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Walls could not stop them

TIME TO TELEPORT

GORDON R. DICKSON

Complete Novel

WORLD WITHOUT WALLS!

They called their secret society simply Members of the Human Race, but the majority of humanity preferred to call them "the Inhumans." That's because it was generally believed that they were a vicious masked gang of vivisectionists, mutators, and monster-makers.

In fact it had got to the point where the world government, that amazing non-national association of services which had abolished war, was about to outlaw and destroy them. If the government acted—and Anthony Sellars its spokesman was ready to—it might be the first armed conflict in a century. But it would be scarcely more than a police action—the entire respectable world against a little hideout bunch of crackpots.

Except, as Sellars was to find out, how do you go about collaring people who can walk through walls?

Turn this book over for second complete novel

GORDON R. DICKSON, who is in his late thirties, is looked upon as a native of Minneapolis, although he spent his boyhood years in Canada. He has only recently returned to the Twin Cities after a California sojourn and marriage. A graduate of the University of Minnesota, he has been writing science-fiction for a good many years and has appeared in all the leading fantasy magazines.

His previous novels in Ace Books editions have included ALIEN FROM ARCTURUS (D-139) and MANKIND ON THE RUN (D-164).

TIME TO TELEPORT

by

GORDON R. DICKSON

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TIME TO TELEPORT

THE GENETIC GENERAL

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1

A COURIER air-sub with the coral red of the Underseas Power Group tipping its wing stubs came diving out of the blue south sky at a little after noon. It checked, and for the short space of several minutes hung hovering above the huge floating structure that was Cable Island, seat of government and political neutral ground for the Autonomous Groups, symbolically built and anchored in twelve hundred fathoms of chill sea water above the theoretical midpoint of the old Atlantic cable. Then the Island signaled clearance; and the ship dropped gently to the landing deck. From it stepped a boy of less than twenty. He wore a silver tunic trimmed in red; a sea-green kilt was clipped about his lean waist by a gun-belt and holster from which a handgun with a coral-red butt protruded. And an ebony-black official courier's cloak clung to the magnetic shoulder tabs of his tunic, while a courier's pouch with thumb-lock was clamped to his right forearm.

A lieutenant of the Neutral Guard took charge of him, impounded the gun and checked him through the scanners. These mechanical watchdogs discovered nothing dangerous either on or within the youngster. The officer turned him over to two guards with instructions to conduct him to the main council room, and there deliver him to Eli Johnstone, the spokesman for his group. The two guards saluted, about-faced and set off smartly, marching in step and rather hurrying the brightly dressed young courier between them. It was, perhaps, an unnecessary display of military manners; but the five hundred man Neutral Guard were, after all, the only professional soldiers left on Earth; and you could hardly blame them.

The main council room of Cable Island occupied the very center of the mammoth structure, being surrounded by committee rooms and these in turn surrounded by the offices of the individual groups. Above all this was the solar deck and the landing deck upon which Poby Richards, the courier, had come down with his air-sub. Below it were the living quarters, recreation centers and such, while the bottom layer of the Island was taken up by kitchens, storerooms and machinery.

The main council room itself was a steep-sided circular amphitheater, the sides of which were arranged in three levels and each level divided into sections to hold the representatives of each individual group. There were sections for one hundred and twenty-eight groups, but, in practice, only about thirty groups bothered to have representatives permanently stationed on the island and it was unusual to find more than twelve groups at business in the council room at any one time. The truth was that the larger groups usually each spoke for a number of smaller ones as well; as a result there were at this particular moment only ten spokesmen present in the amphitheater. One of these ten was from the highly important Communications Group, headed by young Alan Clyde; and another from the Underseas Domes whose spokesman was that same Eli Johnstone that Poby was seeking.

Eli had built Underseas—and himself along with it—into a political factor to be reckoned with.

The Underseas cities had a unanimity of feeling that the land groups lacked. Eli had united the small Underseas groups who needed a strong voice to speak for them on the Island; and for the last five years he had been able to stand forth and match point to point with Anthony Sellars, spokesman for the overwhelmingly large Transportation Group. Sellars was considered by most to be the most powerful political personage in the world. He was the lion that Eli worried, and wolflike fought, in the never-ending battle for position among the groups.

They sat now across the amphitheater from each other, each in their respective sections, Eli nursing the knee of his bad left leg absent-mindedly with both hands beneath the cover of the desk that, with his chair and himself, occupied the front of his section, walled off by waist-high partitions from the sections on either side. He was a slight, dark man in his late thirties, with a thin face early graven in bitter-humorous lines. The lines were deepened now by strain and fatigue; and he sat in a half-daze of numb tiredness, listening with only half an ear to the flexible baritone of Jacques Veillain, underspokesman for Transportation, as he rehearsed the popular list of indictments against the organization presently under discussion, the Philosophical Researchists. This organization called themselves Members of the Human Race, but which the easily swayed, easily frightened little people of

the world had taken to calling the "Inhumans."

"—vivisectors and mutators," Veillain was saying to the assembled spokesmen and underspokesmen. "They would write us all off as outmoded ape men to usher in their new era of monstrosities—"

In front of and a little to one side of Veillain, Anthony Sellars sat immovable, his square, flat face without expression as he listened to the words of his underspokesman. Watching, one would have thought that there was no connection between the two, that Veillain's attack on the Members was as fresh to Sellars as it was to the others in the council room; yet, as everyone present knew, Veillain was merely preparing the ground for his superior, laying down the artillery barrage before Sellar's personal assault.

Eli was the last man present to be deceived by appearances; and he let his attention slip from Veillain entirely and his gaze wander along the first level until he came to the Communications Section and Alan Clyde. The young spokesman sat listening, his dark, handsome face propped on his right fist, his expression thoughtful. Eli watched him carefully. Alan was brilliant and elusive. Eli had been wooing Communications for some time now, with little evidence of success.

The rest of the council, thought Eli, as he withdrew his attention from Clyde and let his gaze wander around the rest of the room, was even more badly attended than usual. Besides himself, Sellars, and Clyde, he counted only seven full spokesmen and a scattering of underspokesmen and aides. True, the really important representatives like Bornhill of Atomics and Stek Howard of Metals, were where you would expect them to be in their sections. But the great majority of the seats were empty. Some of those present looked frankly bored.

And yet this was at a time when political rivalry among the groups was at its peak. Paradoxical, thought Eli, nursing his knee; but not so paradoxical at that, when you came to think of it. The groups had outlived their usefulness, the political setup had frozen and was now beginning to mortify. Which was one of the reasons he, at least, was getting out of it.

With the swiftness of a lifetime of practice, he buried the thought before it had time to linger in his mind. *Sellars*, he thought, *Tony. Yes, I'm sure Tony sees it too, that the groups*

can't last. Eighty years ago they were a good idea. Organize the world along mutually interdependent lines and end all possibility of war. The barriers to be not geographical but occupational. How could Transportation declare war on Meteorology, or Meterology on Communications? No one cuts the rope he hangs by. But that was eighty years ago when the old hates and prejudices still held. *Now,* thought Eli, *the world is ready to act as a single unit and Tony wants to be on top of it. That's the reason for this witch hunt against the Members he's been pushing. Well, let him. People aren't that primitive any more . . .*

"—and when our police broke into the laboratory, all the equipment within it was found to have been melted down with thermite and to be practically unidentifiable," Veillain was saying. "By careful reconstruction, however, it was possible to ascertain that some of it had been radiation devices. . . ."

Eli felt a sudden tap on his shoulder. He turned his head and looked back and up into the serious, healthy face of Kurt Anders, his underspokesman.

"Courier, Eli," said Kurt.

"All right," replied Eli. "Thanks, Kurt. Bring him in."

Kurt moved back and a scintillating combination of silver, red, green and black slipped into his place. Eli smiled.

"All right, Poby," he said. "What've you got?"

"A sealed cube relayed through Dome One, Eli," whispered the boy. "Here . . ." and he held out the arm to which the pouch was attached.

Eli fitted his thumb into the aperture of the thumb-lock and it, recognizing his print as the one it had been set for, snapped open. Not one, but two cubes came rolling out.

Poby Richards blinked foolishly at them.

Eli looked down at the cubes and then back up at Poby curiously. He juggled the little objects in the palm of his hand.

"But there was only one!" Poby protested, his face tragic. "I know—I mean, I watched the pouch sealed myself in Dome One and it's been locked on my arm ever since." And he held out arm and pouch for verification.

Eli looked back at the cubes. They looked identical, but of course they would not be. For a moment he rolled them back and forth in his palm and then his hand closed over them.

"Let it go, Poby," he said. "But go back and wait for me

in my office. I'm going to want you later."

"Yes, Eli," and the young courier slipped away. Kurt moved back into the vacated space.

