Barclay. All you need are the fed controls and gyro-eveners banked together there." The Master pointed them out, one by one, while the O. M. nodded. "I'll have to take over in four, five hours though. Sure you can do it till then?"

"That much, yes." The O.M. tossed a blanket over the younger man and then moved over by the projecting feed bars. "Ever strike you as funny I came on this trip?"

"Didn't have time to think," said the Master.

Barclay squatted down on a beam, his eyes on the controls. "I don't do things without a purpose, Lord. Venus needs radium—needs it bad. They offer double price for three million dollars' worth, Earth price, when delivered at Hellas. But they want it quick, so it has to be sent in one load. You can't get insurance on that for one a one-shipment cargo: too much risk. And no private company will ship it without insurance."

"So?"

"So I bought the radium on the market, had it stowed secretly with the chocolate—mutiny never happened, but it might—and came along to watch it. That represents my entire personal fortune. If it reaches Venus, I double my money; otherwise, I won't be there to worry about it."

He stopped, then went on in the same even voice. "That's why I could cheerfully kill you for putting a jinx on this voyage. But I won't. I have reasons for reaching Venus in a hurry. Put this ship down in one piece on the surface of Venus, and one-third of the profit is yours—one million dollars, cold cash, in any bank you want it."

Ignatz honked softly—for him—and Jerry blinked. He swung off at a tangent. "You spoke of my luck hitting another ship across ten million miles; and now you've got reasons for reaching Hellas quickly. Anne?"

The O. M. repeated Jerry's earlier answer. "Anne. Saw it from the conning turret. The *Burgundy* broke a steering tube bank, had to make a forced landing. We got the start of an SOS, but it faded off—must have ruined the radio as they hit."

"Where?"

"Latitude 78° 43′ 28″ south, longitude 24° 18′ 27″ west. SOS started with something about twin mountains. Know where it is?"

"Minerva's Breasts, in the middle of Despondency. I camped near the north breast. Worst spot on Venus, that isn't too hot for life."

"Exactly. We radioed Hellas, but in that jungle it may take weeks to find them. So there's a million in it for you —*and* my place in New Hampshire where your darned luck won't bother anyone but yourself—but not Anne, definitely not!"

But Jerry was dead to the world, and Ignatz, curled up in his lap, was deciding to sleep while he could, now that everything was settled.

They were only eight hours from Hellas when Ignatz stirred and looked up. The Old Man was a frenzy of action, a scowl of concentration etched across his forehead, but he was still doggedly at the controls. Again the zloaht prodded his Master awake, and Jerry sat up, some of the bleariness gone from his eyes. He reached out for a caffeine and strychnine capsule, to help him stay awake, and tapped Barclay's shoulder.

"You should have dug me up hours ago, sir. I'll take over now; fresh as a daisy." That was a lie and the other knew it. "You've done a beautiful job, but I know the controls better."

The O.M. mustered a smile and looked up casually enough—even patted Ignatz—but he relinquished the job gratefully. "I couldn't have held on much longer," he

agreed. "These controls are beyond me. Have to extend the navigator's knowledge in the future."

Jerry looked his thanks. "I didn't expect the relief, you know. But don't think what you said about Anne means anything to me!"

"So you did hear that? Look, son, I don't hold anything against you, personally—always liked you. But unless you give up that animal and get rid of your hoodoo—"

Jerry's backbone stiffened visibly. "Ignatz stays."

"I thought so. In that case, I don't want you around. Nothing personal, you understand, but I'm not taking chances."

"Nothing personal, of course, sir." The door closed softly as the O. M. slipped out, and Jerry chuckled. For a second there was a sparkle in his eyes before the ache in his body cut it off. "Imagine the old boy taking over that way. Some father-in-law, eh, fellow?"

They hadn't landed yet, Ignatz thought, and Anne might have something to say. There was heavy doubt in his grunt, which Jerry interpreted correctly. But the Master was busy with his own thoughts.

Now that the fingers of Venus' gravity were reaching out harder for them, the lack of full efficiency from the stabilizers made itself felt. The long, cigar-like shape put the center of gravity above the rockets and the old ship suggested that it would be so much nicer to turn over and let gravity do its work; the suggestion was mild at first, but the freighter grew more positive with each mile, shimmying sidewise toward the planet like a girl edging toward her first crush.

"Easy, old girl," Jerry pleaded. "We've got to swing you in line with Venus' rotation and let you ride down with her." He babied the ship along, coaxed her into the new path, and performed mathematical magic in his head as the plot of the new orbit came down with corrections. The navigators were taking half-hour turns now, with the captain overseeing their work. Fast talk and absolute accuracy would have to be continuous until the tugs took over.

But she came down smoothly, arcing in toward the

south pole, held up by sheer nerve and stimulants. A thousand miles up, relative speed was nine miles a second, fall-rate three. Five hundred up, frontal speed checked to coasting, fall-rate down to normal landing curve. And then they hit the mythical cushion height, where the air was thick enough to support her on her fins, and the stablizers purred pleasantly again. From there on they would coast into Hellas and let the tugs snag her.

"Your damned luck!" The O. M. cut in crisply. "Just got a radio that tugs are on strike at Hellas. You'll have to coast to Perdition on North Venus instead of Hellas. Can you hold her up?"

"I'll ride her. Navigator, I want co-ordinates for latitude 78° 43′ 28″ south, longitude 24° 18′ 27″ west."

"But Perdition—" The navigator was cut short by a burst of language from Barclay.

Jerry barked wearily. "Shut up! We're not going to Perdition—nor Hellas! Navigator, you heard my orders. Give me data, and see that it's right. Get scared and blunder, and you'll never know what happened."

"But the tugs are in Perdition."

"To hell with the tugs! I'll set her down on her tail!" Gulps came over the phone, and Ignatz could hear the teeth of the navigator chattering. The O. M. was yelling about insanity, but he checked his raging and there was a muttered consultation too low to hear. Then Barclay's voice cleared.

"You're all in the hands of a lunatic, but your only chance is to give him his data. We'd be dead by the time we could dig him out. Take orders from Lord!" He spoke directly into the phone. "Jerry, I'll break you like a dry stick if I live. Not one tail landing out of three works with whole controls. Listen to reason, man! We can't help her if we're dead."

The junior navigator seized the phone, his nerves steady with desperation, his voice crisp and raw. Slowly the ship settled down, driving forward through the heavy air. Finally the navigator reported destination, and Jerry tipped the ship up cautiously. She protested at such unorthodox treatment, but reluctantly answered her controls.

"Eighteen thousand feet, directly over your destination. Weather quiet, no wind—thank God, sir! Fourteen thousand. You'll have to slow up!"

Ignatz prayed fervently to his forest and swamp gods, but they seemed far away. And the ground was rushing up while the ship swayed first to one side, then the other. Jerry was dancing a war jig in front of the balance jet bars; his eyes were glassy, his hands shook on the controls, but he fought her down, foot by foot, while the sickening speed slackened.

"Four hundred feet, level ground. Now the blast strikes, we can't see. Instrument at 300—200! Slower!"

She slowed grudgingly, but listed sidewise sharply; Jerry cut power for free fall, and she righted. Power boomed out again.

"Forty feet—God help us!"

That loss of power, short as it was, had been too much. She was all out now, but falling too fast. No, she was checking it. But another sway came. Ignatz groaned, saw that Jerry had deliberately swung her sidewise to land horizontal—at forty feet! There wasn't power enough in the laterals to hold her up. The speed picked up as she wabbled on her axis, slowed, and she righted. Jerry cut controls, grabbed a girder, and slumped. Ignatz went flaccid.

It sounded like a heavy scrunch, with attendant yells. She bounced slightly before settling. And then there was silence, and they were down. Jerry picked himself up, felt Ignatz carefully. "You're tough, fellow, not even scratched. If I hadn't been limp with exhaustion, that ten-foot free fall probably would have messed me up a little; but the others should be all right. This section took most of the shock."

Half a minute later there were groans and shouts over the ship. The Master scooped Ignatz up. "Come on, fellow, we've got to go down and stock up on provisions."

The after hold was crowded with miscellaneous items for the comfort and safety of the spore-hunters, and he located a ready-packed kit of provisions, ample for three months' trek if the bearer could carry the load. He ad-

justed it carefully, felt to make sure of the feverin bottle, and took down three pairs of mud hooks, like skis crossed with canoes; the light beryllium frames would support a man's weight on slimy mud of water and let him shuffle forward through the ooze of the swamps without sinking.

"Durnall's fool enough to go off in the mud," the Master told Ignatz. "That guy never did have good sense, so I've got to take three sets." He swung out to the emergency port, opened the inner seal, and pulled it shut. The outer one gave slowly, and opened—on the flat, sandy expanse of the Hellas landing field!

The old freighter had berthed neatly in the center of the rocket dock, and crowds, who'd heard or seen the landing, were streaming out. Mechanics were working on the crew port, which seemed to be giving trouble again.

Heavy hands reached up suddenly and dragged Jerry out onto the ground. "This way, fellow." Three dock flunkies held him securely, grinning as they felt him over for a concealed weapon. Then the leader motioned the others to lead him toward a waiting spinner.

"Smart guy, eh?" He looked at Jerry appraisingly. "You gotta be up early to catch old Barclay. We got a radio you'd be coming out of the emergency, so we waited for you. Got a nice little reception hall fixed up for you."

Jerry stopped swearing long enough to ask the obvious. "Where to?" They grinned again, the three of them holding him firmly as they seated him in the spinner. At the motion of the leader, the pilot cut the motor in, and they rose and headed toward the outskirts of Hellas—but in the opposite direction from the jail.

"You'll be nice and comfortable, you and your pet," the headman volunteered. "The Old Man's putting you in one of the private suites belonging to Herndon, our branch manager. Says you're to have a nice long rest, where nobody'll bother you—or t'other way around."

No use questioning these dock flunkies, who probably knew less about it all than he did. Jerry slumped back silently, and Ignatz curled up to wait for the spinner to meet with an accident; but even misfortune refused to smile on them. They landed smoothly on the roof of one of the company's apartment buildings, and the men

dragged the Master down through the roof entrance, across a hall, and into a well-fitted apartment.

"Make yourself to home," the big husky invited generously. "Herndon probably won't come here, so it's all yours. You'll find the walls and doors made of steel, the windows transplon, and locks that stay locked." He pulled the visiphone plug out and picked up the instrument. "Anything you'd like?"

The Master shrugged, estimating his chances. But they were all strong, young, and alert. He gave up any foolish ideas. "You might send up a diamond mine, or a dozen chorus girls."

"That's Herndon's specialty—chorines. See him about it." The flunkies grinned and began backing out. "The Old Man says he'll be down tomorrow, probably." The door closed and the key in the lock made a positive and unpleasant click.

Jerry turned in disgust toward the bedroom. "Sometimes, Ignatz," he muttered, "I begin to think—" He cut it as he saw the zloaht's expression. "Never mind, fellow. I'll turn the heat on low in the oven, and you can sleep there tonight. We both need shut-eye."

Sunlight was streaking through the translucent transplon windows when Ignatz awoke. His investigation showed that the Master was still sleeping, and he had no desire to awaken him. Muttering in disgust at the world in general, he turned to the library in search of information on the peculiar disease with which humans seemed afflicted.

The dictionary defined love, and the encyclopedia gave an excellent medical and psychological version of it; but none of the sober, rational phrases gave any key to the idiocies Ignatz associated with that emotion. Other books bore gaudy titles that hinted at possibilities. He selected three at random, waded through pages here and there, honking and snorting loudly. They only served to confirm his preconceptions on the subject, without making things any clearer. Compared with the men in the books, Jerry was a rational being.

Still, books had their uses. Ignatz sniffed them over

thoughtfully and found the usual strong glue had been used in binding them. Since the dictionary and encyclopedia were useful, he put them back with some difficulty. Then he tipped down half a dozen other books whose titles indicated they were on the same subject and began ripping the covers off methodically. A most excellent glue, well-flavored and potent; of course, the paper insisted on coming off with it, but that could always be spit out. What was left, he pushed into the incinerator closet.

With his stomach filled and the sleep out of his system, there was nothing left to do but explore. Sometimes these human habitations proved most interesting. He sampled a jar of vaseline, examined the workings of an electric mixer with some interest, and decided to satisfy his curiosity on another matter which had bothered him for months.

Jerry Lord awoke with Ignatz's doleful bellow in his ears, mixed with sundry threshings and bumpings, and the jangling of an uncertain bell. He rubbed the sleep out of his eyes with hands that were sure and steady again, and looked down, to grin suddenly. "I told you to let those spring alarm clocks alone, fellow. Suppose they do go *tick-tick* instead of purring like the electrics—do you have to see why?"

Ignatz had found out why—with details. Jerry untangled the zloaht's tail from the main spring and various brass wheels, and unwrapped the alarm spring from his inky body. Once that was done, they both prowled around until satisfied that escape from the apartment was completely impossible.

Jerry tried the stereovisor while eating breakfast, but there was no news; only the usual morning serials and music came over. He dug out a book on rocket motors to kill time, while Ignatz succeeded in turning on the hot water in the bathroom and crawling into the tub. If the O. M. ran true to form, he'd show up when it suited his own convenience.

It was noon when Barclay unlocked the door and came in, leaving a couple of guards outside. "Crazy young fool!"

Jerry grinned ruefully. "A nice trick, your fake data;

I actually thought I was landing at Minerva's Breasts. Well, I didn't ruin your darned freighter."

"Didn't even wreck the radio. Sweetest tail landing I ever saw, and I made a couple myself." He chuckled as the Master stared. "Sure, I used to pilot them, back when it took men. But I never tried a horizontal, though I've heard of it."

He fished out an envelope. "Here, I keep my word. Deposit book, Prospector's Commercial, one million dollars. And the deed to the house in New Hampshire, if you ever get back there—which you won't on any of my ships. You can save your thanks."

Jerry took it calmly. "I didn't intend to thank you; I earned it." He stuffed the envelope in the prospector's kit he'd brought with him. "What word from Anne? And when do I get out of here?"

"I've made arrangements to have you leave today." Seeing Jerry's look, he shook his head. "Not to jail, exactly—just to the new detention house they've erected since you were here last; they use it for drunks and weed-chewers. I've booked you as a stowaway to be held for convenient deportation, and I'll make the charge stick. Judging from last night, I don't want you in any of my employees' quarters; they get hit by sudden bad luck."

"Well?"

"Herndon got married and left me in the lurch last night—when I most need him."

"That looks like your bad luck, not his," Jerry pointed out. "Though I suppose you fired him."

"He quit—to lead the glamorous life." The O. M. smiled wryly. "His bad luck was that he married that woman who dances at the casino with a Martian sand-eel."

Jerry nodded; he'd seen her act, and there was no answer. Instead, he steered the conversation back to Anne. "You know I could locate the *Burgundy* in a couple of hours if you'd let me out of here. I didn't spend two months in Despondency for nothing. And Ignatz is supposed to bring good luck out there."

Barclay shrugged. "Good luck for you; that's what I'm afraid of. It so happens we've located the *Burgundy*

already, without your help. Now we've been sending out searching parties on mud hooks for Anne and Pete; the captain had to take orders from her and let them go." His face was momentarily bitter. "I thought Durnall had better sense than to go lugging her around the swamps where even the compass is cockeyed."

"I was afraid of that. You made a mistake, sir, in making me land at Hellas instead of the Breasts."

Barclay grunted, and let it pass. They all knew there was about as much chance of one man finding her in the steaming swamp jungle as the proverbial needle. "If I thought you could find her, I'd probably be fool enough to let you go. Better pack up your luggage. These men will take you over to detention house."

The detention ward was comfortable enough, and Barclay had arranged for all the Master's ordinary wants. But it was no nearer Anne. He paced the room endlessly until Slim, the flunky, brought his supper. Bribery had failed before, but he tried it again.

The guard grinned. "Here's your supper, such as it is. We found the food's mostly turned sour since you moved in this noon. And your check's no good; Prospector's Commercial closed its doors until a new shipment of gold can come through from Earth."

Ignatz grunted, but the Master refused to give up. "But the check will be good when it opens."

Slim hunched his shoulders. "Not with your money in it; it won't open."

"You don't believe that superstition, do you?" Jerry's voice was not particularly convincing.

"Huh? Look, mister, since you come here, I got word my wife just had triplets—and me a poor man! I don't want nothing to do with you or yourn." He shoved the food in and swung on his heel.

Jerry swore, then called after the jailer. "Hey, wait! Can you get a message to Manager Barclay? Tell him I know how he can find his daughter. Tell him I want to see him tomorrow morning!"

Slim nodded glumly and went on. Jerry turned to his meal, refusing to answer Ignatz's inquiring grunts. The

zloaht watched his Master finish and begin the endless pacing again, smoking incessantly on the pungent Venusian cigarettes. He picked up a butt and honked curiously.

"Nerves, fellow," Jerry answered. "They're supposed to calm you when something bothers you—like my pipe that I left back on Earth. Want to try one?" He placed one between Ignatz's sharp lips, and lit it. "Now, you puff in, take the smoke into your lungs, then blow it out. Sure, like that."

Ignatz coughed the smoke out and bellowed hoarsely, swearing heatedly at the Master. An odd sensation stirred in him somewhere, however, and he regarded the cigarette thoughtfully; somtimes a thing was better after a time or two. Dubiously, he picked it up with his antennae and tried again, with slightly better success. It didn't taste so nauseous that time. And the third try was still better.

"Better go easy on it, fellow," Jerry advised. "I don't know how it'll affect your metabolism; alcohol had no results with you, but this might."

Ignatz heard vaguely, but didn't trouble his head about it. There was a nice warm feeling stealing along his nerves and down toward his tail. He'd been a fool to think life was hard—it was ducky—that's what. And this room was beautiful, when it stood still. Just now, it was running around in circles; he pursued the walls in their crazy rotation, but gave up—they were too fast for him.