Eli turned to the desk in front of him. In the polished black surface that winked back at him there was a slot. He turned the cubes over in his fingers until he found on one of them a mark he was expecting. He slipped this one into the slot.

There was a moment's pause and then from the high headrest of the chair a voice seemed to murmur in Eli's ear.

"Eli: Everything is ready. Arthur Howell."

Eli nodded. He turned his attention back to the mysterious extra cube. For several seconds he sat, turning it over before his eyes and thinking. Then he put it, also in the slot.

Again the pause. Then, this time, a deeper, familiar voice.

"Eli: You—"

Swiftly, but with decision, Eli stabbed at the disposal button on the desk. Before his eyes a little panel flashed back and the new voice in his ears cut off as he watched, through a shielded transparency, the two cubes tumble into a little recess where the flash of an electric arc consumed them. The small panel snapped back again. Eli drew a deep breath and released the button, before turning his attention back once more to the orating Veillain.

But Veillain had just about finished. He was winding up now on a graceful note and turning the floor over to Sellars. Eli sat up; and by an effort of will forced the tiredness from him so that the council room seemed to suddenly stand out sharp and bright, and the people within it to take on a new solidity, as if the illumination of the amphitheater had suddenly been upped a notch. Veillain was sitting down and Tony Sellars was rising.

He was a large man but his impressiveness did not lie in his size. He was, in fact, slab-bodied, with wide shoulders, but a wide waist also—wide, but flat, for there was no fat on him. And he held himself stiffly erect, so that he seemed to move all in one piece and bend, with difficulty, only at the waist, when he bent at all. His body was the big-boned, serviceable carcass of the manual laborer—what would have been called a peasant's body at one time in history. His tunic, kilt, and long, official cape of Transportation blue, seemed to square him off, rather than lend him grace and dignity. He was in his late forties, with hair untouched by gray and face

unlined.

"All right," he said, laying his large, capable hands palm down on the desk before him. "My underspokesman has given you the background. Now I'll give you the rest of it."

He paused, sweeping them all with his eyes; and his gaze, like his rough-hewn body and his dominant voice, broadcast to them a sense of power and conviction that his way was right and his conclusions true.

"The groups," he said, "have always prided themselves on a high degree of tolerance. And for over half a century this tolerance has not been abused."

With Sellars' eyes straight upon him, Eli permitted himself the luxury of a small ironic smile. But if the spokesman for Transportation noticed, he gave no sign of it.

"There is, however, he went on, "a point at which tolerance must give way to the dictates of common sense. Such is the present time.

"In the last twenty years we have seen the emergence of a secret society masquerading as a philosophical association. The members of this society have taken to themselves the notion that the human race as it now is, is obsolete. They have taken it on themselves to decide we're all due to become extinct to make way for the next generation, which will be something entirely different."

Sellars paused and let his slow, impressive gaze sweep the room once more.

"Now that," he went on, "is a fine theory. And as long as it stays a theory I don't mind who holds it. But these crackpots who call themselves *Members* of the *Human Race*—as if only they were, and nobody else was—have gone ahead to try and give evolution a helping hand. Their notion of this is to try hard radiation on themselves and anyone else they can get their hands on, to dabble in every sort of dirty occult business they can dig up, and to practice gene experimentation on their own children.

"This, alone, to my mind, is reason enough for us to get together and clean up the situation they've caused. But there's more to it than just that. I've had Veillain list you off some accounts of what's been discovered lately about these so-called "foundations" and "research centers" they put up, and if you listened to him carefully, you heard only one thing—and that is simply this. These Members—these *Inhumans* as

people rightly call them—are succeeding."

He stopped to let this sink in. The council room remained silent about him; and, after a second, he went on.

"I tell you they *are* succeeding. The fact that I cannot at this moment produce a specimen of their 'next step in evolution' should not blind you to the fact that we have abundant indirect evidence that such specimens do exist. Fiddle a bit more and you'll get some dangerous freaks. Want an example?"

"For two hundred years now the human race has been playing with the idea of possessing the so-called psi faculties —telepathy, telekinesis, etc. And for thirty years the Members have been telling us that our next evolutionary step would be not a physical, but a mental one, which would enable us to possess these faculties. But for the first twenty-five of these years they were publishing regular reports about their experimentation in this field, and had so often repeated their belief in the existence of such faculties that the general public had become almost tone deaf to that particular portion of their propaganda scale.

"Suddenly, during this last five years, the reports dwindle. The propaganda ceases, references to the psi faculties become general and vague. Why? And now that we, at least, within the Transportation Group, have begun to root them out of their dark corners, there are inexplicable instances of Members being warned of our raids ahead of time, of Members disappearing from the equivalent of locked rooms. How?"

Sellars paused once more.

"Both these things," he said, slowly, "as well as a growing body of popular legend that sounds as if it might have come from the darkest of the Dark Ages, confirm me in my belief that the Members have succeeded in developing some thing or things, or being or beings, that are actively dangerous to the whole race as we know it today. In my mind the only solution is for us, for once, to set aside the autonomy of our individual groups and form a single united, supreme authority to deal with this present emergency. I leave it to you."

And with that Sellars sat down, yielding the floor.

Glancing swiftly around the room, Eli was aware of the shrewdness of Sellars' appeal that had particular force with this particular audience. The fight among the groups had always been to narrow the fight—for the leaders of larger groups to crowd out the spokesmen of smaller groups. And

this would be a step forward. For such a supreme authority, to be successful would have to be restricted to a few members, and where would those members be found except among the few top-ranking representatives here at this moment? Stek Howard's face was frankly interested, Kurachi of Plastics had a half-dreamy, half-expectant smile on his face, and even old Bornhill's eyes were veiled and thoughtful under his gray brows.

"Idiots," growled Eli to himself. For a moment he struggled with his conscience against the knowledge that this was, strictly speaking, no longer any of his business. Then, abruptly, he gave in. "Ahoy, ahoy, check!" he muttered to himself and, getting to his feet, raised his voice. "Mr. Chairman!"

Stek Howard, Chairman of the Day, came out of his pleasant abstraction and banged the gavel on his desk before him.

"Underseas," he acknowledged.

"Thank you," said Eli. All eyes in the council room were on him now and he smiled pleasantly back at them, but expecially at Sellars.

They all looked back at him; and not, he noticed, particularly with approval. The wealth and size of Transportation so overshadowed all of them individually, that usually their attitude was distrust of Sellars and a bias toward Eli. Today, however, Sellars had dangled a juicy plum before their eyes and they did not want Eli coming along and pointing out that it really belonged to somebody else.

"Spokesmen and Gentlemen," said Eli. "I am surprised—in fact I am astonished at your reaction to what you have just heard. I have sat here and listened in horror to what Transportation has just had to say. I was assured that you had listened with horror too. At the close of his words I could hardly restrain myself from jumping to my feet, and only held myself back because of the conviction that you, all of you would be jumping to your feet, to say, as I am saying"—Eli turned to look Sellars blandly in the face—"that Transportation has set forward the only possible method of dealing with this situation. And furthermore I can conceive of no man more worthy or capable to head such a supreme authority than Spokesman Sellars." He sat down.

The council sat back, shocked, as Eli took his seat. He leaned back and whispered to Kurt.

"Come on, Kurt," he said. "Back to the office."

Slowly and with dignity he got up, inclined his head to the chairman, and led the way back and out of his section. As he went up the ramp and passed out through the exit at the top of the amphitheater, a low muttering of representative to representative across the low walls between sections broke out behind him; and he smiled to himself. He had thrown his weight in the wrong direction at the wrong time for Sellars. Now the natural suspicions of the others would fight against their cupidity. A more powerful Sellars might be risked for the increase of power they themselves would gain. But a possible Sellars-Eli combination? Not if they knew it.

So Eli smiled. But abruptly the smile faded, to be replaced by a scowl.

"You're a damn quixotic fool," he murmured to himself. "Why the hell didn't you keep out of it?"

2

THE OFFICES belonging to Underseas formed one of the smaller suites and were well removed from even the larger committee rooms. This, combined with the fact that business was still theoretically in process in the main council room, led to their being deserted at this particular hour, with the single exception of a secretary at work in the outer office.

"See that we aren't disturbed, Kara," Eli told her, as he and Kurt entered the outer office and he led the way, with his swift limp across to the half-open door that led to his inner office that was his own.

"Yes, Eli." She looked up, her dark, somewhat angular features important with a message. "Poby Richards—"

"That's all right," said Eli. "I've spoken to him, Kara."

He led the way on into the private office and shut the door. Leading the way past the half-open aperture of a sliding panel that opened on a little adjoining room fitted with couch and lavatory, he came to the large, impressively paneled desk that was standard spokesman furniture. The desk was equipped to do everything but measure him for a new suit of clothes; and during all the seven years of his residence in this office, he had scarcely used a tenth of the gadgets installed in it. Now, as he came up to it, he punched buttons with

recklessness.

A piny scent swept through the office, a murmur of woodland music crept out on the air and the desk, like a dutiful patient sticking out his tongue for a physician, thoughtfully protruded a small but complete bar from one end of itself.

"How about a drink, Kurt?" asked Eli.

"Why I suppose so," said Kurt, a little surprised. It was the first time such an invitation had ever been extended to him by Eli. "I almost never . . ."

Eli sighed a little.

"Neither do I any more," he said. "There was a time when I never expected to run out of thirst. But it's odd, somewhere along the way I seem to have lost it. Well"—he turned brisk—"we'll have one anyway. The occasion calls for it."

And he proceeded to make himself busy with the materials in the bar.

Kurt chuckled.

"You did a nice job."

"Nice job?" echoed Eli, looking up.

"On Tony," said Kurt.

"Oh, that," Eli frowned. "Kurt, you're going to have to watch out on that. I've just spiked this business temporarily." He checked himself abruptly, and rose with two glasses in his hands, one of which he handed to Kurt. "I'm getting ahead of myself. Here, take this."

Kurt accepted it, a little unskillfully.

"Well now," said Eli. "Here's to you, Kurt."

"To me?" said Kurt, surprised.

"Yes," said Eli, and took a small drink. "How'd you like to be spokesman for Underseas?"

Kurt grinned. But Eli did not. And gradually Kurt's grin faded. He put his glass down on the edge of the desk.

"You aren't getting out, Eli?" he said, incredulously.

"That's right," said Eli, cheerfully. "Only I call it retiring."

Kurt's face was a little pale.

"You're joking."

"No, I'm not," said Eli sharply.

"But—" Kurt stumbled. "You must be. Why, you *are* Underseas, Eli. The only reason our coalition groups stick with us is because of you."

"That's nonsense," said Eli, setting his own drink down on the desk. "They stick because of the advantages of being com-

bined with us."

"But I couldn't ever handle them!" burst out Kurt in desperation.

"How do you know until you've tried?" asked Eli. "Besides, if you want, it won't have to be more than temporary—until the Domes appoint someone officially to replace me. I think they'd give it to you without a question if you wanted it. But if you don't, they'll be able to find someone else." He looked at the stunned underspokesman with sympathy. "But you don't know until you've tried whether you'll want it or not."

"But you, Eli," said Kurt, looking up at him. "I can't understand why *you* want to get out!"

Eli sighed gustily, and the bitter lines in his face sharpened momentarily.

"I suppose you thought the spokesmanship was something I wanted," he said.

"But, my God, Eli," protested Kurt stupidly. "You went after it like a house afire. No one knew you eight years ago!"

"Well, it wasn't," said Eli, watching him. "I suddenly woke up to realize that I was getting older and not doing anything. Everybody my own age fitted into the world. I felt I had to catch up, so I went gunning for the biggest job I could find."

"And now that there's no place else to go, you're getting out?" There was accusation in Kurt's voice.

"No," said Eli. He half turned from the underspokesman, staring at the wall of the office, but not seeing it. "I went into politics because I thought I was wasting my time doing nothing. Now, I think I'm wasting my time in politics. All my life I've been hunting for what I really want to do; and I've just decided to keep after it." He flicked a glance at Kurt. "Or do you think that at nearly forty I'm too old?"

"No," said Kurt, quickly. "No, but . . ." he hesitated, then suddenly burst out. "But it's a selfish thing to do, then."

"Agreed," said Eli cheerfully. It was the kind of merciless admission that he liked to make; and it restored his good humor. He became conscious, suddenly, of his aching knee and sat down.

"If that's the only reason you're getting out," amended Kurt. Having uncovered feet of clay in his idol, Kurt was in a hurry to cover them up.

"Another reason is that I think the world is headed for hell

in a handbasket," said Eli. "But that needn't concern you."

"I don't understand," said Kurt.

"It doesn't take understanding," said Eli. "The most casual observation shows the groups disintegrating as a governmental system; there's no place to go but toward a completely single-unit world and in spite of the experience of the past two thousand years we don't seem to be ready for that yet. What would *you* guess the immediate future is going to be like?"

Kurt stared at him.

"Do you really believe that?" he asked. "I know times are tense, now, with all this superstition about the Members—"

"Tense!" echoed Eli. "Times are always tense. People are always—"

He had swung about in a half turn as he spoke and now he suddenly halted.

"Poby!" he said.

Looking very embarrassed indeed, the young courier was standing in the panel entrance to the little side room of the office. Now, with Eli's and Kurt's eyes full upon him, he faltered out into the main room.

"You asked me to wait for you in your office, Eli."

"You've been listening to all this?" demanded Eli.

"I fell asleep on your couch in there." Poby was really suffering and at once the state of his feeling jumped the gap between him and Eli as if it had been a strong electric current.

"Well, in that case," Eli said, turning back to the bar and smiling, "I imagine you rate a final drink, too. What'll it be?"

Poby stared at him for a moment in bewilderment. Then Eli's words penetrated through to him.

"No, Eli," he cried. "Why, I couldn't drink to that!"

Eli straightened up above the bottles and looked at him in slight astonishment.

"Couldn't drink to what?" he asked.

"Couldn't drink to your leaving," said Poby.

Eli stared at him. Poby turned red but stared back defiantly.

"It's not a thing for celebrating," said Poby. "It's a—it's a tragedy. Millions of people count on you. If they don't have you, who're they going to trust? If you leave—"

"Poby," interrupted Eli, dryly.

Poby stopped speaking.

"That's better," said Eli. "Now, I am not King Arthur and

you are not Sir Bedivere. Thank you for your high opinion of me, though, all the same."

"But it's true!" cried Poby.

"Well, and if it were," said Eli easily, "have you ever heard of the right to individual happiness?"

"Oh, you'll answer whatever I say!" Poby burst out, transported beyond himself. "Because you're a master statesman. I can't talk! All I can do is tell you."

"That," said Eli, wearily, "is what is wrong with most of the people in the world at any time. We'll leave the matter at that, Poby, before you and I run aground on the shoals of our mutual argument." He turned to Kurt. "It's still early. I'm going to leave right away. I'll give you a recording of my resignation and you can release it whenever you feel ready. You know all there is to know about the situation and the position at the present time. Poby"—he swung back to the courier—"get that ship of yours ready. I want you to deliver me to a place about two hours from here."

Poby turned and went, to follow his instructions and think of all the arguments he might have used on Eli if they had only come to mind at the proper time. Eli waited until the youngster was out of the room. Then he turned back to Kurt.

"I'll be at the University of Miami's Calayo Banks Shallow Water Research Station," he said.

"I didn't know they had one," said Kurt.

"Let's hope nobody else does," answered Eli. "Keep that address to yourself." He looked around the office. "Well, I guess that does it—except for the resignation." He moved over to the desk and its recorder."

"You know," said Kurt abruptly, following him. "The boy was right."

Reaching over to press the record button, Eli lifted his head from the desk and looked at the underspokesman oddly.

The air-sub thrummed through the skies. He looked out the window at the blue Mediterranean below, thinking his own wry thoughts.

He and Poby were alone in the small craft. They were flashing now over the Mediterranean at some sixteen hundred miles an hour, headed for a certain point of the Turkish coast.

"Do you see it yet, Poby?" asked Eli.

"Just a minute," the pilot Scannerset in front of Poby

chimed suddenly, a single dulcet note. "There! Locked on," said Poby. "We'll be down in ten minutes." He set the automatic pilot.

The plane dropped swiftly through the still air. Eli shook himself suddenly out of his mood. He gazed out the window and saw the surface of the world rushing up to meet him. Minutes later they were on the water and taxiing up to a small stone jetty sticking out in the ocean below a large resort home that dominated some smaller houses clustered down the beach from it. A rather fat man in white tunic and blue pantaloons, was waiting on the jetty for them.

The ship reached the jetty, Poby opened the door and Eli got out.

"Well, Hassan," said Eli, as he stepped up onto the jetty.

"Well, Eli," responded Hassan Bendhruk. "Come on up to the house. I've got everything ready for you to look at."

Two hours later, they sat at lunch in the pleasant little loggia extending from one end of the house.

"I'm getting too old," said Hassan, "to remain the head of a secret police."

"Then you're glad I'm disbanding this little organization of mine?" said Eli.

"Well, not really," said Hassan, grimacing slightly above the cup of coffee he had just picked up. He put it down untasted. "Perhaps I'm just trying to talk myself into the fact that I could be glad."