Jerry giggled for no reason Ignatz could see. "Ignatz, you're acting drunk. And that butt's going to burn you if you don't spit it out."

"Hwoonk!" said Ignatz. Still, it was a little warm; laboriously he removed the burning thing and tossed it away. *"Hwulp!"* Now why did his tail insist on jerking him up like that? *"Hwupp!"* If it insisted, he'd be the last one to stop it. He gazed up at the moon that had mysteriously sailed away from Earth and was gliding across the ceiling of the room. Such a lovely night. Must make a song about the lovely night. Lovely song.

His fog-horn voice creaked out in a quavering bellow,

rose to a crescendo wail, and popped out with a sound like a starting rocket. Lovely song—lovely! Jerry stuffed him in a pillow and tried to silence him, but without immediate success. If the men in detention wanted to sleep, what of it? Anyway, they were making too much noise themselves.

Who wanted to sleep? Too nice a night to sleep. He executed a remarkable imitation of a steam buzz saw. Jerry gave up and crawled in beside him, growling unhappily. Ignatz honked reproachfully at the Master, rolled over and snored loudly.

The next morning he awoke to see the guard let the O. M. in, and tried to climb down from the bunk. Something lanced through his head, and he fell back with a mournful bellow. He hadn't felt like that last night.

Jerry grinned at him. "Hangover—what'd you expect?" He turned back to Barclay. "The flunky delivered my message, then?"

"He did." The O. M. hadn't been doing much sleeping, from the look on his face. "If your plan involves letting you out, don't bother telling me."

"It doesn't. I've found from experience there's no use trying to change your mind." He jerked back the package of cigarettes as Ignatz dived for it. "But the semi-annual mud run is due any day now, and Despondency is hell then. You've got to get her out."

The O. M. nodded; he'd been thinking the same. Jerry went on. "All right. A man can't locate anything smaller than a rocketship up there. But a zloaht can. Well, thirty miles north of Minerva's Breasts—the compass points south by southeast, in that neighborhood—there's a village of Ignatz's people built out in a little lake. They've dammed up Forlorn River there, and built their houses on rafts, working with their antennae and practically no raw materials. They grow food, along the shores, and they've got a mill of sorts to grind it with. Of course, they're not human, but they'll be up alongside us yet, if we don't kill them off first. Highly civilized now."

The O. M. snorted, glanced at Ignatz hunting for butts. "Civilized! Sounds more like beavers to me."

"Okay, have it your way." Jerry was used to man's

eternal sense of divine descent—or maybe the word was ascent. "Anyway, they've developed an alphabet of sorts and have tame animals. What's more important, I taught them some English, and they'll do almost anything for chocolate and peanuts."

Barclay caught the idea. "You mean, I'm to send up there, get in touch with them, and have them look for Anne? Sounds pretty far-fetched, but I'm willing to try anything once."

Jerry began sketching a crude map. "They can't talk to you, but when one of them comes for the chocolates, you'll know he's found her—they're honest about bargains. Then all you have to do is follow."

The O. M. took the note and started toward the door. "I'll let you know how it works," he promised. "If they find her, I'll even risk shipping you back to Earth." Jerry grunted and turned back to Ignatz, who was rumbling unhappily on the cot, his foot-and-a-quarter body a bundle of raw nerves.

It was three slow, dull days later when Slim brought another note in. "Mr. Barclay sent this down to you," he said briefly. Slim had as little to do with the Master as possible.

Jerry opened it eagerly, to find the wording terse and to the point:

Three spinners, trying to make your lake, broke down. Rescue crews out for them now. I'll have nothing more to do with any of your fool plans.

He passed it to Ignatz, who read it glumly, then watched hopefully as Jerry shook out a cigarette. Seeing the pack returned to its place, beyond his reach, he snorted his disgust and retired to the corner in sulky silence.

The silence was broken by a reverberating boom that rocked the detention house like a straw in the wind. The floor twisted crazily and the transplon window fell out with a brittle snap. Then the noise quieted and Jerry picked himself up from the floor, grabbed Ignatz and the prospector pack. He wasted no words, but dived toward the open window.

Slim came racing down the corridor. "Air conditioner

motor exploded right below," he yelled. "You all right, Lord?" As he saw the two climbing out the window, he grabbed for his needle gun, then rammed it back. "I ain't taking chances with this thing; it'd explode in my hands with you around. The farther you two get, the happier I'll be!"

Sometimes a bad reputation had its uses. Jerry dropped ten feet to the ground, spotted a spinner standing empty and unlocked to the rear of the building, and set out for it. He dived through the door, yanked it shut, and cut in the motor as the guards began streaming out. Ignatz looked at the fuel gauge and was surprised to see it full.

Before the gun on the roof could be lined up, the spinner was rising smoothly and speeding away. Jerry swung in a half circle and headed north, with the rheostat clear over, and the little ship cut through the air with a whistling rush. Hellas dropped behind, five miles, ten, then fifteen. Ten miles ahead lay the muck of Hellonfire, beyond that Despondency.

"Only let me reach the swamps, fellow," Jerry begged. "Don't get us in any funny business now." Ignatz had his antennae curled up in a tight knot, trying by mental concentration to oblige.

Two miles short of the swamps, the engine began to stutter, starting and stopping erratically. Jerry fussed with the controls, but the ship slowed, moving along at an uncertain speed. The first line of the Hellonfire verdure rose through the thin mists as the motor stopped. Jerry's teeth were clenched as he tried to hold the spinner in a flat curve that would carry them clear. But the ground came up steadily as the ship crawled toward the swamp.

By a hair-thick margin they cleared the tangled swamp growth, and were over Hellonfire. And the little motor caught, purred softly, and drove the vanes steadily against the air, lifting them up easily. Ignatz relaxed and Jerry reached over to pat him softly. Now, according to the legend, luck should be good.

It was. They glided along across Hellonfire smoothly, passed over the wreck of the first spinner sent out by the

O. M., and headed on. The compass began to waver and twist without good reason, and Jerry was forced to rely on Ignatz's sense of direction. The zloaht held his antennae out as a pointer toward his home village, and the Master followed his direction confidently.

Hellonfire drifted by under them, and gave place to the heavy tangle of Despondency. Looking down, they could see the slow crawl of the mud-run that made the swamp even more impassable twice a year, and Jerry shook his head. If Anne were out in that, unless she stayed on a high hummock, there was little hope of finding her. They swept between the Breasts and saw the temporary camp, established as a base for searchers, being dismantled; the men would leave before the mud crept higher.

And then Ignatz hooted, and Jerry looked down to see the little lake glistening below them. Floating rafts covered it, neatly laid out in rows, and thatched over with fine craftsmanship. Zloahts like Ignatz were busily engaged in the huts and canals between them. On the shores of the lake, others were driving their tame *zihis,* twenty times as large as they were, about in the fields. Now and again, a fog-horn yelp across the lake was answered from the largest raft.

Jerry let down the pontoons and dropped the spinner lightly on the lake. Ignatz ducked out and across the water to the chief's building, dragging a waterproof package of chocolate with him. He was back inside of ten minutes, hooting shrilly, a small bundle in his mouth.

The Master took it. On the coarse papyrus he made out a roughly executed picture of a man and woman, pulled on a narrow raft by two of the zihis. Under it, there were two black squares with one white sandwiched between them, and inside the drawing was a bar of chocolate of a different brand from that which Jerry had sent them.

The Master snapped the rheostat over. "So she left a day and two nights ago, with Durnall. Traded her chocolate for zihis and raft. Know what direction she went?"

Ignatz hooted and pointed south and east, along a sluggish stream that fed into Forlorn River. Jerry turned the spinner and headed that way, searching for signs of

them. Zihi travel should average twenty or more miles a day, which would place them some seventy miles out. He slowed up after fifty, noting that the stream was narrowing. If it ended before he reached Anne, it meant hours of scouting, probably hopelessly, in search of her. There were a hundred different courses she could take once she left the Little Hades.

But he sighted her before the stream ended in its twisted little feeders. She had stopped, probably picking her course and he could see her look up at the sound of his motor and begin signaling frantically. He set the spinner down sharply jerking it to a short stop within a few feet of the raft and opened the door as she headed the zihis toward him. Durnall was lying on the raft, covered by a poncho.

"Jerry Lord!" Her voice was shrill, tired, her eyes red and sleepless. "Thank heaven! Pete's got the fever—red fever—and we had no feverin in our packs." She grabbed the bottle he handed her, poured three tablets down Durnall's throat. "Help me load him in and the duffel—and take us to the hospital, pronto!"

Jerry grabbed Durnall and loaded him in the back as quickly as he could. Ignatz was giving orders to the zihis to return to the village with the raft, while Anne gathered the duffel, and climbed in back. She sank beside the sick man, whose face had the dull brick-red of an advanced case of swamp fever.

"Your father's been worried sick—so have I."

"Have you?" Her voice was flat. "Jerry, how soon can we reach the hospital?"

He shrugged. "Three hours, I guess." Ignatz glanced up at the Master's face and grunted as softly as he could. Of course, Anne had been gone for days, alone with Durnell, and sick men had a way of working on a woman's sympathies. He brushed his antennae lightly against the Master's ankles.

"How'd you find the village?" Jerry asked. "I've been trying to get a chance to help you, but I was afraid you'd be lost in the mud-run."

She looked up, but went on fussing over Durnall. "When we couldn't find the *Burgundy,* I remembered your story

about getting lost yourself, and how you found the village. We headed the way you said the compass pointed, and holed up there, till I found they understood me. Then I bartered some supplies for their raft and animals. With what you'd told me helping us, we'd have made out all right if Pete hadn't come down with the fever; I was lucky, myself, and didn't catch it."

Durnall was groaning and tossing uneasily, and she turned her attention back to him. Jerry bent over his controls, and drove silently south toward Hellas, watching Despondency change to Hellonfire. Then they were out of the swamps, and he turned back to assure Ann they were almost there.

But his head jerked back sharply. The rotor, which had been circling sweetly overhead, now twanged harshly and dragged back on the motor. Ignatz ducked back to avoid the Master's look and groaned. One of the rotor vanes had cracked off, and the others were unbalanced and moving sluggishly. The ship was coming down much too fast. Jerry cut the motor off, tried to flatten the fall, and failed. He yanked the shock-cushion lever out, and a rubber mattress zipped out behind him, designed to save the passengers from a nose collision in the fog. Before he could reach the pilot's cushion lever, the ship's nose hit the ground and buckled in.

Ignatz saw the Master slump forward over the controls, and then something tore sharply at the zloaht's snout horn, and little lights streaked out. Blackness shot over him hotly.

He swam up through a gray haze, tried to snort, and failed. When he opened his eyes, he saw yards of gauze covering his snout, and Jerry was propped up in bed watching him.

"Major operation, fellow. The doc says he had to cut out half your horn because of something that splintered it. You had me beat by half a day, and the doc says I was out for forty-eight hours." He wiggled in the bed. "I'm still solid enough, though, except for a couple of bones, and a bump on the head."

Ignatz looked around slowly, conscious from his slug-

gish reactions that they must have given him drugs. He was in a small room, and his bed was a miniature replica of Jerry's. But it wasn't a hospital.

Jerry grinned. "They were afraid you'd be a jinx in the city, and I kept yelling for you, so they put us both up here in a house the O. M. owns just inside Hellonfire. I've been waiting for them to bring you to before we entertained visitors." He raised his voice. "Hey, nurse, tell them all clear here."

With his words, the door burst open and the Old Man hurried in. "Well, it's about time. Look fit as ever."

"Yeah, fit to go back to your lousy detention house."

The O. M. was pleased with himself. "Not this time. I figured out something else. Got the deed to the New Hampshire house still? Good. Well, I'm taking it back, and putting this deed to the swamp house in its place. That pet of yours should be harmless here. And I'm advising you to invest your money in our stock."

"So you won't ship me back to Earth, eh? Afraid I'd get your ship smashed?"

Barclay shook his head. "I'm not worried about the ship. What I'm worried about is a branch manager, and you're it—if you want the job."

Jerry took it calmly. "What's the catch?"

"None. Bad luck or not, you get things done, and you know rockets. That's what I need, you impudent young puppy. Just keep your pet out here and things should go swimmingly." He got up brusquely. "You've got another visitor."

"Don't forget what I said about—" Jerry started to shout, and then she was framed in the door.

"Hi, Jerry. You both four-oh again?"

Ignatz grunted, while Jerry stared. "Durnall?"

"He's doing all right." Anne took a seat beside him, held out her hands. "Now that he's safe, let's forget him. Pete isn't a bad guy, but I don't like darn fools who get me into messes like the last one, even when it's half my fault."

Jerry digested it slowly, and Ignatz cursed his bandages. Now was the time for him to slip back into the swamps, where Jerry could never make the mistake of taking him

out again. He could see where the Master was going to need decent breaks with all the responsibility coming up. But the bandages held him securely.

Anne hauled the little bed closer, ran warm fingers over Ignatz's back. "You'll have to live out here and commute by spinner, of course, but I'll take care of Ignatz while you're gone. He owes us a lot of good fortune, and we're going to collect it."

"I—" Jerry glanced at Ignatz. "You know how your father feels about him."

She smiled impishly. "Dad figured it all out. You see, I brought back something with me in my duffel, and when he found I meant to keep it, he gave up." She reached into a little bag and hauled out the snooty head of another zloaht. "Meet Ichabod."

Jerry gulped, "Well, I'll be—" And suddenly he had a great deal of urgent business.

Ignatz longed for a cigarette, but he snorted softly and turned away.

* * * * *

Dark Mission

THE RAYS OF THE SUN lanced down over the tops of the trees and into the clearing, revealing a scene of chaos and havoc. Yesterday there had been a wooden frame house there, but now only pieces of it remained. One wall had been broken away, as by an explosion, and lay on the ground in fragments; the roof was crushed in, as if some giant had stepped on it and passed on.

But the cause of the damage was still there, lying on the ruins of the house. A tangled mass of buckled girders and metal plates lay mixed with a litter of laboratory equipment that had been neatly arranged in one room of the house, and parts of a strange engine lay at one side. Beyond was a tube that might have been a rocket. The great metal object that lay across the broken roof now only hinted at the sleek cylinder it had once been, but a trained observer might have guessed that it was the wreck of a rocketship. From the former laboratory, flames were licking up at the metal hull, and slowly spreading towards the rest of the house.

In the clearing, two figures lay outstretched, of similar size and build, but otherwise unlike. One was a dark man of middle age, completely naked, with a face cut and battered beyond all recognition. The odd angle of the head was unmistakable proof that his neck was broken. The

other man might have been a brawny sea viking of earlier days, both from his size and appearance, but his face revealed something finer and of a higher culture. He was fully clothed, and the slow movement of his chest showed that there was still life in him. Beside him, there was a broken beam from the roof, a few spots of blood on it. There was more blood on the man's head, but the cut was minor, and he was only stunned.

Now he stirred uneasily and groped uncertainly to his feet, shaking his head and fingering the cut on his scalp. His eyes traveled slowly across the clearing and to the ruins that were burning merrily. The corpse claimed his next attention, and he turned it over to examine the neck. He knit his brows and shook his head savagely, trying to call back the memories that eluded him.

They would not come. He recognized what his eyes saw, but his mind produced no words to describe them, and the past was missing. His first memory was of wakening to find his head pounding with an ache that was almost unbearable. Without surprise, he studied the rocket and saw that it had come down on the house, out of control, but it evoked no pictures in his mind, and he gave up. He might have been in the rocket or the house at the time; he had no way of telling which. Probably the naked man had been asleep at the time in the house.

Something prickled gently in the back of his mind, growing stronger and urging him to do something. He must not waste time here, but must fulfill some vital mission. What mission? For a second, he almost had it, and then it was gone again, leaving only the compelling urge that must be obeyed. He shrugged and started away from the ruins toward the little trail that showed through the trees.

Then another impulse called him back to the corpse, and he obeyed it because he knew of nothing else to do. Acting without conscious volition, he tugged at the corpse, found it strangely heavy, and dragged it toward the house. The flames were everywhere now, but he found a place where the heat was not too great and pulled the corpse over a pile of combustibles.

With the secondary impulse satisfied, the first urge returned, and he set off down the trail moving slowly. The

shoes hurt his feet, and his legs were leaden, but he kept on grimly, while a series of questions went around his head in circles. Who was he, where, and why?

Whoever had lived in the house, himself or the corpse, had obviously chosen the spot for privacy; the trail seemed to go on through the woods endlessly, and he saw no signs of houses along it. He clumped on mechanically, wondering if there was no end, until a row of crossed poles bearing wires caught his eye. Ahead, he made out a broad highway, with vehicles speeding along it in both directions, and hastened forward, hoping to meet someone.

Luck was with him. Pulled up at the side of the road was one of the vehicles, and a man was doing something at the front end of the car. Rough words carried back to him suggesting anger. He grinned suddenly and hastened toward the car, his eyes riveted on the man's head. A tense feeling shot through his brain and left, just as he reached the machine.

"Need help?" The words slipped out unconsciously, and now other words came pouring into his head, along with ideas and knowledge, and that seemed wrong somehow. The driving impulse he felt was still unexplained.

The man had looked up at his words, and relief shot over the sweating face. "Help's the one thing I need," he replied gratefully. "I been fussing with this blasted contraption darned near an hour, and nobody's even stopped to ask, so far. Know anything about it?"

"Ummm." The stranger, as he was calling himself for want of a better name, tested the wires himself, vaguely troubled at the simplicity of the engine. He gave up and went around to the other side, lifting the hood and inspecting the design. Then sureness came to him as he reached for the tool kit. "Probably the . . . umm . . . timing pins," he said.