"Well, I'm rather glad to hear that," said Eli. "Because there are still a few things I might need done. I thought"—Eli raised one eyebrow in a quizzical expression that gave his face a slightly satanic look—"you might be willing, you alone, to do a little part-time work for me from time to time."

"Oh, that!" said Hassan, spreading his hands eagerly. "Of course!"

"You see," said Eli, "the trouble is, a man who has got to the point in the world's eye that I have, cannot just safely step back down into the anonymous ranks of the private citizens again. *I* know I'm through. But others may not be so quick to believe that. To some, I won't mention who . . ."

"Our friend whose name begins with an S," murmured Hassan, folding his hands lazily over his stomach.

Or others," said Eli. "And it may well happen that one or

more of these people decide not to take a chance on a change of heart in my case. You understand?"

"I think," replied Hassan, "that I can fairly well guarantee to let you know of anything planned against you from the sources of danger we know of." He grimaced again, slightly. "News comes daily, to knock at my private door and offer itself for sale. It is one of the sad advantages of having a great deal of wealth to pay for it." He peered keenly at Eli. "But, you really are quitting?"

"Really quitting," said Eli. "I'll give you my address."

"I have it already," sighed Hassan. Eli grinned, a trifle sourly. "What you're going to need there," went on Hassan, "is some foolproof means of communication with me that doesn't attract too much attention."

"I suppose," answered Eli ironically, "you've already got that figured out?"

"As a matter of fact, I have," replied Hassan. "If you want to come along, I'll show you what I mean."

He rose; and Eli rose with him. Together, they went out of the loggia onto the lawn, and down a winding gravel path to the sea's edge. Here they stepped into a little water skimmer, and Hassan sent them sliding over the waves down the coastline.

A few miles down the beach, they came upon a section of limestone cliffs. Here the gentle surf broke raggedly along a rocky shore. Hassan maneuvered the skimmer in among the rocks and over the surf, with such aplomb that for a moment Eli suspected him of wanting to wreck them both, and the little skimmer with them. But then, suddenly, they made a sharp turn; came upon a sudden opening in the rock, and shot through into a watery cave at the far end of which light glowed.

They slid back through the cave and around a corner. The little skimmer approached and popped through a wall of pure light. And, without warning, they found themselves in a sort of brilliant underground world.

It was an enormous cavern, glittering with illumination. An artificial sun burned overhead, so brightly that human eyes could not look up and see against its glare the ceiling of the cave. For the rest, the vast expanse of the cave was planted and laid out with grass and paths almost like a formal garden aboveground.

Hassan tied up to a small jetty. They stepped ashore onto rock. And around a dwarf fir tree, a small bent man, wearing old-fashioned spectacles, came to meet them.

"This," said Hassan, "is Johann Schoner, Eli."

"Honored," said Eli.

Johann Schoner bobbed his head in acknowledgement of the greeting. But he looked almost agitatedly at Hassan.

"But I'm not ready!" he said. "You know I'm not ready. I told you yesterday, I couldn't possibly—"

"All right, all right!" said Hassan with humorous exasperation. "We don't need any messengers yet. I just wanted to show Eli what they were like."

"Well . . . well, in that case"—Karl turned back toward his fir tree, casting a glance back over his shoulders—"this way, then. Come along, Johnstone."

Eli followed, and Hassan along with him, between some small trees, and back into a section of the cave, that had been walled off into compartments, by tall barriers of light. As they stepped through one of these barriers, he found himself surrounded by tiny darting birds small enough to nest, it seemed, in the palm of his hand.

"Become a bird fancier, have you?" said Eli, smiling at Hassan. Hassan shook his head seriously, his heavy face a-joggle with the movement.

"Show him," he said to Johann.

Johann reached into a heavy pocket hanging from his tunic belt. From the tunic pocket, he took out a small chamois leather bag, with a draw-string. He opened the draw-string, and extracted a small white metal ring, which he handed to Eli.

"Put it on, put it on," he said.

Eli slipped the ring onto the fourth finger of his right hand. It fitted perfectly.

"Now what—" he began, when, with an almost soundless flutter of tiny wings one of the small birds about him—a drab brown morsel scarcely larger than a mandarin orange, with wings outstretched—perched like a piece of thistle-down upon that same ring.

Eli stared at it. It threw back its miniscule head and abruptly, without warning, poured forth a stream of silver notes, astonishing in their loudness for one so small.

"Now," said the voice of Hassan in his ear, "squeeze the

ring."

Eli did. From the ring came a tiny sound. It spoke in human language. "Pleased to meet you, Eli," it said.

Eli turned his head to stare at Hassan and Johann.

"Quite a gadget," he said dryly.

"You wear that ring," said Hassan. "These birds can fly halfway around the world, if necessary. However, it won't be necessary for them to do quite that much to reach you. We'll have some of them based on the mainland, not more than eighty or a hundred miles from where you'll be. Just wear your ring, and get out in the open, at least once a day if possible."

"The birds are trained to come to this ring?" said Eli, glancing at it curiously.

"Not trained, *sensitized!*" put in Johann eagerly. "A process akin to the instincts that used to cause them to migrate."

Eli shook his head briefly in admiration.

"And the song can be made to carry any message?" he asked.

"Any at all," responded Johann. "Even a fairly long one. You see, the translator in your ring takes into account frequency, modulation, pitch and a number of other things about each note in extracting information. Oh, it's quite complicated, I give you my word." And he rubbed his nose, juggling his glasses, in obvious delight.

"I see," said Eli.

"Well then," put in Hassan, "you keep the ring, Eli. We'd better be getting back. I'll talk to you later about this more, Johann."

Johann tenderly captured the little bird that had continued to roost this while upon Eli's finger and carried it off through another wall of light. Hassan led Eli back out to the skimmer.

The ride back to the house was a quiet one. But when they were once more ensconced in the loggia, sipping coffee, Eli spoke—a little bitterly, and as much to himself as to Hassan.

"And I thought I was getting away from all of this," he said, looking out over the sea.

"You know better than that, Eli," said Hassan. Eli turned his head to look at him; and saw that the other man was coldly serious. "People like us must always know it. For, instance I've heard ground rumors already, just since your resignation, that something or other is being hatched against

you."

Eli continued to look at Hassan for a long moment. And then slowly, wearily, he nodded.

"It would be," he said.

3

THEY DROPPED down out of the bright sky toward the blue water.

"That's the spot, then," said Eli, peering out the window on his side of the ship.

"Yes," said Poby.

Poby was handling the air-sub as if he loved it, bringing it in a wide sweep, gently, gently, yet swiftly into the ocean. Below them Eli picked out a glinting dot on the azure expanse of the Florida waters around the tiny sterile sandspit of Calayo Banks Cay, lost and lonely in the sea. Like a tiny bright coin dancing on the waves when he saw it first, it steadied and swelled to the transparent hemisphere of a solar roof over the top of an underwater station. Then they were landing in a fume of spray and it swelled bubblelike above them, with the brown sea-resistant concrete of the jetty pushing out from it, lifting toward them over the chop of the waves as they taxied up to it.

When they bumped the magnetic mooring rim of the jetty and locked there, Eli stood up. Poby, reaching over him, threw back the hatch and stepped past him to turn and give him a hand from heaving air-sub to the immobile jetty. Eli had one quick glimpse down through the clear water as he stepped across, a momentary picture of sixty feet of station reaching away and down through the fantastic clearness of the water to the white sand far below. Then he found his feet on the jetty; and turned back to Poby.

"Well, that's that, Poby," he said.

"Yes, Eli," the young courier looked at him rather helplessly. Eli rubbed his narrow jaw thoughtfully.

"What's your home Dome?" he asked. "You told me once, but I've forgotten."

"Number Three, Pacific," said Poby.

"That's right," said Eli. "Well, I want you to go there for the next few weeks; or at least until Kurt makes public my

resignation. If he does that, go directly to him and put yourself under his orders. You understand why I'm doing this, Poby?"

"I think so," Poby answered.

"I've had this planned for a long time. I've set things up so I can step out quickly and without fuss. But for the general public it can't be that sudden. Kurt is going to announce that I've gone into a surgical hospital to have my knee worked on. Only he or you know that I'm actually, as of now, no longer spokesman. I trust you to keep the information to yourself."

"Yes, Eli."

"All right. Get me an order blank for the ship and I'll write you a predated order for a month's leave."

Poby dived back into the air-sub and produced a small pad of order blanks on which Eli scribbled the instructions he had just given, signed it and pressed his thumb on the sensitized signature area. He tore off the order and handed it back to Poby.

"There you are," he said and held out his hand. Something in the other's eyes made him add, "Look me up in about a year if you still feel like it."

"I will. I'll find you," said Poby.

They shook hands, and slowly Poby re-entered the air-sub, pulling the hatch closed behind him. The airboat sparked as its motors thrust it away from the magnetic pull of the mooring ring. Then it had surged away from the jetty and was gone, leaping into the air. Eli stood looking after it a little sadly. Nostalgia was not one of his usual indulgences, but he let it touch him now, momentarily.

The sound of footsteps on the jetty behind him brought him around. A girl in her early twenties and a young man scarcely older were coming from the solar deck of the station, through a watertight, stormtight door flung wide, to meet him. He turned a little awkwardly, favoring his one bad leg and took them in at a glance, the tall dark man and the small, blond girl.

The man was big-boned and young, with a large nose set a little crooked, which, however, did not spoil the general effect of his good looks. There was scarcely half a dozen years difference in age between him and Poby, but this one could almost have passed as Poby's father. He did not so much look old, as mature; and he had probably looked mature

since he was sixteen, with rectangular, solid jaw and a stiff bristle that required shaving twice a day. But his eyes were the clear, uncynical eyes of his proper age, and a little wondering and a little kind.

With the girl it was different. About the same chronological age, probably as old as the young man, she had an ageless quality about her. Small and light-boned, with hair so light and fluffy of texture that it seemed she had despaired of bringing it to any discipline of form, so that it floated like a loose cloud about her head. Her face was pointed and fragile, with such a clearness of skin, that although she was not conventionally pretty, she struck at any moment a memorable picture for any man to carry with him afterwards. Her lips and eyes molded the visible expression of everything she said; so that from that first moment on until a long time afterward, until he knew her very well (and even then) Eli was to find himself watching one of these two features of hers, as she spoke.

She spoke now, half-running forward to keep up with the long steps of the man beside her.

"Eli! You were quick! I'm Tammy Wina."

"Hello, Tammy," he said, smiling, and taking the hand she gave him. She held it and turned him toward the man. "And this is Dr. Mel Bruger."

In a period in which first names were almost universally used, even on first acquaintances, Eli caught the hint of an inferiority complex in the tall man and responded accordingly.

"Hello, Doctor," he said, and was rewarded by a smile flashed by Tammy from behind Mel Bruger's back.

"Hello," answered Mel, shaking hands. His voice was slow and deep. "Arthur Howell and Ntoane are downstairs."

"Both doctors also," said Tammy—and the slyness of the remark, Eli could see, was lost on Mel.

They turned and went into the station, dogging the weather door shut behind them. The still air of the solar under the brilliant sun was hothouse warm. They walked across the plastic floor like polished white marble between tables and deck chairs, and entered an elevator capsule whose tube projected like a transparent sleeve up through the floor of the solar deck to about eight feet. The capsule held them easily and they dropped with a rush of released air to the fifth level of the station, a scant dozen feet above the ocean bed.

Down the hall was the lab and the two men in it looked up as they entered. One was Arthur Howell, a thin, angular man in his fifties. The other was a sensitive-featured, black-skinned man who at first glance appeared to loom beside Howell like a giant.

"Dr. Ntoane," said Tammy, as they came up. "And you know Arthur Howell."

At second glance, as he shook hands with the dark man with the Basuto name, Eli perceived that appearances had deceived him, for Ntoane was scarcely taller than himself. A trick of ideal body proportioning, however, made him appear much larger, so that he was in fact, like a giant in miniature, with a calm face and intelligent, but rather unhappy eyes.

"Happy to meet you, Eli," he said, in a soft, slow voice. His hand, as it grasped Eli's in handshake, was soft also, but with strong, sudden pressure behind it.

"Don't embarrass me," said Eli, with a smile. He turned to Howell. "Well, Arthur!" he said, extending his hand.

"Hello," said Howell, giving Eli's hand one quick pump and then dropping it. "You made good time. That's good. What do you think of the station?"

"I think it looks excellent," said Eli.

"Yes. I do too," said Howell. "Well, now that you've met everybody, come on back to my office with me. I want to talk to you. You can finish up here, Ntoane?"

"Of course, Arthur."

"Fine. This way, Eli." And, without waiting for any further parleying, Howell turned and began to lead the way back between the cluttered benches, sinks, and equipment of the lab. Eli, with a humorously apologetic smile at the rest, followed him.

Howell led him to an office opening off the far end of the lab. A little square cubicle fitted with deck, chair, and filing cabinet. Howell, himself, perched on the edge of the desk and waved Eli to the chair.

The man who had sent Eli the message cubes and now sat opposite him, with one toe of one narrow foot on the ground and that of the other beating nervous time back and forth in the air, was well into his fifties. Howell was skinny. His elbows were knobby, his hair was badly gone, and his bony face cut with lines, but the violent energy of the undergraduate was still with him. That he was abrupt and intol-

erant was natural; it was part of him.

"How much time have you got?" he demanded without preamble as Eli sat down.

"As much as you need," said Eli. "I've resigned the spokesmanship."

"Fine. Excellent," said Howell, rubbing his hands together pleasantly, as if it was no more than commendable that a man should throw up one of the world's leading executive positions in order to provide him with more time in which to work. "Well, I'm pretty sure we can do it."

"No more than pretty sure?" asked Eli.

"There are no hundred percents in medicine," said Howell, didactically. "You came to me five years ago with a question as to whether the human body could not be rebuilt with new parts in pretty much the way an engine is. I'm now prepared to try and answer that question."

"On me," said Eli wryly.

"Precisely," replied Howell, utterly unconscious of any irony. "However, that needn't concern you. There were some other things I wanted to talk to you about. First, you asked me to look into the matter of your lame knee. I have. There's nothing wrong with it."

In spite of himself, Eli was nettled.

"I happen to know there is," he retorted.

"Well, you're wrong," said Howell. "If it bothers you, it must be psychosomatic. See Mel. He's got his degree—"

"Is that why he's here?" demanded Eli.

"No. I need him for the operating. I'm a research man, pure and simple. I don't operate myself."

"That's good," said Eli. "Because I don't intend to see anyone in that line professionally, now or ever."

"Why not?" Howell was looking at him curiously.

"Because it's a waste of time," said Eli.

"Well," Howell shrugged. "It's not my department. Suit yourself. Now the first thing we need are some tests on you."

"You've had nothing but tests!" said Eli.

"Certain data has to be brought up to date. Nothing extensive." Howell glanced at the watch on his wrist. "When did you eat last?"

Eli had to stop and think.

"This morning."

"All right," said Howell. "I'll give you a short, timed dose

to put you under. From there you should go into a natural sleep and we can start taking checks on you. Come along."

He led the way out through the lab, stopping on the way to take a tiny green capsule from a refrigerator and pass it over to Eli. The three other people in the station had gone about their business and were nowhere to be seen. Howell led Eli out of the lab and up a level and down a hallway to a spacious room dim-lit by the sunlight filtering down through thirty-odd feet of water and the two-foot thick pane of window glass. A wide, white bed sat on the polished floor, surrounded by banked instruments. But the rest of the room, with its couch, viewing screen, table and chairs, was like any good hotel room. Eli took the green capsule Howell had given him; and, after the other man had gone, lay down on the bed and let sleep claim him.

At some indeterminate time later, he awoke in the darkness. For a moment he though that only a matter of minutes had passed and he was still alone, waiting for the drugged aleep to pull him under the surface of consciousness. Then, a soft, all-pervasive humming and the shielded glow of little signal lights from the now-operating machines about his bed disillusioned him. He lifted his head and caught a shadowy glimpse of a figure clad in a white tunic that moved about the machines.

"Doctor?" he said uncertainly.

The white-clad figure approached him. A cool hand touched his forehead.

"Lie back," said Tammy's voice. "Sleep, Eli."

He lay back, drowsily becoming aware of soft hands encircling wrist, bicep, thigh and throat. There was something strangely familiar and pleasant about Tammy's voice that he could not be troubled to investigate right now but which made him want to hear it again.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"Analyzing you," her soft tones came back to him. "Pulse pressure, metabolic rate, and a lot of other things. Don't talk. Just lie back and close your eyes. And try to sleep."

He closed his eyes and mouth. The bed was warm and he was aware of a reaching, all-encompassing comfort in the knowledge of her presence moving about him.

"Will you take care of everything?" he asked dreamily, out

of the once-more encroaching billows of slumber.

"I'll take care of everything," she whispered. "Just leave everything to me. And sleep, Eli, sleep."

Reassured, he lost his troubled hold on consciousness. The darkness closed about him and he slept.

4

ELI DREAMED that he ran through a huge and empty city. The buildings were tall and gray and empty; and the streets were at first deserted and gray. But finally the people who lived there came in a group and surrounded him.

"You'll have to go to the city hall at once," said a man with an earnest, weary face.