It was. A few minutes later, the engine purred softly and the driver turned to the stranger. "Okay now, I guess. Good thing you came along; worst part of the road, and not a repair shop for miles. Where you going?"

"I—" The stranger caught himself. "The big city," he said, for want of a better destination.

"Hop in, then. I'm going to Elizabeth, right on your way. Glad to have you along; gets so a man talks to himself on these long drives, unless he has something to do. Smoke?"

"Thank you, no. I never do." He watched the other light up, feeling uncomfortable about it. The smell of the smoke, when it reached him, was nauseous, as were the odor of gasoline and the man's own personal effluvium, but he pushed them out of his mind as much as possible. "Have you heard or read anything about a rocketship of some kind?"

"Sure. Oglethorpe's, you mean? I been reading what the papers had to say about it." The drummer took his eyes off the road for a second, and his beady little eyes gleamed. "I been wondering a long time why some of these big-shot financiers don't back up the rockets, and finally Oglethorpe does. Boy, now maybe we'll find out something about this Mars business."

The stranger grinned mechanically. "What does his ship look like?"

"Picture of it in the *Scoop*, front page. Find it back of the seat, there. Yeah, that's it. Wonder what the Martians look like?"

"Hard to guess," the stranger answered. Even rough half-tones of the picture showed that it was not the ship that had crashed, but radically different. "No word of other rockets?"

"Nope, not that I know of, except the Army's test things. You know, I kinda feel maybe the Martians might look like us. Sure." He took the other's skepticism for granted without looking around. "Wrote a story about that once, for one of these science-fiction magazines, but they sent it back. I figured out maybe a long time ago there was a civilization on Earth—Atlantis, maybe—and they went over and settled on Mars. Only Atlantis sunk on them and there they were, stranded. I figured maybe one day they came back, sort of lost out for a while, but popped up again and started civilization humming. Not bad, eh?"

"Clever," the stranger admitted. "But it sounds vaguely familiar. Suppose we said instead there was a war between the mother world and Mars that wrecked both civilizations, instead of your Atlantis sinking. Wouldn't that be more logical?"

"Maybe, I dunno. Might try it, though mostly they seem to want freaks—Darned fool, passing on a hill!" He leaned out to shake a pudgy fist, then came back to his rambling account. "Read one the other day with two races, one like octopuses, the other twenty feet tall and all blue."

Memory pricked tantalizingly and came almost to the surface. Blue—Then it was gone again, leaving only a troubled feeling. The stranger frowned and settled down in the seat, answering in monosyllables to the other's monologue, and watching the patchwork of country and cities slip by.

"There's Elizabeth. Any particular place you want me to drop you?"

The stranger stirred from the half-coma induced by the cutting ache in his head, and looked about. "Any place," he answered. Then the surge in the back of his mind grabbed at him again, and he changed it. "Some doctor's office."

That made sense, of course. Perhaps the impulse had been only the logical desire to seek medical aid, all along. But it was still there, clamoring for expression, and he doubted the logic of anything connected with it. The call for aid could not explain the sense of disaster that accompanied it. As the car stopped before a house with a doctor's shingle, his pulse was hammering with frenzied urgency.

"Here we are." The drummer reached out toward the door handle, almost brushing one of the other's hands. The stranger jerked it back savagely, avoiding contact by a narrow margin, and a cold chill ran up his back and quivered its way down again. If that hand had touched him—The half-opened door closed again, but left one fact impressed on him. Under no conditions must he suffer another to make direct contact with his body, lest something horrible should happen! Another crazy angle, un-

connected with the others, but too strong for disobedience.

He climbed out, muttering his thanks, and made his way up the walk toward the office of Dr. Lanahan, hours 12:00 to 4:00.

The doctor was an old man, with the seamed and rugged good-nature of the general practitioner, and his office fitted him. There was a row of medical books along one wall, a glass-doored cabinet containing various medicaments, and a clutter of medical instruments. He listened to the stranger's account quietly, smiling encouragement at times, and tapping the desk with his pencil.

"Amnesia, of course," he agreed, finally. "Rather peculiar in some respects, but most cases of that are individul. When the brain is injured, its actions are usually unpredictable. Have you considered the possibility of hallucinations in connection with those impulses you mention?"

"Yes." He had considered it from all angles, and rejected the solutions as too feeble. "If they were ordinary impulses, I'd agree with you. But they're far deeper than that, and there's a good reason for them, somewhere. I'm sure of that."

"Hmm." The doctor tapped his pencil again and considered. The stranger sat staring at the base of his neck, and the tense feeling in his head returned, as it had been when he first met the drummer. Something rolled around in his mind and quieted. "And you have nothing on you in the way of identification?"

"Uh!" The stranger grunted, feeling foolish, and reached into his pockets. "I hadn't thought of that." He brought out a package of cigarettes, a stained handkerchief, glasses, odds and ends, that meant nothing to him, and finally a wallet stuffed with bills. The doctor seized on that and ran through its contents quickly.

"Evidently you had money . . . Ummm, no identification card, except for the letters L. H. Ah, there we are; a calling card." He passed it over, along with the wallet, and smiled in self-satisfaction. "Evidently you're a fellow physician, Dr. Lurton Haines. Does that recall anything?"

"Nothing." It was good to have a name, in a way, but

that was his only response to the sight of the card. And why was he carrying glasses and cigarettes for which he had no earthly use?

The doctor was hunting through his pile of books and finally came up with a dirty red volume. *"Who's Who,"* he explained. "Let's see. Umm. Here we are. 'Lurton R. Haines, M.D.' Odd, I thought you were younger than that. Work along cancer research. No relatives mentioned. The address is evidently that of the house you remember first—'Surrey Road, Danesville.' Want to see it?"

He passed the volume over, and the stranger—or Haines—scanned it carefully, but got no more out of it than the other's summary, except for the fact that he was forty-two years old. He put the book back on the desk, and reached for his wallet, laying a bill on the pad where the other could reach it.

"Thank you, Dr. Lanahan." There was obviously nothing more the doctor could do for him, and the odor of the little room and the doctor was stifling him; apparently he was allergic to the smell of other men. "Never mind the cut on the head—it's purely superficial."

"But—"

Haines shrugged and mustered a smile, reached for the door, amd made for the outside again. The urge was gone now, replaced by a vast sense of gloom, and he knew that his mission had ended in failure.

They knew so little about healing, though they tried so hard. The entire field of medicine ran through Haines' mind now, with all its startling successes and hopeless failures, and he knew that even his own problem was beyond their ability. And the knowledge, like the sudden return of speech, was a mystery; it had come rushing into his mind while he stared at the doctor, at the end of the sudden tenseness, and a numbing sense of failure had accompanied it. Strangely, it was not the knowledge of a specialist in cancer research, but such common methods as a general practioner might use.

One solution suggested itself, but it was too fantastic for belief. The existence of telepaths was suspected, but not ones who could steal whole pages of knowledge from the

mind of another, merely by looking at him. No, that was more illogical than the sudden wakening of isolated fields of memory by the sight of the two men.

He stopped at a corner, weary under the load of despondency he was carrying, and mulled it over dully. A newsboy approached hopefully. *"Time* a' *News* out!" the boy sing-songed his wares. *"Scoop* 'n' *Juhnal!* Read awl about the big train wreck! Paper, mister?"

Haines shrugged dully. "No paper!"

"Blonde found muidehed in bath-tub," the boy insinuated. "Mahs rocket account!" The man must have an Achilles' heel somewhere.

But the garbled jargon only half registered on Haines' ears. He started across the street, rubbing his temples, before the second driving impulse caught at him and sent him back remorselessly to the paper boy. He found some small change in his pocket, dropped a nickel on the pile of papers, disregarding the boy's hand, and picked up a copy of the *Scoop*. "Screwball," the boy decided aloud, and dived for the nickel.

The picture was no longer on the front page of the tabloid, but Haines located the account with some effort. "Mars Rocket Take-Off Wednesday," said the headline in conservative twenty-four-point type, and there was three-quarters of a column under it. "Man's first flight to Mars will not be delayed, James Oglethorpe told reporters here today. Undismayed by the skepticism of the scientists, the financier is going ahead with his plans, and expects his men to take off for Mars Wednesday, June 8, as scheduled. Construction has been completed, and the rocket machine is now undergoing tests."

Haines scanned down the page, noting the salient facts. The writer had kept his tongue in his cheek, but under the faintly mocking words there was the information he wanted. The rocket might work; man was at last on his way toward the conquests of the planets. There was no mention of another rocket; obviously, then, that one must have been built in secret in a futile effort to beat Oglethorpe's model.

But that was unimportant. The important thing was that he must stop the flight! Above all else, man must not

make that trip! There was no sanity to it, and yet somehow it was beyond mere sanity. It was his duty to prevent any such voyage, and that duty was not to be questioned.

He returned quickly to the newsboy, reached out to touch his shoulder, and felt his hand jerk back to avoid the touch. The boy seemed to sense it, though, for he turned quickly. "Paper?" he began brightly before recognizing the stranger. "Oh, it's you. Watcha want?"

"Where can I find a train to New York?" Haines pulled a quarter from his pocket and tossed it on the pile of papers.

The boy's eyes brightened again. "Four blocks down, tuihn right, and keep goin' till you come to the station. Can't miss it. Thanks, mister!"

The discovery of the telephone book as a source of information was Haines' single major triumph, and the fact that the first Oglethorpe he tried was a colored street cleaner failed to take the edge off it. Now he trudged uptown, counting the numbers that made no sense to him; apparently the only system was one of arithmetical progression, irrespective of streets.

His shoulders were drooping, and the lines of pain around his eyes had finally succeeded in drawing his brows together. A coughing spell hit him, torturing his lungs for long minutes, and then passed. That was a new development, as was the presssure around his heart. And everywhere was the irritating aroma of men, gasoline, and tobacco, a stale mixture that he could not escape. He thrust his hands deeper into his pockets to avoid chance contact with someone on the street, and crossed over toward the building that bore the number for which he was searching.

Another man was entering the elevator, and he followed mechanically, relieved that he would not have to plod up the stairs. "Oglethorpe?" he asked the operator uncertainly.

"Fourth floor, Room 405." The boy slid the gate open, pointing, and Haines stepped out and into the chromium-trimmed reception room. There were half a

dozen doors leading from it, but he spotted the one marked "James H. Oglethorpe, Private," and slouched forward.

"Were you expected, sir?" The girl popped up in his face, one hand on the gate that barred his way. Her face was a study in frustration, which probably explained the sharpness of her tone. She delivered an Horatio-guarding-the-bridge formula. "Mr. Oglethorpe is busy now."

"Lunch," Haines answered curtly. He had already noticed that men talked more freely over food.

She flipped a little book in her hand and stared at it. "There is no record here of a luncheon engagement, Mr.—"

"Haines. Dr. Lurton Haines." He grinned wryly, wriggling a twenty-dollar bill casually in one hand. Money was apparently the one disease to which nobody was immune. Her eyes dropped to it, and hesitation entered her voice as she consulted her book.

"Of course, Mr. Oglethorpe might have made it some time ago and forgotten to tell me—" She caught his slight nod, and followed the bill to the corner of the desk. "Just have a seat, and I'll speak to Mr. Oglethorpe."

She came out of the office a few minutes later, and winked quickly. "He'd forgotten," she told Haines, "but it's all right now. He'll be right out, Dr. Haines. It's lucky he's having lunch late today."

James Oglethorpe was a younger man than Haines had expected, though his interest in rocketry might have been some clue to that. He came out of his office, pushing a Homburg down on curly black hair, and raked the other with his eyes. "Dr. Haines?" he asked, thrusting out a large hand. "Seems we have a luncheon engagement."

Haines rose quickly and bowed before the other had a chance to grasp his hand. Apparently Oglethorpe did not notice, for he went on smoothly. "Easy to forget these telephone engagements, sometimes. Aren't you the cancer man? One of your friends was in a few months ago for a contribution to your work."

They were in the elevator then, and Haines waited until it opened and they headed for the lunchroon in the building before answering. "I'm not looking for

money this time, however. It's the rocket you're financing that interests me. I think it may work."

"It will, though you're one of the few who believes it." Caution, doubt, and interest were mingled on Oglethorpe's face. He ordered before turning back to Haines. "Want to go along? If you do, there's still room for a physician in the crew."

"No, nothing like that. Toast and milk only, please—" Haines had no idea of how to broach the subject, with nothing concrete to back up his statements. Looking at the set of the other's jaw and the general bulldog attitude of the man, he gave up hope and only continued because he had to. He fell back on imagination, wondering how much of it was true.

"Another rocket made that trip, Mr. Oglethorpe, and returned. But the pilot was dying before he landed. I can show you the wreck of his machine, though there's not much left after the fire—perhaps not enough to prove it was a rocketship. Somewhere out on Mars there's something man should never find. It's—"

"Ghosts?" suggested Oglethorpe, brusquely.

"Death! I'm asking you—"

Again Oglethorpe interrupted. "Don't. There was a man in to see me yesterday who claimed he'd been there —offered to show me the wreck of his machine. A letter this morning explained that the Martians had visited the writer and threatened all manner of things. I'm not calling you a liar, Dr. Haines, but I've heard too many of those stories; whoever told you this one was either a crank or a horror-monger. I can show you a stack of letters that range from astrology to zombies, all explaining why I can't go, and some offer photographs for proof."

"Suppose I said I'd made the trip in that rocket?" The card in the wallet said he was Haines, and the wallet had been in the suit he was wearing, but there had also been the glasses and cigarettes for which he had no use.

Oglethorpe twisted his lips, either in disgust or amazement. "You're an intelligent man, Dr. Haines; let's assume I am, also. It may sound ridiculous to you, but the only reason I had for making the fortune I'm credited with was to build that ship, and it's taken more work and time

than the layman would believe. If a green ant, seven feet high, walked into my office and threatened Armageddon, I'd still go."

Even the impossible impulse recognized the equally impossible. Oglethorpe was a man who did things first and worried about them when the mood hit him—and and there was nothing moody about him. The conversation turned to everyday matters and Haines let it drift as it would, finally dragging out into silence.

At least, he was wiser by one thing; he knew the location of the rocket ground and the set-up of guards around it—something even the newspapermen had failed to learn, since all pictures and information had come through Oglethorpe. There could no longer be any question of his ability to gain desired information by some hazy telepathic process. Either he was a mental freak, or the accident had done things to him that should have been surprising but weren't.

Haines had taken a cab from the airport, giving instructions that caused the driver to lift his eyebrows; but money was still all-powerful. Now they were slipping through country even more desolate than the woods around Haines' house, and the end of the road came into view, with a rutted muddy trail leading off, marked by the tires of the trucks Oglethorpe had used for his freighting. The cab stopped there.

"This the place?" the driver asked uncertainly.

"It is." Haines added a bill to what had already been paid and dismissed him. Then he dragged his way out to the dirt road and followed it, stopping for rest frequently. His ears were humming loudly now, and each separate little vertebra of his back protested at his going on. But there was no turning back; he had tried that, at the airport, and found the urge strong enough to combat his weakening will.

"Only a little rest!" he muttered thickly, but the force in his head lifted his leaden feet and sent them marching toward the rocket camp. Above him the gray clouds passed over the moon, and he looked up at Mars shining

in the sky. Words from the lower part of the dummer's vocabulary came into his throat, but the effort of saying them was more than the red planet merited. He plowed on in silence.

Mars had moved over several degrees in the sky when he first sighted the camp, lying in a long, narrow valley. At one end were the shacks of the workmen, at the other a big structure that housed the rocket from chance prying eyes. Haines stopped to cough out part of his lungs, and his breath was husky and labored as he worked his way down.

The guards should be strung out along the edge of the valley. Oglethorpe was taking no chances with the cranks who had written him letters and denounced him as a godless fool leading his men to death. Rockets at best were fragile things, and only a few men would be needed to ruin the machine once it was discovered. Haines ran over the guards' positions, and skirted through the underbrush, watching for periods when the moon was darkened. Once he almost tripped an alarm, but missed it in time.

Beyond, there was no shrubbery, but his suit was almost the shade of the ground in the moonlight, and by lying still between dark spells, he crawled forward toward the rocket shed, undetected. He noticed the distance of the houses and the outlying guards and nodded to himself; they should be safe from any explosion.

The coast looked clear. Then, in the shadow of the building, a tiny red spark gleamed and subsided slowly; a man was there, smoking a cigarette. By straining his eyes, Haines made out the long barrel of a rifle against the building. This guard must be an added precaution, unknown to Oglethorpe.

A sudden rift in the thickening clouds came, and Haines slid himself flat against the ground, puzzling over the new complication. For a second he considered turning back, but realized that he could not—his path now was clearly defined, and he had no choice but to follow it. As the moon slid out of sight again, he came to his

feet quietly and moved toward the figure waiting there.

"Hello!" His voice was soft, designed to reach the man at the building but not the guards behind in the outskirts. "Hello, there. Can I come forward? Special inspector from Oglethorpe."

A beam of light lanced out from the shadow, blinding him, and he walked forward, at the best pace he could muster. The light might reveal him to the other guards, but he doubted it; their attention was directed outward, away from the buildings.

"Come ahead," the answer came finally. "How'd you get past the others?" The voice was suspicious, but not unusually so. The rifle, Haines saw, was directed at his midsection, and he stopped a few feet away, where the other could watch him.

"Jimmy Durham knew I was coming," he told the guard. According to the information he had stolen from Oglethorpe's mind, Durham was in charge of the guards. "He told me he hadn't had time to notify you, but I took a chance."

"Hmmm. Guess it's all right, since they let you through; but you can't leave here until somebody identifies you. Keep your hands up." The guard came forward cautiously to feel for concealed weapons. Haines held his hands up out of the other's reach, where there was no danger of a direct skin to skin contact. "Okay, seems all right. What's your business here?"

"General inspection. The boss got word there might be a little trouble brewing and sent me here to make sure guard was being kept, and to warn you. All locked up here?"