"Why me?" Eli asked.

"Because you've got a mark upon you," said the man. And they all crowded about Eli, insisting that he go.

"All right, I'll go," he said. And he started walking off by himself in the direction of the city hall. But when he was a safe distance away from them, he shouted back, "I've changed my mind!" and took to his heels again.

He lost them in the maze of streets and descended to the vehicle levels. On these he continued to wander until he came to the edge of the city. And there, on the gray, open plain, he saw that there was a camp set up, like the camp of a Roman legion on the march. But when he wandered into it, he discovered that the soldiers were all a strange alien species, neither animal nor human. And as he walked through their camp one of the officers came up to him.

"Get back to your post, soldier," the officer said.

"Oh, I'm not one of you," said Eli. "See, I'm just like your enemies, the people in the city. I even have a mark on me."

"That mark does not matter," said the officer. "It is merely the surface manifestation of a mark that makes you one of us. Look at it."

"I don't believe in marks," said Eli and he began to walk off swiftly. As he went he expected every minute to feel the officer's hand on his shoulder; but when he looked back, he saw the other still standing, staring after him. He started to run and ran until he came out the other side of the camp into open country which was wide and gray and covered with

mist. He ran through this for a while until he realized he was lost. He sat down for a moment to rest, but then it struck him that he must keep going and find some kind of shelter. He got up and continued on through the mist until suddenly he came face to face with Mel Bruger.

"What are you doing here?" Mel asked.

"I'm looking for something," answered Eli.

"That's a common type of evasion that we often run into in psychiatry," said Mel. "What you really mean is that you're running away from something. Now, what are you running from?"

And then Eli woke up. For a moment he lay still, remembering the dream and blinking. The bedroom was still about him, once more dimlit with sunlight through the water beyond the window, the machines pushed back from his bed and the tapes gone from arms and legs. He groped for the headboard of the bed and with his finger set the artificial illumination of the room up to daylight. I ought to remember that dream, he thought. But already the gray insubstantial substance of it was evaporating like morning fog in the day's brightness.

He rose and dressed in the fresh tunic and kilt that somebody—probably Tammy—had laid out for him, popping the sealed, transparent packaging with an active pleasure, and shoving his discarded outfit down the incinerator slot in the far wall of the room. The colors were the new combination, rust and gold, which made it almost certain that Tammy was responsible. Another male would never have presumed on so bright a choice for a man whose tastes they did not know. However Eli did not mind. He was feeling a new and cheerful sense of freedom from the obligations that had held him these past years; and he went out to breakfast in the rust-shot gold of his tunic and the gold-flecked rust of his kilt without any sartorial qualms.

Howell caught him at the entrance to the automat and had coffee with him while he breakfasted. They had the little room to themselves, everybody else having eaten several hours previously; and while Eli dug into his chicken pie, Howell outlined the procedures for the morning, which was to consist of some more tests of Eli in the lab.

"And what about the afternoon?" asked Eli with a grin.

"Or do I have that to myself?"

"More or less," said Howell, looking a trifle sour, for what reasons Eli could not at that moment understand.

He found out just before lunch, when the last of the prodding, picture taking, sticking, and slicing was finally finished up.

"All through?" said Howell, popping into the lab, where Ntoane and Tammy had been doing most of the work. "I suppose you can see him now, then."

"See who?" asked Eli, putting his tunic back on.

"I don't know," said Howell somewhat brusquely. "He flew in this morning in his own private flyer. His name's Seth Maguin."

Eli froze suddenly. Then, conscious that his reaction was noticeable to the rest, went on mechanically, putting on his tunic.

"Oh, yes," he said. "Why didn't you tell me before?"

"I didn't want anything interrupting the rest of the work, either," he added significantly.

"I'll see he doesn't get in the way," Eli assured him. "Where is he?"

"Up on the solar deck," said Howell.

"Thanks," said Eli. "I'll go up there right now."

As Eli rode up on the elevator, he was conscious of a tiny sore spot on his left forearm, from which tissue had been removed, and another on the inside of his mouth on the left cheek from which a section of the mucous membrane had been clipped by a small, gleaming instrument in Tammy's capable fingers. He touched the sore spot in his mouth with the tip of his tongue; exploring like a child; and thought of the clean smell of Tammy's hands as she worked close to him. The same haunting familiarity which had touched him the night before at the sound of her voice, came to him again.

The capsule rose above the solar floor; and he caught sight of a lean, fine-featured man who stood awaiting him, apparently having just risen from a deck chair near the transparent wall of the dome. The mark of Berber blood was strong upon this other, in his dark skin and shiny brown hair. A dark-colored, all-weather cape was clipped to his shoulders and he stood with his hands on the back of one of the chairs and smiled at Eli.

Eli went toward him.

"You're a damn fool, Seth," he said without preamble, as he got within speaking distance. "Sooner or later Sellars checks up on everyone who sees me. Do you want to be found out?"

"You are my brother," said Seth. "And I think you're in trouble." He held out his hand, and Eli took it. They sat down together.

"What gives you that idea?" asked Eli.

"That's a foolish question," answered the Seth Maguin. "As well ask me how I found you here, or how I know you did not listen to the cube I sent you yesterday at Cable Island. As soon as you recognized my voice you destroyed it. I know these things; and you could know the equivalent of me, if you would only tear down the walls you've built up to block off that section of your mind."

"We won't go into that, again," said Eli. "After all, we're only half-brothers."

"What of it?" countered Seth. "We still had the same father; even if he did not know that one hot night spent in Ankhara had given him a son. Neither one of us knew either until the day when you and I looked at each other across a playground at the special school in Bermuda where we'd each been sent because of our high ratings on the aptitude tests. We looked at each other and knew. Not only I knew—you knew."

"I don't remember that far back," said Eli.

"Then why do you admit the relationship now?"

"I don't in public," replied Eli. "And in private . . . what's the difference? There's nothing to blood relationship but an accident, lucky or not, depending on how you look at it."

"It matters when there's psi ability in the blood. Our father had it."

"Did he?"

"I have it."

"Have you?"

"And you—"

"No," said Eli, definitely. He shook his head with sudden weariness. "I won't talk about this, Seth. You're a Member and wedded to the notion. I'm not and I don't believe in it. Now let's drop it and get to the reason you risked being brought to Sellar's attention by coming to see me."

Seth looked at him, a faint, upright line pain-drawn between the fine shadows of his dark brows.

"It *is* the reason I came," he said quietly. "What are you here for?"

"That's my business," answered Eli, levelly, meeting him eye to eye.

"Forgive me," said Seth sadly. "But there is so much I know about you. You're free of ordinary politics now—I know that—and I'd hoped to bring you in with us."

"No!" exploded Eli violently. "I sold my freedom for a mess of politics these last eight years and I'll never sell again—on any terms. For all my life I've tried to find the solutions of my problems in the ways other people find theirs. From now on I want to be left alone to do as I want."

Seth shook his head.

"That's impossible for you, Eli."

"Suppose you tell me why."

"Because," said Seth, "the world does not go that way. History will not allow it. I don't mean past history, but present history, this moment, in the way it determines the future. This moment, which is not just this moment in this one little area, but this moment the world over, with all its present, momentary happening and potentialities that those happenings imply. That is how history builds, not on a few but on an unimaginable multitude of casual incidents."

"I don't see it interfering with me," said Eli grimly.

"It can't help but interfere," replied Seth. "Conflict is inevitable; and you are one of the factors in the conflict, along with us, the Members, with our belief in a great future for the race; and Anthony Sellars, with his armbanded group people who are theoretically merely qualified first-aiders who can be called upon in any public emergency, but which we know are the core of the army he is raising against us."

Eli moved his head restlessly against the back of the deck chair.

"Words," he said. "Suppositions. Rumors."

"Are they?" demanded Seth. "We happen to know at the moment that Sellars is planning to uncover living proof of the popular rumor that credits us with having used hard radiation and gene experimentation on humans."

"I would have thought he had more brains than that. Anyone with sense knows that couldn't be true."

"But Eli," said Seth. "It *is* true."

Eli turned and looked at him as if he had never seen him before.

"It was a possible solution," said Seth, his dark eyes unhappy. "It had to be tried. Somewhere along the line, someone had to try it. It was before my time, back twenty or thirty years ago, and the experiments that survived are all grown up now. I could not have made such a decision myself, I think; but that is perhaps because I, today, know that such tactics are not the answer. But I cannot blame them. Like we who are the present Members, they believed that the future of the race was at stake—at stake as definitely as if a plague was sweeping the world and threatening to exterminate everyone."

"Where, in God's name do you get such a notion?" burst out Eli.

"What is characteristic of a species which has reached a point where further upward evolution is necessary?" countered Seth. "The species has reached its limits of adaptation within its present stage. It must evolve, or else."