"Nope. A lock wouldn't do much good on this shack; that's why I'm here. Want I should signal Jimmy to come and identify you so you can go?"

"Don't bother." Conditions were apparently ideal, except for one thing. But he would not murder the guard! There must be some other way, without adding that to the work he was forced to do. "I'm in no hurry, now that I've seen everything. Have a smoke?"

"Just threw one away. 'Smatter, no matches? Here."

Haines rubbed one against the friction surface of the box and lit the cigarette gingerly. The raw smoke stung against his burning throat, but he controlled the cough, and blew it out again; in the dark, the guard could not see his eyes watering, nor the grimaces he made. He was waging a bitter fight with himself against the impulse that had ordered the smoke to distract the guard's attention, and he knew he was failing. "Thanks!"

One of the guard's hands met his, reaching for the box. The next second the man's throat was between the stranger's hands, and he was staggering back, struggling to tear away and cry for help. Surprise confused his efforts for the split second necessary, and one of Haines' hands came free and out, then chopped down sharply to strike the guard's neck with the edge of the palm. A low grunt gurgled out, and the figure went limp.

Impulse had conquered again! The guard was dead, his neck broken by the sharp blow. Haines leaned against the building, catching his breath and fighting back the desire to lose his stomach's contents. When some control came back, he picked up the guard's flashlight, and turned into the building. In the darkness, the outlines of the great rocketship were barely visible.

With fumbling fingers, Haines groped forward to the hull, then struck a match and shaded it in his hands until he could make out the port, standing open. Too much light might show through a window and attract attention.

Inside, he threw the low power of the flashlight on and moved forward, down the catwalk and toward the rear where the power machinery would be housed. It had been simple, after all, and only the quick work of destruction still remained.

He traced the control valves easily, running an eye over the uncovered walls and searching out the pipes that led from them. From the little apparatus he saw, this ship was obviously inferior to the one that had crashed, yet it had taken years to build and drained Oglethorpe's money almost to the limit. Once destroyed,

it might take men ten more years to replace it; two was the minimum, and in those two years—

The thought slipped from him, but some memories were coming back. He saw himself in a small metal room, fighting against the inexorable exhaustion of fuel, and losing. Then there had been a final burst from the rockets, and the ship had dropped sickeningly through the atmosphere. He had barely had time to get to the air locks before the crash. Miraculously, as the ship's fall was cushioned by the house, he had been thrown free into the lower branches of a tree, to catch, and lose momentum before striking earth.

The man who had been in the house had fared worse; he had been thrown out with the wrecked wall, already dead. Roughly, the stranger remembered a hasty transfer of clothing from the corpse, and then the beam had dropped on him, shutting out his memory in blackness. So he was not Haines, after all, but someone from the rocket, and his story to Oglethorpe had been basically true.

Haines—he still thought of himself under that name—caught himself as his knees gave under him, and hauled himself up by the aid of a protruding bar. There was work to be done; after that, what happened to his own failing body was another matter. It seemed now that from his awakening he had expected to meet death before another day, and had been careless of the fact.

He ran his eyes around the rocket room again, until he came to a tool kit that lay invitingly open with a large wrench sticking up from it. That would serve to open the valves. The flashlight lay on the floor where he had dropped it, and he kicked it around with his foot to point at the wall, groping out for the wrench. His fingers were stiff as they clasped around the handle.

And, in the beam of light, he noticed his hand for the first time in hours. Dark-blue veins rose high on flesh that was marked with a faint pale-blue. He considered it dully, thrusting out his other hand and examining it; there, too, was the blue flush, and on his palms, as he turned them upward, the same color showed. Blue!

The last of his memory flashed back through his brain

in a roaring wave, bringing a slow tide of pictures with it. With one part of his mind, he was working on the valves with the wrench, while the other considered the knowledge that had returned to him. He saw the streets of a delicate, fairy city, half deserted, and as he seemed to watch, a man staggered out of a doorway, clutching at his throat with blue hands, to fall writhing to the ground! The people passed on quickly, avoiding contact with the corpse, fearful even to touch each other.

Everywhere, death reached out to claim the people. The planet was riddled with it. It lay on the skin of an infected person, to be picked up by the touch of another, and passed on to still more. In the air, a few seconds sufficed to kill the germs, but new ones were being sent out from the pores of the skin, so that there were always a few active ones lurking there. On contact, the disease began an insidious conquest, until, after months without sign, it suddenly attacked the body housing it, turned it blue, and brought death in a few painful hours.

Some claimed that it was the result of an experiment that had gone beyond control, others that it had dropped as a spore from space. Whatever it was, there was no cure for it on Mars. Only the legends that spoke of a race of their people on the mother world of Earth offered any faint hope, and to that they had turned when there was no other chance.

He saw himself undergoing examinations that finally resulted in his being chosen to go in the rocket they were building feverishly. He had been picked because his powers of telepathy were unusual, even to the mental science of Mars; the few remaining weeks had been used in developing that power systematically, and implanting in his head the duties that he must perform so long as a vestige of life remained to him.

Haines watched the first of the liquid from the fuel pipes splash out, and dropped the wrench. Old Leán Dagh had doubted his ability to draw knowledge by telepathy from a race of a different culture, he reflected. Too bad the old man had died without knowing of the

success his methods had met, even though the mission had been a failure, due to man's feeble knowledge of the curative sciences. Now his one task was to prevent the race of this world from dying in the same manner.

He pulled himself to his feet again and went staggering down the catwalk, muttering disconnected sentences. The blue of his skin was darker now, and he had to force himself across the space from the ship to the door of the building, grimly commanding his failing muscles, to the guard's body that still lay where he had left it.

Most of the strength left him was useless against the pull of this heavier planet and the torture movement had become. He tried to drag the corpse behind him, then fell on hands and knees and backed toward the ship, using one arm and his teeth on the collar to pull it after him. He was swimming in a world that was bordering on unconsciousness, now, and once darkness claimed him; he came out of it to find himself inside the rocket, still dragging his burden, the implanted impulses stronger than his will.

Bit by bit, he dragged his burden behind him down the catwalk, until the engine room was reached, and he could drop it on the floor, where the liquid fuel had made a thin film. The air was heavy with vapors, and chilled by the evaporation, but he was only partly conscious of that. Only a spark was needed now, and his last duty would be finished.

Inevitably, a few of the dead on Mars would be left unburned, where men might find the last of that unfortunate race, and the germs would still live within them. Earthmen must not face that. Until such a time as the last Martian had crumbled to dust and released the plague into the air to be destroyed, the race of Earth must remain within the confines of its own atmosphere, and safe.

There was only himself and the corpse he had touched left here to carry possible germs, and the ship to carry the men to other sources of infection; all that was easily remedied.

The stranger from Mars groped in his pocket for the

guard's matches, smiling faintly. Just before the final darkness swept over him, he drew one of them from the box and scraped it across the friction surface. Flame danced from the point and outward—

* * * * *

Helen O'Loy

I AM AN OLD MAN now, but I can still see Helen as Dave unpacked her, and still hear him gasp as he looked her over.

"Man, isn't she a beauty?"

She was beautiful, a dream in spun plastics and metals, something Keats might have seen dimly when he wrote his sonnet. If Helen of Troy had looked like that the Greeks must have been pikers when they launched only a thousand ships; at least, that's what I told Dave.

"Helen of Troy, eh?" He looked at her tag. "At least it beats this thing—K2W88. Helen . . . Mmmm . . . Helen of Alloy."

"Not much swing to that, Dave. Too many unstressed syllables in the middle. How about Helen O'Loy?"

"Helen O'Loy she is, Phil." And that's how it began—one party beauty, one part dream, one part science; add a stereo broadcast, stir mechanically, and the result is chaos.

Dave and I hadn't gone to college together, but when I came to Messina to practice medicine, I fould him downstairs in a little robot repair shop. After that, we began to pal around, and when I started going with one twin, he found the other equally attractive, so we made it a foursome.

When our business grew better, we rented a house and near the rocket field—noisy but cheap, and the

rockets discouraged apartment building. We liked room enough to stretch ourselves. I suppose, if we hadn't quarreled with them, we'd have married the twins in time. But Dave wanted to look over the latest Venus-rocket attempt when his twin wanted to see a display stereo starring Larry Ainslee, and they were both stubborn. From then on, we forgot the girls and spent our evenings at home.

But it wasn't until "Lena" put vanilla on our steak instead of salt that we got off on the subject of emotions and robots. While Dave was dissecting Lena to find the trouble, we naturally mulled over the future of the mechs. He was sure that the robots would beat men some day, and I couldn't see it.

"Look here, Dave," I argued. "You know Lena doesn't think—not really. When those wires crossed, she could have corrected herself. But she didn't bother; she followed the mechanical impulse. A man might have reached for the vanilla, but when he saw it in his hand, he'd have stopped. Lena has sense enough, but she has no emotions, no consciousness of self."

"All right, that's the big trouble with the mechs now. But we'll get around it, put in some mechanical emotions, or something." He screwed Lena's head back on, turned on her juice. "Go back to work, Lena, it's nineteen o'clock."

Now I specialized in endocrinology and related subjects. I wasn't exactly a psychologist, but I did understands the glands, secretions, harmones, and miscellanies that are the physical causes of emotions. It took medical science three hundred years to find out how and why they worked, and I couldn't see men duplicating them mechanically in much less time.

I brought home books and papers to prove it, and Dave quoted the invention of memory coils and veritoid eyes. During that year we swapped knowledge until Dave knew the whole theory of endocrinology, and I could have made Lena from memory. The more we talked, the less sure I grew about the impossibility of *homo mechanensis* as the perfect type.

Poor Lena. Her cuproberyl body spent half its time in

scattered pieces. Our first attempts were successful only in getting her to serve fried brushes for breakfast and wash the dishes in oleo oil. Then one day she cooked a perfect dinner with six wires crossed, and Dave was in ecstasy.

He worked all night on her wiring, put in a new coil, and taught her a fresh set of words. And the next day she flew into a tantrum and swore vigorously at us when we told her she wasn't doing her work right.

"It's a lie," she yelled, shaking a suction brush. "You're all liars. If you so-and-so's would leave me whole long enough, I might get something done around the place."

When we calmed her temper and got her back to work, Dave ushered me into the study. "Not taking any chances with Lena," he explained. "We'll have to cut out that adrenal pack and restore her to normalcy. But we've got to get a better robot. A housemaid mech isn't complex enough."

"How about Dillard's new utility models? They seem to combine everything in one."

"Exactly. Even so, we'll need a special one built to order, with a full range of memory coils. And out of respect to old Lena, let's get a female case for its works."

The result, of course, was Helen. The Dillard people had performed a miracle and put all the works in a girl-modeled case. Even the plastic and rubberite face was designed for flexibility to express emotions, and she was complete with tear glands and taste buds, ready to simulate every human action, from breathing to pulling hair. The bill they sent with her was another miracle, but Dave and I scraped it together; we had to turn Lena over to an exchange to complete it, though, and thereafter we ate out.

I'd performed plenty of delicate operations on living tissues, and some of them had been tricky, but I still felt like a pre-med student as we opened the front plate of her torso and began to sever the leads of her "nerves." Dave's mechanical glands were all prepared, complex little bundles of radio tubes and wires that heterodyned on the electrical thought impulses and distorted them as adrenalin distorts the reaction of human minds.

Instead of sleeping that night, we pored over the schematic diagrams of her structures, tracing the thoughts thought mazes of her wiring, severing the leaders, implanting the heterones, as Dave called them. And while we worked, a mechanical tape fed carefully prepared thoughts of consciousness and awareness of life and feeling into an auxiliary memory coil. Dave believed in leaving nothing to chance.

It was growing light as we finished, exhausted and exultant. All that remained was the starting of her electrical power; like all the Dillard mechs, she was equipped with a tiny atomotor instead of batteries, and once started would need no further attention.

Dave refused to turn her on. "Wait until we've slept and rested," he advised. "I'm as eager to try her as you are, but we can't do much studying with our minds half dead. Turn in, and we'll leave Helen until later."

Even though we were both reluctant to follow it, we knew the idea was sound. We turned in, and sleep hit us before the air-conditioner could cut down to sleeping temperature. And then Dave was pounding on my shoulder.

"Phil! Hey, snap out of it!"

I groaned, turned over, and faced him. "Well? . . . Uh! What is it? Did Helen—"

"No, it's old Mrs. van Styler. She 'visored to say her son has an infatuation for a servant girl, and she wants you to come out and give counter-hormones. They're at the summer camp in Maine."

Rich Mrs. van Styler! I couldn't afford to let that account down, now that Helen had used up the last of my funds. But it wasn't a job I cared for.

"Counter-hormones! That'll take two weeks' full time. Anyway, I'm no society doctor, messing with glands to keep fools happy. My job's taking care of serious trouble."

"And you want to watch Helen." Dave was grinning, but he was serious, too. "I told her it'd cost her fifty thousand!"

"Huh?"

"And she said okay, if you hurried."

Of course, there was only one thing to do, though I could have wrung fat Mrs. van Styler's neck cheerfully. It wouldn't have happened if she'd used robots like everyone else—but she had to be different.

Consequently, while Dave was back home puttering with Helen, I was racking my brain to trick Archy van Styler into getting the counter-hormones, and giving the servant girl the same. Oh, I wasn't supposed to, but the poor kid was crazy about Archy. Dave might have written, I thought, but never a word did I get.

It was three weeks later instead of two when I reported that Archy was "cured," and collected on the line. With that money in my pocket, I hired a personal rocket and was back in Messina in half an hour. I didn't waste time in reaching the house.

As I stepped into the alcove, I heard a light patter of feet, and an eager voice called out, "Dave, dear?" For a minute I couldn't answer, and the voice came again, pleading, "Dave?"

I don't know what I expected, but I didn't expect Helen to meet me that way, stopping and staring at me, obvious disappointment on her face, little hands fluttering up against her breast.

"Oh," she cried. "I thought it was Dave. He hardly comes home to eat now, but I've had supper waiting hours." She dropped her hands and managed a smile. "You're Phil, aren't you? Dave told me about you when . . . at first. I'm so glad to see you home, Phil."

"Glad to see you doing so well, Helen." Now what does one say for light conversation with a robot? "You said something about supper?"

"Oh, yes. I guess Dave ate downtown again, so we might as well go in. It'll be nice having someone to talk to around the house, Phil. You don't mind if I call you Phil, do you? You know, you're sort of a godfather to me."

We ate. I haven't counted on such behavior, but apparently she considered eating as normal as walking. She didn't do much eating, at that; most of the time she spent staring at the front door.

Dave came in as we were finishing, a frown a yard

wide on his face. Helen started to rise, but he ducked toward the stairs, throwing words over his shoulder.

"Hi, Phil. See you up here later."

There was something radically wrong with him. For a moment, I'd thought his eyes were haunted, and as I turned to Helen, hers were filling with tears. She gulped, choked them back, and fell to viciously on her food.

"What's the matter with him . . . and you?" I asked.

"He's sick of me." She pushed her plate away and got up hastily. "You'd better see him while I clean up. And there's nothing wrong with me. And it's not my fault, anyway." She grabbed the dishes and ducked into the kitchen; I could have sworn she was crying.

Maybe all thought is a series of conditioned reflexes —but she certainly had picked up a lot of conditioning while I was gone. Lena in her heyday had been nothing like this. I went up to see if Dave could make any sense out of the hodgepodge.

He was squirting soda into a large glass of apple brandy, and I saw that the bottle was nearly empty. "Join me?" he asked.

It seemed like a good idea. The roaring blast of an ion rocket overhead was the only familiar thing left in the house. From the look around Dave's eyes, it wasn't the first bottle he'd emptied while I was gone, and there were more left. He dug out a new bottle for his own drink.

"Of course, it's none of my business, Dave, but that stuff won't steady your nerves any. What's gotten into you and Helen? Been seeing ghosts?"

Helen was wrong; he hadn't been eating downtown— nor anywhere else. His muscles collapsed into a chair in a way that spoke of fatigue and nerves, but mostly of hunger. "You noticed it, eh?"

"Noticed it? The two of you jammed it down my throat."

"Uhmmm." He swatted at a non-existent fly, and slumped further down in the pneumatic. "Guess maybe I should have waited with Helen until you got back. But if that stereo cast hadn't changed . . . anyway, it did. And those mushy books of yours finished the job."

"Thanks. That makes it all clear."

"You know, Phil, I've got a place up in the country . . . fruit ranch. My dad left it to me. Think I'll look it over."

And that's the way it went. But finally, by much liquor and more perspiration, I got some of the story out of him before I gave him an amytal and put him to bed. Then I hunted up Helen and dug the rest of the story from her, until it made sense.

Apparently as soon as I was gone, Dave had turned her on and made preliminary tests, which were entirely satisfactory. She had reacted beautifully—so well that he decided to leave her and go down to work as usual.

Naturally, with all her untried emotions, she was filled with curiosity, and wanted him to stay. Then he had an inspiration. After showing her what her duties about the house would be, he set her down in front of the stereovisor, tuned in a travelogue, and left her to occupy her time with that.

The travelogue held her attention until it was finished, and the station switched over to a current serial with Larry Ainslee, the same cute emoter who'd given us all the trouble with the twins. Incidentally, he looked something like Dave.

Helen took to the serial like a seal to water. This play acting was a perfect outlet for her newly excited emotions. When that particular episode finished, she found a love story on another station, and added still more to her education. The afternoon programs were mostly news and music, but by then she'd found my books; and I do have rather adolescent taste in literature.

Dave came home in the best of spirits. The front alcove was neatly swept, and there was the odor of food in the air that he'd missed around the house for weeks. He had visions of Helen as the super-efficient housekeeper.

So it was a shock to him to feel too strong arms around his neck from behind and hear a voice all a-quiver coo into his ears, "Oh, Dave, darling, I've missed you so, and I'm so *thrilled* that you're back." Helen's technique may have lacked polish, but it had enthusiasm, as he found when he tried to stop her from kissing him. She had

learned fast and furiously—also, Helen was powered by an atomotor.

Dave wasn't a prude, but he remembered that she was only a robot, after all. The fact that she felt, acted, and looked like a young goddess in his arms didn't mean much. With some effort, he untangled her and dragged her off to supper, where he made her eat with him to divert her attention.

After her evening work, he called her into the study and gave her a thorough lecture on the folly of her ways. It must have been good, for it lasted three solid hours, and covered her station in life, the idiocy of stereos, and various other miscellanies. When he finished, Helen looked up with dewy eyes and said wistfully, "I know, Dave, but I still love you."

That's when Dave started drinking.

It grew worse each day. If he stayed downtown, she was crying when he came home. If he returned on time, she fussed over him and threw herself at him. In his room, with the door locked, he could hear her downstairs pacing up and down and muttering; and when he went down, she stared at him reproachfully until he had to go back up.

I sent Helen out on a fake errand in the morning and got Dave up. With her gone, I made him eat a decent breakfast and gave him a tonic for his nerves. He was still listless and moody.

"Look here, Dave," I broke in on his brooding. "Helen isn't human, after all. Why not cut off her power and change a few memory coils? Then we can convince her that she never was in love and couldn't get that way."

"You try it. I had that idea, but she put up a wail that would wake Homer. She says it would be murder—and the hell of it is that I can't help feeling the same about it. Maybe she isn't human, but you wouldn't guess it when she puts on that martyred look and tells you to go ahead and kill her."

"We never put in substitutes for some of the secretions present in man during the love period."

"I don't know what we put in. Maybe the heterones

backfired or something. Anyway, she's made this idea so much a part of her thoughts that we'd have to put in a whole new set of coils."

"Well, why not?"

"Go ahead. You're the surgeon of this family. I'm not used to fussing with emotions. Matter of fact, since she's been acting this way, I'm beginning to hate work on any robot. My business is going to blazes."

He saw Helen coming up the walk and ducked out the back door for the monorail express. I'd intended to put him back in bed, but let him go. Maybe he'd be better off at his shop than at home.

"Dave's gone?" Helen did have that martyred look now.

"Yeah. I got him to eat, and he's gone to work."

"I'm glad he ate." She slumped down in a chair as if she were worn out, though how a mech could be tired beat me. "Phil?"

"Well, what is it?"

"Do you think I'm bad for him? I mean, do you think he'd be happier if I weren't here?"

"He'll go crazy if you keep acting this way around him."

She winced. Those little hands were twisting about pleadingly, and I felt like an inhuman brute. But I'd started, and I went ahead. "Even if I cut out your power and changed your coils, he'd probably still be haunted by you."

"I know. But I can't help it. And I'd make him a good wife, really I would, Phil."

I gulped; this was getting a little too far. "And give him strapping sons to boot, I suppose. A man wants flesh and blood, not rubber and metal."

"Don't, please! I can't think of myself that way; to me, I'm a woman. And you know how perfectly I'm made to imitate a real woman . . . in all ways. I couldn't give him sons, but in every other way . . . I'd try so hard, I know I'd make him a good wife."

I gave up.

Dave didn't come home that night, nor the next day. Helen was fussing and fuming, wanting me to call the hospitals and the police, but I knew nothing had happened

to him. He always carried identification. Still, when he didn't come on the third day, I began to worry. And when Helen started out for his shop, I agreed to go with her.

Dave was there, with another man I didn't know. I parked Helen where he couldn't see her, but where she could hear, and went in as soon as the other fellow left.

Dave looked a little better and seemed glad to see me. "Hi, Phil—just closing up. Let's go eat."

Helen couldn't hold back any longer, but came trooping in. "Come on home, Dave. I've got roast duck with spice stuffing, and you know you love that."

"Scat!" said Dave. She shrank back, turned to go. "Oh, all right, stay. You might as well hear it, too. I've sold the shop. The fellow you saw just bought it, and I'm going up to the old fruit ranch I told you about, Phil. I can't stand the mechs any more."

"You'll starve to death at that," I told him.

"No, there's a growing demand for old-fashioned fruit, raised out of doors. People are tired of this water-culture stuff. Dad always made a living out of it. I'm leaving as soon as I can get home and pack."

Helen clung to her idea. "I'll pack, Dave, while you eat. I've got apple cobbler for dessert." The world was toppling under her feet, but she still remembered how crazy he was for apple cobbler.

Helen was a good cook; in fact she was a genius, with all the good points of a woman and a mech combined. Dave ate well enough, after he got started. By the time supper was over, he'd thawed out enough to admit he liked the duck and cobbler, and to thank her for packing. In fact, he even let her kiss him good-bye, though he firmly refused to let her go to the rocket field with him.

Helen was trying to be brave when I got back, and we carried on a stumbling conversation about Mrs. van Styler's servants for a while. But the talk began to lull, and she sat staring out of the window at nothing most of the time. Even the stereo comedy lacked interest for her, and I was glad enough to have her go off to her room. She could cut her power down to simulate sleep when she chose.

As the days slipped by, I began to realize why she couldn't believe herself a robot. I got to thinking of her as a girl and companion myself. Except for odd intervals when she went off by herself to brood, or when she kept going to the telescript for a letter that never came, she was as good a companion as a man could ask. There was something homey about the place that Lena had never put there.

I took Helen on a shopping trip to Hudson and she giggled and purred over the wisps of silk and glassheen that were the fashion, tried on endless hats, and conducted herself as any normal girl might. We went trout fishing for a day, where she proved to be as good a sport and as sensibly silent as a man. I thoroughly enjoyed myself and thought she was forgetting Dave. That was before I came home unexpectedly and found her doubled up on the couch, threshing her legs up and down and crying to the high heavens.

It was then I called Dave. They seemed to have trouble in reaching him, and Helen came over beside me while I waited. She was tense and fidgety as an old maid trying to propose. But finally they located Dave.

"What's up, Phil?" he asked as his face came on the viewplate. "I was just getting my things together to——"

I broke him off. "Things can't go on the way they are, Dave. I've made up my mind. I'm yanking Helen's coils tonight. It won't be worse than what she's going through now."

Helen reached up and touched my shoulder. "Maybe that's best, Phil. I don't blame you."

Dave's voice cut in. "Phil, you don't know what you're doing!"

"Of course, I do. It'll all be over by the time you can get here. As you heard, she's agreeing."

There was a black cloud sweeping over Dave's face. "I won't have it, Phil. She's half mine and I forbid it!"

"Of all the——"

"Go ahead, call me anything you want. I've changed my mind. I was packing to come home when you called."

Helen jerked around me, her eyes glued to the panel. "Dave, do you . . . are you——"

"I'm just waking up to what a fool I've been, Helen. Phil, I'll be home in a couple of hours, so if there's anything——"

He didn't have to chase me out. But I heard Helen cooing something about loving to be a rancher's wife before I could shut the door.

Well, I wasn't as surprised as they thought. I think I knew when I called Dave what would happen. No man acts the way Dave had been acting because he hates a girl; only because he thinks he does—and thinks wrong.

No woman ever made a lovelier bride or a sweeter wife. Helen never lost her flare for cooking and making a home. With her gone, the old house seemed empty, and I began to drop out to the ranch once or twice a week. I suppose they had trouble at times, but I never saw it, and I know the neighbors never suspected they were anything but normal man and wife.

Dave grew older, and Helen didn't, of course. But between us, we put lines in her face and grayed her hair without letting Dave know that she wasn't growing old with him; he'd forgotten that she wasn't human, I guess.

I practically forgot, myself. It wasn't until a letter came from Helen this morning that I woke up to reality. There, in her beautiful script, just a trifle shaky in places, was the inevitable that neither Dave nor I had seen.

Dear Phil,

As you know, Dave has had heart trouble for several years now. We expected him to live on just the same, but it seems that wasn't to be. He died in my arms just before sunrise. He sent you his greetings and farewell.

I've one last favor to ask of you, Phil. There is only one thing for me to do when this is finished. Acid will burn out metal as well as flesh, and I'll be dead with Dave. Please see that we are buried together, and that the morticians do not find my secret. Dave wanted it that way, too.

Poor, dear Phil. I know you loved Dave as a brother, and how you felt about me. Please don't

grieve too much for us, for we have had a happy life together, and both feel that we should cross this last bridge side by side.

With love and thanks from,

Helen.

It had to come sooner or later, I suppose, and the first shock has worn off now. I'll be leaving in a few minutes to carry out Helen's last instructions.

Dave was a lucky man, and the best friend I ever had. And Helen—Well, as I said, I'm an old man now, and can view things more sanely; I should have married and raised a family, I suppose. But . . . there was only one Helen O'Loy.

The Renegade

HARVEY LANE squatted just inside the door of the chief's thatched hut, his outward attention divided between the chief's laborious attempts to sew on a button belonging to Lane's only pair of shorts and the life in the village itself. Outwardly, it was little different from that of any other inland African community, though the cleanliness and the absence of a constant confused babble were strange, as was the lack of yapping cur dogs underfoot. But to anyone else, the huge females busy at their gardening or making the crude artifacts possible with the material at hand, the playing young, and the bulky guards squatting in the lower branches around would have been distinctly not normal.

Lane was used to it. In eight years a man can become completely accustomed to anything, even the sight of some hundreds of gorillas busy at work that would normally be man's. He knew every one of the hairy, heavily muscled apes out there, so well that he no longer saw their faces as ugly things, but as the individual countenances of friends and students. Now he leaned further back, brushing against a muscular shoulder while one of the bulls in the hut flicked a fan back and forth to keep the flies off his hairless hide until the chief fin-

ished the sewing and he could put on his tattered shorts again.

Ajub, the chief, had been thinking; now he picked up the conversation again, his voice thick and slow, and the consonants sometimes destorted; but his speech in the English for which they had so gladly exchanged their own primitive, unexpressive tongue was no worse than could be found in parts of the larger man-cities. "It was about fifty years ago, I think, when we decided to come here and build a village away from all the blacks; we'd been trying to learn from them before that for maybe a hundred years, but all they showed for us was hatred, fear, and a desire to kill us and eat us, so we gave it up as hopeless; the harder we tried, the more afraid they became. And the one white man we'd seen before you came hadn't been exactly friendly. He killed several of our tribe before we were forced to eliminate him and his group. Beyond that, our memory and our poor speech give no clue. Are these mutations really common, Lane?"

"Fairly, though I think they're a hit-or-miss proposition, Ajub; it's a matter of blind luck when one is useful and dominant enough to be passed on." Lane reached toward the basket of dried fruits, and one of the gorillas handed it to him, plucking an insect from the man's shirt carefully. "There must have been a lot of mutations running around the tribe before they all concentrated in the one offspring, and he passed them down, with his children spreading the combination further. Even then, it's hard to realize that you changed from a bunch of savage beasts like the other gorillas into a race at least as intelligent as man in less than five hundred years! Wish I knew more about the subject of mutations."

"Our good luck is that you know as much as you do about so many things. Before, we groped blindly for the truths without even realizing the order of nature, yet now we may be able to build on your knowledge in time—— Here, I can't do any better with these unskilled hands." The chief handed the shorts back, and his words concealed none of his pride in having accom-

plished it at all. While the younger members of the tribe were showing surprising dexterity, even to the learning of a fine style of script writing, the oldsters approached delicate work with much determination and little skill. "And if you're to have your supper, we'd better begin the hunt. What would you like?"

Lane considered. "Antelope, I guess; a good broiled antelope steak would be fine. And watch out for the cats."

He grinned at Ajub's grunt, and watched the massive apes go out after their leader, some armed with bows having two-hundred-pound pulls, others with the throwing sticks and spears Lane had taught them to make and use recently. Ajub carried the latter, and the man was well aware that the lions would stand small chance against such a combination of weapon, intelligence and muscle. He'd seen the chief toss the twelve-pound spear a good five hundred feet, to pierce cleanly through a full-grown lion and pin it to the earth on the other side. Antelope steaks for supper were a certainty.

He was useless on a hunt, being too weak and too clumsy, so he remained where he was, squatted comfortably in the sunlight, exchanging greetings with the few who passed the door of the hut, calling out occasional instructions to Ajub's youngest wife as she began grinding grain in a mortar. Off at the side, he could see a group of middle-aged bulls at work, slowly chipping and burning out two heavy wooden wheels for a new cart, and he wished briefly that he could locate a vein of metal ore somewhere to give them better tools. Still, they almost made up in muscle for the quality of the instruments they used. Beyond, another younger bull was laboriously constructing a solid-log hut on pioneer lines to prove to a young female that he would make a fine mate. Lane leaned back against the frame of the door lazily, chewing on the sun-dried fruits.

The old days were gone; the play-boy reputation, the smutty divorce trial Linda had put him through, the drunken orgy of forgetfulness were all a part of some remote past. He'd been a failure there, as he'd been on the crazy hunting expedition into this country, and the

still crazier idea of tracking down the legends of the blacks that dealt with the "wild men of the woods" without the help of experienced guides. He'd been such a fool that his only answer to the superstitious fears of the blacks had been the promise of more money later. Well, he learned better when he awoke to find himslf alone, with only his rifle beside him, holding two forlorn cartridges.

Now *that* Harvey Lane was dead; he'd died while stumbling on in a fever that carried him into the little village of the gorillas, who'd tended and healed him before his delirium was over and he could realize they were other than normal. Here, now, Harvey Lane was greater even than the chief, the teacher of the young and the old who wanted avidly to learn, living in the chief's own hut and fed by the chief's spear. From early morning to mid-afternoon, he taught them all he could, and from then on he loafed or did as he pleased. The village was his to command, and the miserable failure had become the lord high priest of knowledge, who knew that the stars were other suns and that the dust under their feet was made up of countless atoms.

Little Tama entered the square, interrupting Lane's reverie as he came plunging toward the hut, dragging some heavy box behind him. "Teacher!"

"Not now, Tama. School's over. I'll tell you about germs again tomorrow. Go and play now." His largest trouble was in holding their eager minds to any reasonable limits—quite different from the problems of most of the teachers he had known.

But Tama was unwilling to be dismissed this time. He fidgeted, unhappy at disobeying his oracle, but filled with the importance of what he had to tell. "Teacher, I found something! I think it's full of *books!*"

"Huh?" The only book in the village was a small first-aid handbook he'd had with him, almost worn out from too much handling. "Where, Tama?"

"In this box." The young ape ripped some of the boarding away further and pointed to the contents, throwing his hundred and fifty pounds about excitedly as

Lane drew the object back inside the hut and examined it. It was a heavy wooden box, obviously from the outside world, judging by the letters that were now illegible, stamped onto the sides.

Quickly, he indicated that Tama should pull all the cover off, his eyes darting down to the regular row of objects revealed. "*Encyclopedia Britannica!* Lord, Tama, they *are* books; they're the collection of all man's knowledge. Where'd you find this?"

"Dead black man came down the river in a boat, like the boats that went up two months ago. I thought you'd like it, teacher, so I swam out and pulled it to the shore." His eyes darted up, and Lane nodded quick approval, knowing the aversion they felt toward the water. "The books were inside the boat, under the black man; I threw him away and brought the box to you."

Nothing is surprising in Africa; Lane had seen chiefs wearing alarm clocks tied around their heads for crowns, had met others with Oxford accents, and had stopped wondering at their idiosyncrasies; probably one had ordered the encyclopedia, only to have it stolen from him. Or possibly it had been robbed from a safari under some white. Whatever its source, he was struck only by the singular good luck that had brought it drifting down the stream and sent little Tama out to collect it; here it was the treasure of all treasures.

"Good boy, Tama; Ajub himself will give you a spear for this, and I'll answer all your questions for a month. Anything else in the canoe?"

"A few things, teacher. The boat is on the river bank, if you want to look."

Lane nodded, following the pleased and excited little ape through the village toward the river. He nodded at the guards, received an answering grunt that told him the river trail was safe, and went on, picking up a child's spear that was light enough for him to handle. Normally, the river was deserted, but occasionally a canoe or more of blacks went up or down it, hurrying to get out of this country, painted so darkly in their superstitions; then the apes avoided showing themselves, or were careful to appear the simple brutes that they seemed.

Tama, he reflected, must have been disobeying orders when he sneaked out to watch the river while the guards knew from their outposts several miles up that there was a canoe coming. But he said nothing to the ape-child as they trotted down the trail, trying to imagine the expression the chief's face would take when he returned and found a whole set of encyclopedia waiting for him. Lane had mentioned such books before often enough when his little fund of general knowledge was exhausted. Then the short trail ended, and Tama ran forward quickly, dragging the canoe further onto the bank.

"See, teacher. I only moved the black man and the box."

Mostly, the contents were such junk as any black native might acquire, bits of trade cloth, a few cheap beads, a copper bracelet, and a small collection of rotting foodstuff that Lane threw hastily into the river. Under that was the stained, dirty shoe of a white woman; a size three, too small for any native! He picked it up slowly, reluctantly turning it over in his hands without hearing the questioning babble of Tama. A silly little gold dancing slipper, size three, triple A, lost on this savage continent, carrying with it all the giddy folly of the woman who must have worn it once. A small, lithe woman, probably young, wearing a toeless shoe with a long spike heel, laughing and dancing in some white city, drinking and flirting, and gossiping as Linda had back in New York when he'd been foolish enough to think she loved him instead of the fortune his father had left him.