"What is there we can't adapt to?"

"Atomic energy," said Seth. He looked at Eli. "Do you really want me to explain this?"

"Yes," said Eli.

"All right," replied Seth. He sat for a minute as if sorting out his thoughts. "All right," he went on. "It goes like this:

"I say atomic energy and you laugh; because we've had atomic energy for two hundred years now and it's done nothing but make the world a very pleasant place to live in and an easy life available to all. But this is a very superficial view." He leaned forward earnestly.

"I would like to remind you, Eli, of something that had its beginning at the same time as Atomic Theory, and that was the physics of which it was a part. There were men to be found, even in the mid-twentieth century who said that their present physics had opened up a very large room, but that its further walls could be seen; and that, barring some startling new discovery and the plugging of gaps here and there, that particular aspect of science was complete.

"For two hundred years there has been completely explored—as far as human beings can explore it. What kind of situation does this leave us with?

"Among other things it leaves us without a shield against atomic energy. Down the long history of Man's development the progression has been—first a new weapon, then a defense against it, then a weapon to crack that defense, and a stronger shield, and so on. Now, for two hundred years we have been possessed of an ultimate weapon, which is the end of the line. No defense is possible—there is no more science from which to build a defense. And for two hundred years we have lived in uneasy truce, one with another. Our solution has been to be careful not to play with the fires that might burn us; but this is contrary to man's very nature. What has made him what he is, has been his insistence *on* playing with the fires that might burn him. For two hundred years we have exercised a miracle of restraint. But it is no more than that. As long as the weapon remains, the problem of using it remains also.

"It must be handled and it cannot be handled. What's the answer? One—the classic response of physical evolution would be to adapt physically so that a human being could walk through the heart of an atomic explosion without damage. Physics denies us this, as it denies us a defense as well. Two —Man's solution would be to think up something new in physics that would enable him to find a defense. But it seems there is nothing new. Well?"

Seth finished and sat looking at Eli. Eli rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"You say," said Eli, finally, "that we're at the end of the line but that we can't stop traveling. So the only thing we can do is crash?"

"Yes."

"A little late in the day to be thinking of evolution, if that's true, don't you think?"

"I'll tell you," said Seth slowly. "I think that evolution actually began farther back than we will ever know—before the first bomb fell. And I think that it has already taken place."

"Oh?" replied Eli. "That must be a comforting conclusion for these cripples of your experimentation."

"Eli!" said Seth. "Be shocked if you want to by what I told you, but don't let it affect the fairness of your judgement!"

"The floor," Eli told him, "is all yours, Seth."

"You didn't give me a chance to finish. We—the Members—have reached the conclusion on the basis of forty years of work and what evidence we can and have observed, that the psi faculties bear the same relation to the human race that human intelligence does—though not necessarily in direct ratio to intelligence. In short, everybody has them, with some people having them more than others. We know they exist—"

"I don't," interrupted Eli. Seth stared at him.

"Now, Eli . . ."

"That's what I said."

"Eli," said Seth sternly, "unless you've been willfully blinding yourself, you couldn't have lived thirty-eight years in this day and age without seeing examples of the ordinary psi qualities in action."

"I've seen parlor tricks," Eli said. "I've heard rumors. I've never been convinced."

"*You* out of all the world!" said Seth, with a rare note of bitterness in his voice. "The man on the street doesn't share your disbelief. Even Anthony Sellars makes no bones about believing."

"I say merely I've never been convinced."

"The message cube I sent you, for example."

"I can think," said Eli, "of more than one way that could have been gotten into Poby's pouch without any non-physical means being involved. They range all the way from illegal hypnotic conditioning of Poby to accept a second cube while denying its existence, to some simple sleight of hand with the diplomatic pouch somewhere along the line."

"I assure you," said Seth, "that that cube was teleported directly from the instrument on which I recorded it to the pouch on your courier's wrist."

Eli turned and smiled at him.

"If that's true," he said, "why bother with me? Go on and take the world."

"Because in two hundred years we have never succeeded in making any single such faculty reliable. We have men who can telepath, who can teleport, who can transmute—but not one of them can be relied on to do it to order."

"It worked with me," said Eli, with a casual wave of his hand.

"Things usually work with you," replied Seth, a shade grimly. "That's what I've tried to tell you for thirty years.

We think, and I believe, that you may have the very thing we need."

"And what's that?"

Seth threw his arms out hopelessly.

"Who knows?" he said. Then he calmed somewhat, slipping back into his normal quietness and self-possession. His slim face stared earnestly into Eli's. "The psi faculties don't seem to show up as a single extra talent, but as a field of extra talents, among them many we can't conceive of. For example—myself."

"For example, you," agreed Eli, good-humoredly.

"My talent, if you want to call it that," said Seth, "seems to lie mainly along the line of something like intuition or insight into people and things." He rose from the desk chair suddenly and began to pace back and forth in the sunlight pouring through the transparency of the solar roof. "Every so often, something will present itself to me in a flash. And from then on my certainty is so fixed that I can't even doubt that thing to myself."

"And I suppose," replied Eli, watching him move, "that you've some such intuition about me."

"Yes," said Seth, halting and looking at him. "I *know*—I don't think, Eli—I *know* that at this present moment in history you are the kingpin on which we all must turn, Members, Sellars, Underseas, and all the people of all the groups anywhere."

"It's too late now, Seth," said Eli. "I've given up the spokesmanship."

"I know."

"Damn it, don't give me that!" shouted Eli, suddenly starting up from his chair. "You can't know."

"I tell you I know!" Seth faced him; and for a moment his eyes lit up and his brown face was transfigured with a wild, prophetic glint. "I know because it is my function to know —everything about you that is necessary at this time. I am bound to you by blood and affection. I am tied to you by chance and time. In the hour approaching there is nothing that can separate us, neither space, nor time nor death!"

For a few seconds after these last words rang out, the two of them stood silent, staring at each other. Then Eli spoke, and his voice was hard.

"Another of your intuitions?" he asked, the sarcasm heavy

in his voice. Seth's face gentled and smoothed. He smiled softly at Eli.

"Yes," he said.

Eli sighed and turned away. He crossed back to his deck chair and dropped down into it again.

"You see why I can't accept anything you say, Seth," he said wearily. "It's too wild."

Seth smiled and answered nothing. Abruptly Eli turned to the small table beside his deck chair. There was a small figurine there in snowy plastic, a Grecian maiden with a water jar on her shoulder. He picked it up and threw it suddenly on the floor, so that it bounced and rolled a dozen feet from them.

"All right!" he said tightly. "Let's see you put that back without touching it."

Seth turned his eyes on the fallen figurine. For a moment his face tightened. Then it relaxed.

"I'm sorry," he said, turning back to Eli. "I can't."

Eli let a long breath sigh from him.

"You see?" his voice was almost helpless. He looked up at Seth. "Not that it makes any difference. Even if you were right—even if what you say was true and real, I'd still say no. What you can't understand . . ." he hesitated. "What nobody can seem to understand is that I'm through with all the big questions. Seth, do you know what I want to do?"

"What haven't you done?" smiled Seth. "During your twenties I remember you tried your hand at just about everything. Certainly, all of the arts; and where sciences were concerned—"

"The point was, I was looking for what I wanted to do," interrupted Eli.

"I thought you found it in politics."

"No!" said Eli sharply. "And I haven't found it yet. But I've found a way to find it."

Seth said nothing, but watched him.

"I'm going to tell you why I'm here," said Eli. He rubbed the back of his hand in momentary weariness across his forehead. "I've always been running after something—you know that. This same something. And I haven't found it, but now I've started to run out of time."

He looked at Seth and then away again.

"Well, I've found a way to gain time. If I tell you about it,

I want you to keep it a secret."

"If you wish," said Seth.

"About two years ago," Eli went on, taking a deep breath, "I began worrying about time. I didn't care about my chronological age. What I cared about was that I still hadn't started whatever it was I was going to do. And my body was getting steadily closer to its end—its time getting shorter every day. I got a notion and I dug up Howell, the man in charge here."

"I've heard of him somewhere before," said Seth.

"He's a good medical research man, one of the best," said Eli. "A little violent, but not bad. I talked my idea over with him, and using my authority as spokesman got our captive University of Miami to award him a research grant, this station and facilities. The grant was for the development of new techniques in underwater surgery."

"The Undersea Domes would be interested in that, of course," nodded Seth.

"But that isn't what he's been doing," said Eli grimly. "What he has been doing is working out a technique to rebuild and replace the worn-down parts of my body. In two years he's worked out something. If it works, my body should regenerate on a twenty-year-old level."

He looked at Seth.

"I could mean, practically, immortality," he said.