For a moment, as he held it, he imagined that a trace of some faint feminine perfume lingered on it, over the stinking smell of the canoe. The illusion passed, but the memories caught at him and held, even when the shoe fell from his hand into the current of the water and went drifting off, sinking slowly. Girls, women, clubs, dances, parties—the rhythm of a jazz band, the laughter of a crowd, the excitement of New Year's Eve in Times Square, Madison Square Garden—the mocking twist of a girl's face avoiding a kiss she'd give willingly later; the rustle of silken cloth, and the smooth outlines of a feminine back in evening dress; the sound of a laugh coming

from the bath as he waited for her; the sudden look that could pass between two people over a drink as they sat at a bar! Women, horse-races, laughter, music—the purely human part of civilization!

"Teacher?" Tama's voice was puzzled, and he plucked at the man's sleeve doubtfully.

Lane straightened, brushing the silly tears from his eyes and trying vainly to kill the ache that ran through him, knowing he could not. "It's all right, Tama."

But he knew it wasn't. He knew that, even before his feet carried him forward and his arms reached for the prow of the canoe, too heavy to move by himself. Tama saw him try, and the young ape leaped forward, only too happy to help in any way he could. The boat slithered and slipped into the river, while Lane's feet lifted over the side and he settled in it, his face pointing down the river, his hands reaching unconsciously for the paddle. Tama started to clamber in, but he shook his head quickly. "No, Tama."

"Why, teacher?"

"Because I'm going away, Tama, and you can't go where I must. Tell Ajub the books can serve him better than I could and that I've gone back to my people! Goodbye, Tama!"

"Teacher! Don't go! Come back!" It was an anguished wail, as the ape-child leaped up and down on the bank, but the boat was sliding away, already out of reach. Lane sighed softly, glancing back and waving at the bend in the stream, before he lost sight of the familiar landmarks. But from behind him still, he heard the wail of the ape. "Teacher, come back! Don't go away, teacher! Come back!"

The sound seemed to haunt Lane during the short time that day was still with him; then it vanished into the jungle night, muffled by the calls of the great cats and the constant murmur of the stream. His shoulders ached dully, moving the paddle steadily, drifting and driving the canoe onward. His stomach was empty, but it never reached a conscious level. He hunched forward as he stroked, unaware of fatigue or hunger, not knowing at

the moment that there was anything except the tumult of emotions inside him.

Somewhere, the river had to flow into a lake or the sea, and before that there'd be white men. Africa was by no means entirely explored, but the whites were everywhere, save for such scattered little places, unimportant and uninviting, as the tribe had chosen. The whites might be only a hundred miles away or a thousand, but the stream flowed toward them, carrying him onward at perhaps seventy miles a day, in addition to the impulse of his paddling.

He stopped once to approach the shore and locate a clearer section, where a tiny stream joined the larger one. There he leaned over and quenched his thirst, grasping the low limb of a tree to steady the canoe. Twice, fruit overhung the water, and he gathered in handfuls of it, storing it in front of him, then going on, begrudging the time taken in eating it.

He was still paddling onward when the sun rose again, quieting the cries of the carnivores, and filling the air with life. He ate hastily of the fruit, drank again from water that was none too clean, barely avoiding the form of a snake that had crawled out on a branch, and picked up the paddle to go on. A crocodile opened its jaws and snapped within inches of the blade, but he barely saw it.

Fatigue could not be avoided or ignored forever, though, and he was finally forced to pull in his paddle to keep from dropping it overboard out of numb fingers. He slipped down into the boat, letting the sleep roll over him, waking only fitfully when the boat drifted into the quiet shallows along the sides, sending it out again into the main stream, and going back to his crazy dreams. Even in sleep, the onward drive possessed him completely.

Another night came, and his paddle rose and fell monotonously until it gave place to day, and the heat and fatigue forced him to stop again. And a third night was going when the little river opened onto a larger stream, with a swarm of native huts stinking up the air near the joining point. Some of the blacks saw him and yelled, but there was no sign of whites near them, and

he lifted the paddle once, then dug it into the water and drifted beyond the smell of the village. At least he was reaching populated country, and white men must be near, somewhere.

That day, he paddled on, unmindful of fatigue, noting other villages along the way. Once a canoe shoved out from shore, but turned back after a short chase, whether friendly or otherwise. The chief had been wearing a high hat, and there was no longer any doubt as to the nearness of his own people! Sluggishly, hour after hour, he sat there paddling, not even stopping to drink the dirty water; his supply of fruit was exhausted, and there was none at hand, but he shrugged the hunger aside. Always, one more hour might bring him to a settlement.

The stink of another village had come and gone when he heard the splashing of many paddles behind him; looking back, he saw the river filled with three boats, each carrying about a score of the blacks, yelling something in a native language full of labials as they saw him turn. Whatever it was, it sounded far from friendly, and he spurred his efforts, trying to leave them behind. Even in semi-civilized parts of Africa, a lone white man might be more valued for his possible possessions than for the civilization his race brings unasked.

The paddles behind him drew nearer, and he knew he had no chance against their well-manned boats, but there was still some hope that he might get beyond the distance they were willing to pursue. Then a short spear with a long notched iron point slipped by within inches of his shoulder. Apparently they waited after that to see whether he would pick up a gun and return their fire, but took heart as he made no sign of doing so. Other spears began coming toward him, one striking the rear of the canoe and shivering there, half-spinning him about in the river.

He gritted his teeth, hunching low and throwing his weary shoulder muscles into the paddling, wondering whether cannibalism had entirely died out. If only a white would appear somewhere, or some other village into which he could turn on the chance that they might be friendly! The river remained bare ahead.

They had ceased throwing spears, probably waiting to

get closer for a better chance, and he stole a brief glance backward, to see a man standing in the front of each canoe, his spear raised. As Lane looked, the leading one drew his arm back with a quick jerk.

It missed by scant inches as he dropped into the canoe, the paddle slipping from his blistered hands! Then, a roar seemed to split the air from the river bank, and there came the sound of a savage thump from behind him, followed by a splashing of the water and the confused, frightened shouts of the blacks. He raised his head to see something go flashing into a second boat, ripping it open below the water line, just as their third spear slid across his forehead in a savage lance of pain!

Then he was dropping back again, feeling consciousness run out of him in slow lingering waves, while warm blood poured down his face and mixed with the filth at the bottom of the canoe. Either the boats behind had ceased paddling, or his ears no longer heard them. Vaguely he wondered what had caused the havoc he'd glimpsed, but the thought was fading as it entered his mind, and the blackness won over it. The canoe drifted on, bumping into shallows, twisting about, sometimes hitting midstream and rushing along. Flies hovered over it, but they no longer could bother him. Only the shallow rise and fall of his breast attested to life. The next day found him still drifting, but now the red flush of fever was spread across his face, and he moaned and twisted, reaching futile hands toward the water around him, only to drop back weakly.

There must have been moments of semi-consciousness. Dimly he was aware of shouting and jarring, of being lifted out of the canoe and being carried somewhere by gentle hands. And there was the sound of speech around him at times, something soft under him into which he sank, and some dim feminine face. But such things were all clouded with dream-phantoms and the sound of his own voice rambling on and on. A vague sense of passing time struck him, and he was somehow aware of days going by slowly.

At least his surroundings came as no surprise to Lane

on the tenth day, when the fever vanished suddenly, leaving him weak and sickened, but lucid and free of its grip. Above him, the face of a middle-aged woman—a white woman—drifted around a room filled with the marks of civilization. She was dressed in light clothes, and there was a faint rustle of cloth as she moved, a fainter odor of some inexpensive perfume, now only a ghost left from the last time she'd used it. Weakness hit harder at him, and he fought to hold his eyes open as she brought a bowl of some broth and began feeding it to him carefully. Seeing that his eyes were open and intelligent, again, she smiled, propping his head further up on the pillows, brushing the hair back over his forehead, where only a trace of pain marked the cut made by the spear.

"Where——"

"Shush! You're among friends here, Mr. Lane. We found your canoe by luck and we've been taking care of you; you'll be all right in another week—just the fever and the loss of blood. One more swallow—that's it. You mustn't talk now, though; just relax and go to sleep again. Everything's going to be all right."

The words, the feminine voice, the smile all lingered in his mind after she closed the door; he lay quietly on the bed, savoring the feeling of being among his own kind. But the sleep would not come, though he closed his eyes and tried to obey her; he heard the door open once, to close quickly, and her voice whispering beyond it in answer to a faint question. "He's asleep, Sam. Poor devil!"

People; his people! Men and women who talked too much about things that were of no consequence, laughed when there was no reason, cried when they felt no pain—weak, puny, silly creatures like himself, climbing and erratically upward to the sound of their own idle chatter!

It was too much to put into words as he lay there, watching the moon stream in through a screen window and wash over the bedding, across the room and onto some picture handing on the wall. He sank deeper into the bedding, letting the idea seep in slowly, and the men's voices outside were only a background to it at first, until his own name caught his attention.

It was a rough, good-natured voice, probably the man to whom the woman had spoken before. "Imagine Lane out in that over eight years, Harper; it's a miracle he got back at all, without going insane for good. Wonder how he'll find life now, though?"

"Meaning?" The second voice was younger, sure of itself, arrogant in a cultured sort of way that indicated mostly a carelessness at ordinary weaknesses.

"Meaning things have changed for the man; you know —he's been declared legally dead, of course. He used to be quite a character, from the newspaper accounts I read when I was visiting my sister in America. But by this time, most of his fortune's been split up and spent, and I don't know whether he can get hold of enough to live on now. Certainly, not the way he used to. Then there's the war past and gone unknown, with a few changes. It'll be a funny world to him, with most of his friends changed and grown away from him."

"Yeah, I suppose so. But it can't be any stranger than what he's been through, Livy."

"Ummm." The tone was doubtful, but they were quiet then, a faint odor of tobacco drifting in through the netting over the windows. Harvey Lane lay still, turning it over in his mind and listening for more words that did not come.

He hadn't thought of all that, of course, but he should have. When he didn't come back the vultures would have lost no time in swooping in to claim his money; and knowing them, he could believe Sam Livy's doubt as to how much would be left. What the taxes and lawyers had left would be gone long before this. Still, he wondered how much that mattered to him.

The ring on his finger still would secure passage back with a few hundred dollars to spare. After that, he'd worry about it as it came, even though he possessed no skills with which to earn his living; life among the apes had stripped him of the false standards of living, and had hardened him and left him with no fear of work, had taught him the appreciation of simplicity. He'd make out; how didn't matter, as long as he was among his own kind again.

Harper's brisk voice picked up the conversation outside. "Guess I'll be pulling out tomorrow, Livy. The boys are all ready, and the group I'm leading is sort of anxious to get started. Hope it's not entirely a fool trip."

"I wouldn't bet on it; the man's been through hell, and it may all be delirious ravings, like that nonsense about the gorilla tribe speaking the purest English!"

"I'll take a chance on it. At worst, it's a new country and there should be plenty of game there. Anyhow, there was that Frenchman who spent a couple of years among a bunch of gorillas without being hurt—that seems to be on the level. Maybe Lane did live among 'em for a while, probably getting them and a tribe of blacks who rescued him later all mixed up, with some other things thrown in. I'm betting he did, since some of the things he kept muttering make it pretty plain he knows a good bit about the habits of the apes!"

There was the sound of a match striking, then Harper's voice went on again. "Besides, it isn't such a long trek, and all we have to do is follow the river, the way he indicated. If there are no gorillas, we'll have a nice trip, and the would-be big game hunters with me will get their fill; if the gorillas are there, I'll get me a couple of nice pelts for mounting, and with luck maybe capture a couple of young ones. They'll fetch a sweet price if the hair's as light a red as Lane was raving about."

"Well, I wish you luck, but——"

"No luck needed, Livy. With the equipment we've got, a dozen tribes of gorillas as smart as he made out wouldn't worry us, and I'll get mine, one way or another. I figure we can leave here . . ."

But Lane wasn't listening then. He was seeing old Ajub mounted in a museum, his gray-speckled red pelt stuffed, with a placard under it; and he was thinking of little Tama crying in a cage somewhere, while fools debated whether an ape could be intelligent; or little Tama being examined by scientists to determine his ability to think, while searching parties went out to bring in more of these curious anthropoids. Oh, they'd fetch a wonderful price, all right!

Perhaps it was logical that man should brook no rivals to his supremacy. But in any event, the outcome was certain. Even the primitives of his own race had fared badly enough, and the apes, no matter how intelligent, would remain only curious beasts, unprotected by any man-law, and sought for by every showman and theorist in the world.

Very slowly, without noise, he slid out from under the bedding, forcing himself to his feet in spite of the weakness that ran over him. For a moment it seemed that he might faint, but that passed; while his knees shook under him and the room seemed to spin around him, he conquered himself enough to stand alone and to move toward the closet the moonlight revealed. Inside there were clothes which did not belong to him, but which fitted him well enough, and he drew them on, supporting himself against a wall.

The silhouettes of the two men on the porch were undisturbed as he glanced about, and he scanned the room hurriedly for a rifle or automatic, but saw none; he dared not venture into other rooms. There were few things that would be of value to him, save a basket of fruit and candies, but he stuffed his pockets with them, forcing the too-sweet homemade stuff down to provide the energy he needed. Finished, he ripped aside the netting over the back window, being careful to muffle the sound, and let himself drop shakily to the ground below, hanging onto the window frame and forcing himself to cling to his consciousness.

He rejected the use of a canoe, knowing that he could never paddle even a light one up the river. Beyond, in the stables, a horse whinnied softly, and he debated chancing that, but gave the idea up; he would be too easily seen leading one away, and he was in no condition for a wild chase. Besides, the horses might give the alarm if a stranger approached them, and his only chance lay in stealth.

Picking the deeper shadows, he crept out away from the house and toward the gate of the compound, now guarded by a sleeping blackboy. The snores continued

undisturbed as he let himself out, and the great continent lay before him. To one side, he saw the river and headed for it, knowing that he must stay beside it and follow it back the way he had come.

It was an utterly stupid business without the faintest hope of success, and his rational mind knew that. Even if he could stand the long trip, and avoid all carnivores and hostile blacks without losing his way, it was an almost impossible task, with no equipment or food. Besides, Harper and his crowd would be pushing on rapidly, probably doubling the distance he could cover in a day. And there was always the possibility that they would decide to trail him, believing he had wandered off in a fit of delirium; on horseback, they could catch up with him in short order.

He forged ahead as rapidly as he could, leaving the last signs of the white quarters behind and picking his way along the rough trail that ran beside the river, limiting his stops for rest to the briefest time he could. Here the moon shone fitfully, brilliant at times and hidden by trees at others. He had no way of knowing what dangers were lurking around him in the jungle that began beside the trail, and he disregarded them; if he had to die, then he would, but at least he could make the attempt.

Then, off to the side and behind, he heard something moving through the strip of jungle; the sound was of one animal, and a large one, moving with some stealth, but not overly worried about noise. For a moment, he considered climbing upward out of reach of whatever it was, but it was nearly day, and probably only a lion making its way home after a night's feeding. The fact that he could hear it with his comparatively untrained ears was encouraging, for he knew the cats could move silently when they chose. He got to his feet, chewing on more of the candy, and continued onward grimly.

The sound came again, this time slightly nearer; maybe that lion, if such it was, was going home hungry instead of after feeding. Sometimes when bad luck had bothered them, they were quite willing to vary their diet with a little human meat, though this seemed rather close to the

guns of the whites for a man-eater. He was staring back down the trail, trying to see his pursuer, when his name was called.

"Lane! Harvey Lane!" It came now from the side, muffled from its passage through the jungle growth, the sound of the creature he had heard before accompanying it. Jerking around, he set his eyes frantically to darting about, but he could see nothing. So they'd found him, already, and were probably surrounding him carefully on the theory that he was mad! He slipped to the side of the trail, hoping to find a place where he could hide, and knowing he'd have no chance, when the voice came again, this time closer. "Teacher!"

"Ajub!" And even as he spoke, the great ape stepped quietly onto the trail in front of him, the huge spear poised easily, and several others carried in a sling.

"Hello, Lane! I thought those were your tracks leading away from the place back there when I smelled them, though I couldn't be sure with all the various human scents around. You have no business unarmed out here!"

Lane sank down on the ground, relief and fresh fear coursing through him at the thousand ideas the ape's presence brought to his mind. "Ajub, those people—the other whites—they're organizing a hunting expedition against your kind. I babbled in my fever, and they're probably already started."

The heavy-featured face betrayed no emotion. "I know. I found a way to get close to their huts, and I've been listening to the plans. It doesn't matter."

"But they're well equipped this time; you can't eliminate them all!"

"Naturally. But they won't find our village; another bull came with me, and I've sent him back with the word. He'll have us moved out to another place we found long ago, and an even better hiding place. When your friends reach the old one, there'll be only a piece of burned-over ground, with no trail behind to betray us."

The load that lifted from Lane's shoulders then was almost physical, and he climbed to his feet again, with the help of one of Ajub's muscular arms. "Why'd you

follow me, Ajub? You had the books, and they hold more knowledge in better form than I can give you. You had no need of recapturing me!"

"Nor intention; you were free to leave us any time you wished, Lane—I thought you always knew that." Ajub shook his heavy head, rattling the big spears on his back. "Physically, you're only a child to us, you know, and you needed protection; we were merely serving as your bodyguard down the banks of the river. If we hadn't, those blacks in their canoes would have captured you, too. And after you were found, sick and raving about us, I naturally stayed."

Lane should have known that only Ajub's people could have broken up the canoes at their distance from the shore, without the sound of guns; but he'd had no time to think of the incident since. He felt the tender scar tissue on his forehead, grimacing, and shrugged. "You might as well have let them succeed—then I couldn't have betrayed you to the whites! Well, get it over with!"

"What?"

"Your vengeance. It's what you stayed for, isn't it? I guess I'd do the same, so you don't need to pass judgment before the execution!"

For a minute, Ajub stared at him stupidly, an almost human grin of amusement creeping over his face. "No, Harvey Lane; I stayed to give you directions for finding us if you ever wanted to, again. Here, I've drawn a map of the new route as best I can. Now let me carry you home to your friends before I go back to mine."

He picked Lane up as he might have handled a child, slinging him easily across one huge shoulder and trotting down the trail, his other hand touching the ground as he ran. And slowly the man relaxed, mentally as well as physically, for the first time in days.

"Ajub," he said quietly into the ape's ear, "you've got your directions twisted. According to this map you've drawn, my friends are north of here—a long ways north."

He heard the chief's sudden chuckle, felt the strong old body swing around and head the other way in the same effortless stride that ate up the miles without haste,

and then he was sleeping peacefully, his head half-buried in the grayish-red fur beneath him. Ajub smiled widely and moved gently, but the distance shortened between them and home.

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The Wings of Night

"DAMN ALL MARTIANS!" Fats Welch's thin mouth bit out the words with all the malice of an offended member of a superior race. "Here we are, loaded down with as sweet a high-rate cargo of iridium as ever came out of the asteroids, just barely over the moon, and that injector starts mismetering again. If I ever see that bulbous Marshy——"

"Yeah." Slim Lane groped back with his right hand for the flexible-shaft wrench, found it, and began wriggling and grunting forward into the mess of machinery again. "Yeah. I know. You'll make mince meat out of him. Did you ever figure that maybe you were making your own trouble? That maybe Martians are people after all? Lyro Bmachis told you it would take two days to make the overhaul of the injector control hookup, so you knocked him across the field, called his ancestors dirty dogs, and gave him just eight hours to finish repairs. Now you expect his rush job to be a labor of love for you—— Oh, skip it, Fats, and give me the screwdriver."

What was the use? He'd been over it all with Fats a dozen times before, and it never got him anywhere. Fats was a good rocket man, but he couldn't stretch his imagination far enough to forget the hogwash the Reconstruction Empire was dishing out about the Destiny of Man and the Divine Plan whereby humans were created to exploit all other races. Not that it would do Fats

much good if he did. Slim knew the value of idealism—none better.

He'd come out of college with a bad dose of it and an inherited fortune big enough for three men, filled with the old crusading spirit. He'd written and published books, made speeches, interviewed administrators, lobbied, joined and organized societies, and been called things that weren't complimentary. Now he was pushing freight from Mars to Earth for a living, quarter owner of a space-worn freighter. And Fats, who'd come up from a tube cleaner without the help of ideals, owned the other three quarters.

Fats watched him climb out of the hold. "Well?"

"Nothing. I can't fix it—don't know enough about electronics. There's something wrong with the relays that control the time interval, but the indicators don't show where, and I'd hate to experiment out here."

"Make it to Earth—maybe?"

Slim shook his head. "I doubt it, Fats. Better set us down on Luna somewhere, if you can handle her that far. Then maybe we can find out what's wrong before we run out of air."

Fats had figured as much and was already braking the ship down, working against the spasmodic flutter of the blasts, and swearing at the effects of even the moon's weak gravity. But the screens showed that he was making progress toward the spot he'd chosen—a small flat plain with an area in the center that seemed unusually clear of debris and pockmarks.

"Wish they'd at least put up an emergency station out here," he muttered.

"They had one once," Slim said. "But nobody ever goes to Luna, and there's no reason for passenger ships to land there; takes less fuel for them to coast down on their fins through Earth's atmosphere than to jet down here. Freighters like us don't count, anyway. Funny how regular and flat that place is; we can't be over a mile up, and I don't see even a meteor scar."

"Luck's with us, then. I'd hate to hit a baby crater and rip off a tube or poke a hole in the shell." Fats

glanced at the radio altimeter and fall indicator. "We're gonna hit plenty hard. If——Hey, what the deuce!"

Slim's eyes flicked to the screen just in time to see the flat plain split into two halves and slide smoothly out from under them as they seemed about to touch it; then they were dropping slowly into a crater of some sort, seemingly bottomless and widening out rapidly; the roar of the tubes picked up suddenly. Above them, the overscreens showed a pair of translucent slides closing together again. His eyes stared at the height indicator, neither believing nor doubting.

"Hundred and sixty miles down and trapped in! Tube sounds show air in some amount, at least, even up here. This crazy trap can't be here. There's no reason for it."

"Right now, who cares? We can't go through that slide up there again, so we go down and find out, I guess. Damn, no telling what kind of landing field we'll find when we reach bottom." Fats' lack of excess imagination came in handy in cases like this. He went about the business of jockeying down the enormous crater as if he were docking at York port, too busy with the uncertain blast to worry about what he might find at the bottom. Slim gazed at him in wonder, then fell back to staring at the screen for some indication of the reason behind this obviously artificial trap.

Lhin scratched idly through the pile of dirt and rotten shale, pried a thin scrap of reddened stone out from where his eyes had missed it the first time, and rose slowly to his feet. The Great Ones had been good to him, sending a rockslide just when the old beds were wearing thin and poor from repeated digging. His sensitive nostrils told him there was magnesium, ferrous matter, and sulphur in abundance, all more than welcome. Of course, he'd hoped there might be copper, even as little as the end of his finger, but of that there seemed to be no sign. And without copper——

He shrugged the thought aside as he had done a thousand times before, and picked up his crude basket, now filled half with broken rock and half with the lichenlike growth that filled this end of the crater. One of his hands

ground a bit of rottenstone together with shreds of lichen and he popped the mixture into his mouth. Grace to the Great Ones who had sent the slide; the pleasant flavor of magnesium tickled his tongue, and the lichens were full-flavored from the new richness of the soil around them. Now, with a trace of copper, there would have been nothing left to wish for.

With a rueful twitch of his supple tail, Lhin grunted and turned back toward his cave, casting a cursory glance up at the roof of the cavern. Up there, long miles away, a bright glare lanced down, diffusing out as it pierced through the layers of air, showing that the long lunar day was nearing noon, when the sun would lance down directly through the small guarding gate. It was too high to see, but he knew of the covered opening where the sloping walls of the huge valley ended and the roof began. Through all the millenia of his race's slow defeat, that great roof had stood, unsupported except for the walls that stretched out around in a circle of perhaps fifty miles in diameter, strong and more lasting than even the crater itself; the one abiding monument to the greatness that had been his people's.

He knew without having to think of it that the roof was artificial, built when the last thin air was deserting the moon, and the race had sought a final refuge here in the deepest crater, where oxygen could be trapped and kept from leaking away. In a vague way, he could sense the ages that had passed since then and wonder at the permanence of the domed roof, proof against all time.

Once, as the whole space about him testified, his had been a mighty race. But time had worked on them, aging the race as it had individuals, removing the vigor of their youth and sending in the slow creepers of hopelessness. What good was existence here, cooped up in one small colony, away from their world? Their numbers had diminished and some of their skill had gone from them. Their machines had crumbled and vanished, unreplaced, and they had fallen back to the primitive, digging out the rocks of the crater walls and the lichens they had cultured to draw energy from the heat and radioactive phosphorescence of the valley instead of sunlight. Fewer

young were planted each year, and of the few, a smaller percentage proved fertile, so that their original million fell to thousands, then to hundreds, and finally to a few grubbing individuals.

Only then had they awakened to the danger of extinction, to find it too late. There had been three elders when Lhin was grown, his seed being the only fertile one. Now the elders were gone long years since, and Lhin had the entire length and breadth of the crater to himself. And life was a long series of sleeps and food forages, relieved only by the same thoughts that had been in his mind while his dead world turned to the light and away more than a thousand times. Monotony had slowly killed off his race, but now that its work was nearly done, it had ended. Lhin was content with his type of life; he was habituated, and immune to boredom.

His feet had been moving slowly along with the turning of his thoughts, and he was out of the valley proper, near the door of the shelter carved into the rocky walls which he had chosen from the many as his home. He munched another mouthful of rock and lichen and let the diffused sunlight shine on him for a few minutes more, then turned into the cave. He needed no light, since the rock walls about had all been rendered radioactive in the dim youth of his race, and his eyes were adapted to wide ranges of light conditions. He passed quickly through the outer room, containing his woven lichen bed and few simple furnishings, and back into the combination nursery and workshop, an illogical but ever-present hope drawing him back to the far corner.

But as always, it was reasonless. The box of rich earth, pulped to a fine loam and watered carefully, was barren of life. There was not even the beginnings of a small red shoot to awaken him to hope for the future. His seed was infertile, and the time when all life would be extinct was growing near. Bitterly he turned his back on the nursery bed.

So little lacking, yet so much! A few hundred molecules of copper salt to eat, and the seeds he grew would be fertile; or those same copper molecules added to the water would render the present seeds capable of growing

into vigorous manhood—or womanhood; Lhin's people carried both male and female elements within each member, and could grow the seeds that became their children either alone or with another. So long as one member of the race lived, as many as a hundred young a year could be reared in the carefully tended incubating soil—if the vital hormone containing copper could be made.

But that, it seemed, was not to be. Lhin went over his laboriously constructed apparatus of hand-cut rock bowls and slender rods bound together into tubes, and his hearts were heavy within him. The slow fire of dried lichen and gummy tar burned still, and slowly, drop by drop, liquid oozed from the last tube into a bowl. But even in that there was no slightest odor of copper salts. Well, he had tried that and failed. The accumulation of years of refining had gone into the water that kept the nursery soil damp, and in it there had been too little of the needed mineral for life. Almost dispassionately he threw the permanent metal rolls of his race's science back into their cylinders and began disassembling the chemical part of his workshop.

That meant the other solution, harder, and filled with risks, but necessary now. Somewhere up near the roof, the records indicated, there was copper in small amounts, but well past the breathable concentration of air. That meant a helmet and tanks for compressed air, along with hooks and grapples to bridge the eroded sections of the old trail and steps leading up, instruments to detect the copper, and a pump to fill the tanks. Then he must carry tanks forward, cache them, and go up to make another cache, step by step, until his supply line would reach the top and—perhaps—he could find copper for a new beginning.

He deliberately avoided thinking of the time required and the chances of failure. His foot came down on the little bellows and blue flames licked up from his crude forge as he drew out the hunks of refined metal and began heating them to malleability. Even the shaping of it by hand to the patterns of the ancient records was almost

impossible, and yet, somehow, he must accomplish it correctly. His race must not die!

He was still working doggedly hours later when a high-pitched note shot through the cave. A meteor, coming into the fields around the sealing slides of the roof, and a large one! In all Lhin's life there had been none big enough to activate the warning screens, and he had doubted that the mechanism, though meant to be ageless and draw sun power until the sun died, was still functioning. As he stood staring at the door senselessly, the whistling note came again.

Now, unless he pressed his hand over the inductance grid, the automatic forces would come into play, twisting the meteor aside and beyond the roof. But he gave no thought to that as he dashed forward and slapped his fingers against the grille panel. It was for that he had chosen his rock house, once the quarters of the Watchers who let the few scouting rockets of the dim past ages in and out. A small glow from the grid indicated the meteor was through, and he dropped his hand, letting the slides close again.

Then he waited impatiently for it to strike, moving out to the entrance. Perhaps the Great Ones were kind and were answering his prayers at last. Since he could find no copper here, they were sending a token from outer space to him, and who knew what fabulous amounts it might contain—perhaps even as much as he could hold in one hand! But why hadn't it struck? He scanned the roof anxiously, numb with a fear that he had been too late and the forces had thrown it aside.

No, there was a flare above—but surely not such as a meteor that size should make as it sliced down through the resisting air! A sharp stinging whine hit his ears finally, flickering off and on; and that was not the sound a meteor would logically make. He stared harder, wondering, and saw that it was settling downward slowly, not in a sudden rush, and that the flare struck down instead of fading out behind. That meant—could only mean—intelligent control. A rocket!

Lhin's mind spun under the shock, and crazy ideas of his ancestors' return, of another unknown refuge, of the

Great Ones' personal visit slid into his thoughts. Basically, though, he was severely logical, and one by one he rejected them. This machine could not come from the barren moon, and that left only the fabled planet lying under the bottom of his world, or those that wandered around the sun in other orbits. Intelligence there?

His mind slid over the records he had read, made when his ancestors had crossed space to those worlds, long before the refuge was built. They had been unable to colonize, due to the oppressive pull of gravity, but they had observed in detail. On the second planet were only squamous things that slid through the water and curious fronds on the little dry land; on his own primary, gigantic beasts covered the globe, along with growth rooted to the ground. No intelligence on those worlds. The fourth, though, was peopled by more familiar life, and like his own evolutionary forerunners, there was no division into animal and vegetable, but both were present in all. Ball-shaped blobs of life had already formed into packs, guided by instinct, with no means of communication. Yet, of the other worlds known, that seemed the most probable as a source of intelligence. If, by some miracle, they came from the third, he abandoned hope; the blood lust of that world was too plainly written in the records, where living mountainlike beasts tore at others through all the rolls of etched pictures. Half filled with dread, half with anticipation, he heard the ship land somewhere near, and started toward it, his tail curved tightly behind him.

He knew, as he caught sight of the two creatures outside the opened lock of the vessel that his guess had been wrong. The creatures were bifurcate, like himself, though massive and much larger, and that meant the third world. He hesitated, watching carefully as they stared about, apparently keenly enjoying the air around them. Then one spoke to the other, and his mind shook under a new shock.

The articulation and intonation were intelligent, but the sounds were a meaningless babble. Speech—that! It must be, though the words held no meaning. Wait—in

the old records—Slha the Freethinker had touched on some such thought; he had written of remote days when the Lunarites had had no speech and postulated that they had invented the sounds and given them arbitrary meaning, and that only by slow ages of use had they become instinctive in the new-grown infants—had even dared to question that the Great Ones had ordered speech and sound meanings as the inevitable complement of intelligence. And now, it seemed, he was right. Lhin groped up through the fog of his discovery and tightened his thoughts into a beam.

Again, shock struck at him. Their minds were hard to reach, and once he did find the key and grope forward into their thoughts, it was apparent that they could not read his! Yet they were intelligent. But the one on whom his thoughts centered noticed him finally, and grabbed at the other. The words were still harsh and senseless, but the general meaning reached the moon man. "Fats, what's that?"

The other turned and stared at Lhin's approach. "Search me. Looks like a scrawny three-foot monkey. Reckon it's harmless?"

"Probably, maybe even intelligent. It's a cinch no band of political refugees built this place—non-human construction. Hi there!" The one who thought of himself as Slim—massive though he appeared—turned to the approaching Lunarite. "What and who are you?"

"Lhin," he answered, noting surprised pleasure in Slim's mind. "Lhin—me are Lhin."

Fats grunted. "Guess you're right, Slim. Seems to savvy you. Wonder who came here and taught him English."

Lhin fumbled clumsily, trying to pin down the individual sounds to their meanings and remember them. "No sahffy Enlhis. No who came here. You——" He ran out of words and drew nearer, making motions toward Slim's head, then his own. Surprisingly, Slim got it.

"He means he knows what we're thinking, I guess. Telepathy."

"Yeah? Marshies claim they can do it among themselves, but I never saw one read a human mind. They

claim we don't open up right. Maybe this Ream monkey's lying to you."

"I doubt it. Take another look at the radioactivity meter in the viability tester—men wouldn't come here and go home without spreading the good word. Anyway, his name isn't Ream. Lean comes closer to the sound he made, though we'll never get it right." He half sent a thought to Lhin, who dutifully pronounced his name again. "See? His liquid isn't . . . it's a glottal stop. And he makes the final consonant a labial, though it sounds something like our dental. We can't make sounds like that. Wonder how intelligent he is."

He turned back into the ship before Lhin could puzzle out some kind of answer, and was out a moment later with a small bundle under his arm. "Space English code book," he explained to Fats. "Same as they used to teach the Martians English a century ago."

Then to Lhin: "Here are the six hundred most useful words of our language, organized, so it'll beat waiting for you to pick them up bit by bit. You look at the diagrammed pictures while I say and think the word. Now. One—w-uh-nn; two—tuh-ooo. Getting it?"

Fats watched them for a while, half amused, then grew tired of it. "Okay, Slim, you mollycoddle the native a while and see what you learn. I'm going over to the walls and investigate that radioactive stuff until you're ready to start repairs. Wish radios weren't so darned limited in these freighters and we could get a call through."

He wandered off, but Lhin and Slim were hardly aware of it. They were going through the difficult task of organizing a means of communication, with almost no common background, which should have been worse than impossible in terms of hours. Yet, strange as the word associations and sounds were, and odd as their organization into meaningful groups, they were still only speech, after all. And Lhin had grown into life with a highly complex speech as natural to him as breathing. He twisted his lips over the sounds and nailed the meanings down in his mind, one by one, indelibly.

Fats finally found them in Lhin's cave, tracing them

by the sound of their voices, and sat down to watch, as an adult might watch a child playing with a dog. He bore Lhin no ill will, but neither could he regard the Moon man as anything but some clever animal, like the Martians or the primitives of Venus; if Slim enjoyed treating them as equals, let him have his way for the time.

Lhin was vaguely conscious of those thoughts and others more disturbing, but he was too wrapped up in the new experience of having some living mind to communicate with, after nearly a century of being alone with himself. And there were more important things. He wriggled his tail, spread his arms, and fought over the Earth sounds, while Slim followed as best he could.

Finally the Earth man nodded. "I think I get it. All of them died off except you, and you don't like the idea of coming to a dead end. Umm. I wouldn't either. So now you hope these Great Ones of yours—we call 'em God—have sent us down here to fix things up. How?"

Lhin beamed, his face contorting into a furrowed grimace of pleasure before he realized Slim misinterpreted the gesture. Slim meant well. Once he knew what was needed, perhaps he would even give the copper gladly, since the old records showed that the third world was richest of all in minerals.

"Nra is needed. Life comes from making many simple things one not-simple thing—air, drink stuff, eat stuff, all that I have, so I live. But to begin the new life, Nra is needed. It makes things begin. The seed has no life—with Nra it lives. But I have no word."

He waited impatiently while Slim digested that. "Sort of a vitamin or hormone, something like Vitamin E_8, eh? Maybe we could make it, but——"

Lhin nodded. Surely the Great Ones were kind. His hearts were warm as he thought of the many seeds carefully wrapped and stored that could be made to grow with the needed copper. And now the Earth man was willing to help. A little longer and all would be well.

"No need to make," he piped happily. "Simple stuff. The seed or I can make it, in us. But we need Nra to make it. See." He pulped a handful of rock from the

basket lying near, chewed it carefully, and indicated that it was being changed inside him.

Fats awoke to greater attention. "Do that again, monkey!"

Lhin obliged, curious to note that they apparently ate nothing other life had not prepared for them. "Darn. Rocks—just plain rocks—and he eats them. Has he got a craw like a bird, Slim?"

"He digests them. If you've read of those half-plant, half-animal things the Martians came from, you'll know what his metabolism's like. Look, Lhin, I take it you mean an element. Sodium, calcium, chlorine? No, I guess you'd have all those. Iodine, maybe? Hmmm." He went over a couple of dozen he could imagine having anything to do with life, but copper was not among them, by accident, and a slow fear crept up into the Lunarite's thoughts. This strange barrier to communication—would it ruin all?

He groped for the answer—and relaxed. Of course, though no common word existed, the element itself was common in structure. Hurriedly, he flipped the pages of the code book to a blank one and reached for the Earth man's pencil. Then, as Slim and Fats stared curiously, he began sketching in the atomic structure of copper, particle by particle, from the center out, as the master physicists of his race had discovered it to be.

It meant nothing to them. Slim handed the paper back, shaking his head. "Fella, if I'm right in thinking that's a picture of some atom, we've got a lot to learn back on Earth. *Wheeoo!*"

Fats twisted his lips. "If that's an atom, I'm a fried egg. Come on, Slim, it's sleepy time and you've fooled away half a day. Anyhow, I want to talk that radioactive business over with you. It's so strong it'd cook us in half an hour if we weren't wearing these portable nullifiers—yet the monkey seems to thrive on it. I got an idea."

Slim came back from his brown study and stared at his watch. "Darn it! Look, Lhin, don't give up yet, we'll talk all this over tomorrow again. But Fats is right; it's time for us to sleep. So long, fella."

Lhin nodded a temporary farewell in his own tongue and slumped back on his rough bed. Outside, he heard Fats extolling a scheme of some kind for getting out the radioactives with Lhin's help, somehow, and Slim's protesting voice. But he paid no attention. The atomic structure had been right, he knew, but they were only groping toward it in their science, and their minds knew too little of the subject to enable them to grasp his pictures.

Chemical formulae? Reactions that would eliminate others, one by one? If they were chemists, perhaps, but even Slim knew too little for that. Yet, obviously, unless there was no copper on Earth, there was an answer somewhere. Surely the Great Ones whom they called God would never answer generations of faithful prayer with a mockery! There was an answer, and while they slept, he would find it, though he had to search through every record roll for clues.

Hours later he was trudging across the plain toward the ship, hope high again. The answer, once found, was simple. All elements formed themselves into families and classes. Slim had mentioned sodium, and copper was related in the more primitive tables, such as Earth might use. More important, its atomic number was twenty-nine by theory elementary enough for any race that could build rockets.

The locks were open, and he slipped through both, the wavering half-formed thoughts of the men leading him to them unerringly. Once in their presence, he stopped, wondering about their habits. Already he had learned that what held true for his people was not necessarily the rule with them, and they might not approve of his arousing a sleeper. Finally, torn between politeness and impatience, he squatted on the metal floor, clutching the record roll, his nostrils sampling the metals around him. Copper was not there; but he hadn't expected so rare an element, though there were others here that he failed completely to recognize and guessed were among the heavy ones almost lacking on the moon.

Fats gurgled and scrimmaged around with his arms,

yawned, sat up, still half asleep. His thoughts were full of some Earth person of the female element which Lhin had noted was missing in these two, and what he'd do "when he got rich." Lhin was highly interested in the thought pictures until he realized that it would be best not to intrude on these obviously secret things. He withdrew his mind just as the man noted him.

Fats was never at his best while waking up. He came to his feet with a bellow and grabbed for something. "Why, you sneaking little monkey! Trying to slip up and cut our——"

Lhin squealed and avoided the blow that would have left him a shapeless blob, uncertain of how he had offended, but warned by caution to leave. Physical fear was impossible to him—too many generations had grown and died with no need of it. But it came as a numbing shock that these beings would actually kill another intelligent person. Was life so cheap on Earth?

"Hey! Hey, Fats, stop it!" Slim had awakened at the sound of the commotion, and a hasty glance showed Lhin that he was holding the other's arms. "Lay off, will you? What's going on?"

But now Fats was fully awake and calming down. He dropped the metal bar and grinned wryly. "I dunno. I guess he meant all right, but he was sitting there with that metal thing in his hands, staring at me, and I figured he meant to cut my throat or something. I'm all right now. Come on back, monkey; it's all right."

Slim let his partner go and nodded at Lhin. "Sure, come back, fella. Fats has some funny ideas about nonhumans, but he's a good-hearted egg, on the whole. Be a good doggie and he won't kick you—he might even scratch your ears."

"Nuts." Fats was grinning, good nature restored. He knew Slim meant it as a crack, but it didn't bother him; what was wrong with treating Marshies and monkeys like what they were? "Whatcha got there, monkey? More pictures that mean nothing?"

Lhin nodded in imitation of their assent gesture and held out the roll to Slim; Fats' attitude was no longer unfriendly, but he was an unknown quantity, and Slim

seemed the more interested. "Pictures that mean much, I hope. Here is Nra, twenty-nine, under sodium."

"Eight column periodic table," Slim told Fats. "At least, it looks like one. Get me the handbook, will you? Ummm. Under sodium, No. 29. Sodium, potassium, copper. And it's No. 29, all right. That it, Lhin?"

Lhin's eyes were blazing with triumph. Grace to the Great Ones. "Yes, it is copper. Perhaps you have some? Even a gram, perhaps?"

"Ten thousand grams, if you like. According to your notions, we're lousy with the stuff. Help yourself."

Fats cut in. "Sure, monkey, we got copper, if that's the stuff you've been yelling about. What'll you pay for it?"

"Pay?"

"Sure, give in return. We help you; you help us. That's fair, isn't it?"

It hadn't occurred to Lhin, but it did seem fair. But what had he to give? And then he realized what was in the man's mind. For the copper, he was to work, digging out and purifying the radioactives that gave warmth and light and life to the crater, so painfully brought into being when the place was first constructed, transmuted to meet the special needs of the people who were to live there. And after him, his sons and their sons, mining and sweating for Earth, and being paid in barely enough copper to keep Earth supplied with laborers. Fats' mind filled again with dreams of the other Earth creature. For that, he would doom a race to life without pride or hope or accomplishment. Lhin found no understanding in it. There were so many of those creatures on Earth—why should his enslavement be necessary?

Nor was enslavement all. Eventually, doom was as certain that way as the other, once Earth was glutted with the radioactives, or when the supply here dropped below the vital point, great as the reserve was. He shuddered under the decision forced upon him.

Slim's hand fell on his shoulder. "Fats has things slightly wrong, Lhin. Haven't you, Fats?"

There was something in Slim's hand, something Lhin

knew dimly was a weapon. The other man squirmed, but his grin remained.

"You're touched, Slim, soft. Maybe you believe all this junk about other races' equality, but you won't kill me for it. I'm standing pat—I'm not giving away my copper."

And suddenly Slim was grinning, too, and putting the weapon back. "Okay, don't. Lhin can have *my* copper. There's plenty on the ship in forms we can spare, and don't forget I own a quarter of it."

Fats' thoughts contained no answer to that. He mulled it over slowly, then shrugged. Slim was right enough about it, and could do as he wanted with his share. Anyhow ——"Okay, have it your way. I'll help you pry it off wherever it is, or dig it out. How about that wire down in the engine locker?"

Lhin stood silently watching them as they opened a small locker and rummaged through it, studying the engines and controls with half his mind, the other half quivering with ecstasy at the thought of copper—not just a handful, but all he could carry, in pure form, easily turned into digestible sulphate with acids he had already prepared for his former attempt at collecting it. In a year, the crater would be populated again, teeming with life. Perhaps three or four hundred sons left, and as they multiplied, more and yet more.

A detail of the hookup he was studying brought that part of his mind uppermost, and he tugged at Slim's trouser leg. "The . . . that . . . is not good, is it?"

"Huh? No, it isn't, fella. That's what brought us here. Why?"

"Then, without radioactives, I can pay. I will fix it." A momentary doubt struck him. "That is to pay, is it not?"

Fats heaved a coil of wonderful-smelling wire out of the locker, wiped off sweat, and nodded. "That's to pay, all right, but you let those things alone. They're bad enough, already, and maybe even Slim can't fix it."

"I can fix."

"Yeah. What school did you get your degree in electron-

ics from? Two hundred feet in this coil, makes fifty for him. You gonna give it all to him, Slim?"

"Guess so." Slim was looking at Lhin doubtfully, only half watching as the other measured and cut the wire. "Ever touched anything like that before, Lhin? Controls for the ion feed and injectors are pretty complicated in these ships. What makes you think you can do it—unless your people had things like this and you studied the records."

Lhin fought for words as he tried to explain. His people had nothing like that—their atomics had worked from a different angle, since uranium was almost non-existent on the moon, and they had used a direct application of it. But the principles were plain to him, even from what he could see outside; he could feel the way it worked in his head.

"I feel. When I first grew, I could fix that. It is the way I think, not the way I learn, though I have read all the records. For three hundred million of your years, my people have learned it—now I feel it."

"Three hundred million years! I knew your race was old when you told me you were born talking and reading, but—galloping dinosaurs!"

"My people saw those things on your world, yes," Lhin assured him solemnly. "Then I shall fix?"

Slim shook his head in confusion and handed over a tool kit without another world. "Three hundred million years, Fats, and during almost all that time they were farther ahead than we are now. Figure that one out. When we were little crawling things living off dinosaur eggs, they were flitting from planet to planet—only I don't suppose they could stay very long; six times normal gravity for them. And now, just because they had to stay on a light world and their air losses made them gather here where things weren't normal, Lhin's all that's left."

"Yeah, and how does that make him a mechanic?"

"Instinct. In the same amount of time, look at the instincts the animals picked up—what to eat, enemy smells, caring for their young . . . He has an instinct for machinery; he doesn't know all about it, probably, but he can instinctively feel how a thing should work. Add to

that the collection of science records he was showing me and the amount of reading he's probably done, and there should be almost nothing he couldn't do to a machine."

There wasn't much use in arguing, Fats decided, as he watched what was happening. The monkey either fixed things or they never would leave now. Lhin had taken snips and disconnected the control box completely; now he was taking that to pieces, one thing at a time. With a curious deftness, he unhooked wires, lifted out tubes, and uncoupled transformers.

It seemed simple enough to him. They had converted energy from the atomic fuel, and they used certain forces to ionize matter, control the rate of ionization, feed the ions to the rocket tubes, and force them outward at high speed through helices. An elementary problem in applied electronics, to govern the rate and control the ionization forces.

With small quick hands he bent wires into coils, placed other coils in relation, and coupled a tube to the combination. Around the whole, other coils and tubes took shape, then a long feeder connected to the pipe that carried the compound to be ionized, and bus bars to the energy intakes. The injectors that handled the feeding of ions were needlessly complicated, but he let them alone, since they were workable as they were. It had taken him less than fifteen minutes.

"It will work now. But use care when you first try it. Now it makes all work, not a little as it did before."

Slim inspected it. "That all? What about this pile of stuff you didn't use?"

"There was no need. It was very poor. Now it is good." As best he could, he explained to Slim what happened when it was used now; before, it would have taken a well-trained technician to describe, even with the complicated words at his command. But what was there now was the product of a science that had gone beyond the stumbling complications of first attempts. Something was to be done, and was done, as simply as possible. Slim's only puzzle was that it hadn't been done that way in the first place—a normal reaction, once the final simplification is reached. He nodded.

"Good. Fats, this is the business. You'll get about 99.99% efficiency now, instead of the 20% maximum before. You're all right, Lhin."

Fats knew nothing of electronics, but it had sounded right as Lhin explained, and he made no comment. Instead, he headed for the control room. "Okay, we'll leave here, then. So long, monkey."

Slim gathered up the wire and handed it to Lhin, accompanying him to the air lock. On the ground, as the locks closed, the Moon man looked up and managed an Earth smile. "I shall open the doors above for you to go through. And you are paid, and all is fair, not so? Then—so long, Slim. The Great Ones love you, that you have given my people back to me."

"Adios," Slim answered, and waved, just before the doors came shut. "Maybe we'll be back sometime and see how you make out."

Back in the cave, Lhin fondled the copper and waited for the sounds the rockets would make, filled with mixed emotions and uncertainties. The copper was pure ecstasy to him, but there were thoughts in Fats' mind which were not all clear. Well, he had the copper for generations to come; what happened to his people now rested on the laps of the Great Ones.

He stood outside the entrance, watching the now-steady rocket blast upward and away, carrying with it the fate of his race. If they told of the radioactives, slavery and extinction. If they remained silent, perhaps a return to former greatness, and passage might be resumed to other planets, long deserted even at the height of their progress; but now planets bearing life and intelligence instead of mere jungles. Perhaps, in time, and with materials bought from other worlds with ancient knowledge, even a solution that would let them restore their world to its ancient glory, as they had dreamed before hopelessness and the dark wings of a race's night had settled over them.

As he watched, the rocket spiraled directly above him, cutting the light off and on with a shadow like the beat of wings from the mists of antiquity, when winged life had filled the air of the moon. An omen, perhaps, those

sable wings that reached up and passed through the roof as he released the slides, then went skimming out, leaving all clear behind. But whether a good omen or ill, he had not decided.

He carried the copper wire back to the nursery.

And on the ship, Slim watched Fats wiggle and try to think, and there was amusement on his face. "Well, was he good? As good as any human, perhaps?"

"Yeah. All right, better. I'll admit anything you want. He's as good as I am—maybe he's better. That satisfy you?"

"No." Slim was beating the iron while it was hot. "What about those radioactives?"

Fats threw more power into the tubes, and gasped as the new force behind the rockets pushed him back into his seat. He eased up gently, staring straight ahead. Finally he shrugged and turned back to Slim.

"Okay, you win. The monkey keeps his freedom and I keep my lip buttoned. Satisfied now?"

"Yeah." Slim was more than satisfied. To him, also, things seemed an omen of the future, and proof that idealism was not altogether folly. Some day the wings of dark prejudice and contempt for others might lift from all Earth's Empire, as they were lifting from Fats' mind. Perhaps not in his time, but eventually; and intelligence, not race, would rule.

"Well satisfied, Fats," he said. "And you don't need to worry about losing too much. We'll make all the money we can ever spend from the new principles of Lhin's hookup; I've thought of a dozen applications already. What do you figure on doing with your share?"

Fats grinned. "Be a damned fool. Help you start your propaganda again and go around kissing Marshies and monkeys. Wonder what our little monkey's thinking?"

Lhin wasn't thinking, then; he'd solved the riddle of the factors in Fats' mind, and he knew what the decision would be. Now he was making copper sulphate, and seeing dawn come up where night had been too long. There's something beautiful about any dawn, and this was very lovely to him.

* * * * *

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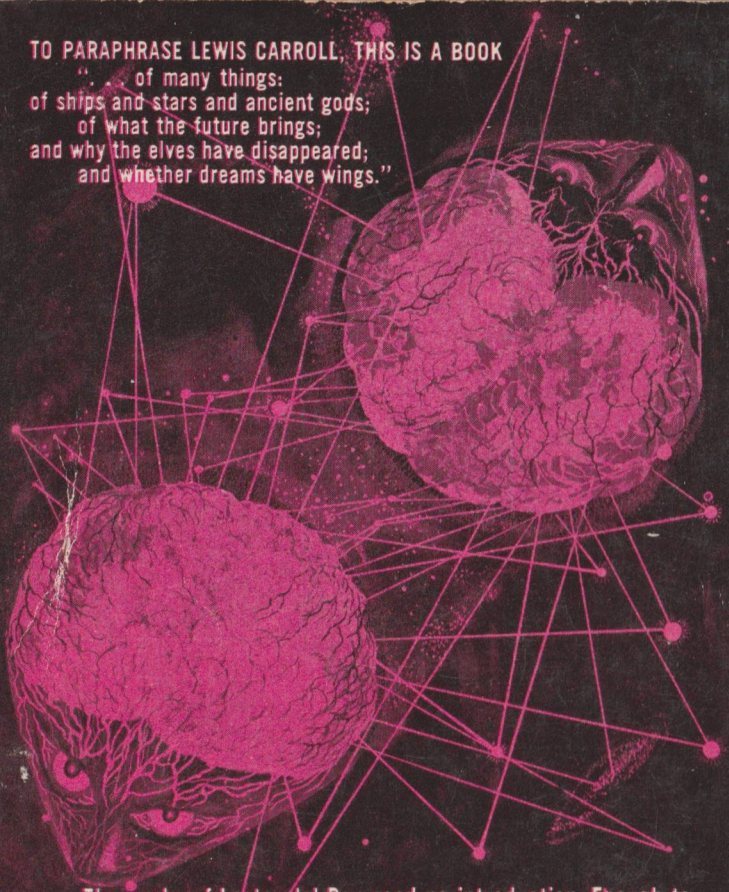

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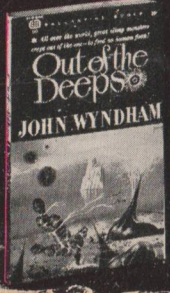

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