Seth frowned in astonishment.

"So you see," said Eli. "I—" he hesitated. "I have my own life to lead. A man has a right—"

The large three-dimensional screen that rose like a bubble in the center of the solar floor, chimed suddenly, four dulcet notes, and the head of Tammy appeared in it, several times life-size.

"Oh, there you are," she said, swiveling to face them. "We're knocking off for the cocktail break downstairs. Why don't you two come down and join us."

She smiled and disappeared. Eli got up from his chair.

"Coming, Seth?" he asked.

Seth smiled.

"I'll come for the company," he said.

They moved across the floor to the elevator capsule, the subject between them, by mutual silent agreement, laid aside for the moment. They stepped inside; and Eli thumbed the

stud for fourth level.

"A pleasant station," said Seth, as the capsule began to slip downward.

"Yes," said Eli. "I—"

He broke off suddenly. Seth looked at him. "Nothing!" said Eli. And when he saw Seth still staring, he repeated, fiercely. "*Nothing,* I tell you!"

Seth let it go; and the walls of the elevator tube slipped swiftly upward, opaquely about them as they dropped. But Eli was looking through and beyond them, seeing still the momentary picture of the solar deck, seen over Seth's shoulder in the minute before the capsule dropped below its floor level. For a moment the solar had stood out before him, with deck chairs, screen and tables.

The figurine, the little Grecian maiden with the water jar in white plastic, was no longer on the floor where Eli had thrown it. It was once more standing upright in its usual position on the table.

5

THE COCKTAIL break, Eli discovered, was in this instance something more than just a pleasant afternoon interlude. It was, in fact, a sort of combination celebration and send-off party, to mark not only the conclusion of two years of preparatory work, but the beginning of the operations, since they would start getting Eli ready for the first of these directly after it.

Eli found himself welcoming the opportunity to sit back and take a good look at the people whom he was counting on to do a number of rather drastic things to him and get away with it successfully. In this moment he thought, as he watched them and listened to the chatter, that Howell's single-minded egocentricity was reassuring rather than otherwise. The man was so certain of himself. Tammy, also, he shifted his eyes to the girl, was reassuring, for a different, almost opposed reason. She seemed the kind of person who would think of him, even when stretched out unconscious on the operating table, as another person, and not as so much flesh and bone to be tinkered with. There was comfort in Tammy, as he had noticed during the testing of the night before. A feeling of

concern for him seemed to flow out from her and lap around him.

As for Mel and Ntoane—they were the unknown quantities. Of the two, Eli thought he preferred the Basuto. There was an echo of wisdom to him that seemed to be lacking in the younger man. *Perhaps,* thought Eli, *that's what I have against Mel, the fact that he's young. But usually I like people for that reason.*

He shook his head. There was something about Mel that puzzled and disturbed Eli, a hint of deep-buried, repudiated resentment against Eli for which there could be no reason. Eli thought about it; then gave up as Howell dropped unexpectedly down beside him.

"How d'you feel?" demanded Howell.

"Fine," Eli considered. "A little frightened, I suppose."

"Of the operation. Naturally," said Howell. "Atavistic fear of being hurt, of being helpless. Not afraid of dying, are you?"

"Is there any danger?" countered Eli.

"None," said Howell. "We'll put you under with a lytic mixture this evening. Then take twenty-four hours to get your body temperature down. By that time we'll be able to keep you on the operating table until all of the major organs are out and replaced."

"I suppose you've got the—er—substitutes ready?" asked Eli, feeling a little queasy at the notion.

"My God!" said Howell. "We've had two years to culture them. They ought to be ready."

"Oh? They're all cultures?"

"Of course." Howell peered at him. "You don't think we'd take a chance on anything out of an accident bank?"

Eli did not answer immediately. He was thinking at the moment that it might somehow perhaps be a little more friendly to think of his new heart and liver, or whatever they were going to replace, being natural-grown accessories, so to speak, than the impersonal offsprings of a culture bath.

"No telling what factors we might introduce if we did that," Howell went on.

"It seems to me," protested Eli, mildly, "that I've heard of cultured body parts being refused by the body so that—"

"Nonsense!" said Howell. "In the beginning they had a few cases due to incomplete knowledge of body typing. Not for twenty years now. No, no, it's perfectly simple. Cut, attach

mechanical standby, remove, replace, detach mechanical, and there you are."

Eli winced. Howell, in his attempts to reassure his patient was being markedly unsuccessful.

"If you want, I can take you down to the operating room now," said Howell, "and show you the complete procedure."

"No thanks," said Eli. And as promptly as if he had run up a distress signal, Tammy and Seth both came swooping down at once to break up the conversation.

As soon as he was free, Eli slipped away from the party and went up to the solar roof to be by himself. The sun was just dipping toward the horizon. It had already stained a path of reddish gold across the restless waters of the ocean, from out of the west. The sky was luminous; but in the east the waters were dark. Eli took a turn limping around the deck of the solar.

He had not thought that he would be afraid of anything. But now, whether triggered either by Seth's unexpected visit, or by the imminence of the operation itself, fear was gnawing at him internally. Not a great fear, of the kind that chills the body and stiffens the muscles, but a little rat's tooth of gnawing uneasiness that worked at the back of his mind like an ulcer might have worked at his stomach lining. Deny it to Seth as much as he could, he could not hide from himself the fact that he operated largely with what appeared to be instinct. And at this moment, that instinct was warning him of . . . what? Coming up against that question mark, Eli grinned a little sourly to himself. There was no lack, he thought, of things to make him uneasy.

The world was quivering on the edge of an explosion that would tear it apart, like a balloon at the bursting point. There were hints, through Hassan, of those who might have designs upon his life. And, if this were not enough, he faced an ordeal rather like that of a guinea pig who goes first under the knife in the discovery of a new technique of an experimental laboratory. But more than this—Eli halted his pacing and leaned with one arm upon the back of a chair to gaze somberly at the ceaselessly moving ocean—there was the matter of his own deep unhappiness and out-of-placeness in the world. He knew what he was about to do, and what he had done; but there was no way in which he could tell whether these things which he had done and was about to do, would bring

him peace.

He shook off these morbid thoughts. The sun was even closer to the horizon now; and he reminded himself that there were things to be done.

He sat down on the chair, and pushed the key on the communicator in the middle of the table before him. He had not pressed the vision key, only the audio. The bubble itself, in which the head of the operator should have appeared, remained milky. But her voice came from it.

"Calling?"

"Scrambler," replied Eli. He was referring to the mechanical device at World Central which mixed up its incoming messages on a random basis, so as to make them completely untraceable; and then sent them forth from its own location in one of the basements of Cable Island.

There was a moment's pause, and then a single silvery chime came from the clouded half-bubble.

"Scrambler on. Go ahead, sir," said the voice of the operator. There was another chime and Eli knew that even the operator was now out of the circuit.

"Number two-nine-four, Cable Island," said Eli. Again, there was an almost imperceptable pause. Then Kurt Anders' voice spoke from the bubble.

"Anders here," it said.

"Kurt," said Eli. "It's me." He reached out and pressed the picture button. Immediately before him, the bubble cleared; he stared into the face of his former underspokesman for the Underseas Domes.

Kurt's slim face looked up at him in astonishment, which as Eli watched, slowly began to mix itself with gladness.

"Eli—" Kurt was beginning. Eli cut him short.

"No, I haven't changed my mind," Eli said. "I just called up to tell you that you could announce my resignation now, Kurt. That is, if you haven't done so already."

The excitement in Kurt's face faded slowly as Eli watched. The face became hard and Eli was amazed to see, how bitter.

"You can't do this, Eli," said Kurt, at last.

"Oh, but I can," said Eli, smiling, but looking at him closely. "Tell me, Kurt. I always thought you'd be the sort of a man to welcome the position of spokesman. But you really don't want it, do you?"

"No," said Kurt flatly, his eyes meeting Eli's. "I don't."

"Mind telling me why?"

"No, I don't mind telling you why," retorted Kurt. "Under ordinary situations it would have come about naturally, and it would have been just what I would have wanted. But you handed it to me to hold just when it started to fall apart."

Eli held his face steady; but the shock struck home internally. He had not seen himself before this in the light of a man who hands over a bankrupt company with all the airs and graces of making a valuable present to one who had long wanted it.

"If you feel that way, Kurt," Eli said calmly, "you don't have to take the job, of course."

"Don't I?" flared Kurt. "Who else is there?"

"Why, I imagine the Domes can find somebody," said Eli evenly.

"Oh sure, they can find somebody!" said Kurt. "They can find somebody to prop up behind the desk here. But that's not what's needed, Eli, and you know it."

Eli sighed.

"Kurt," he said, "that is the same old argument that has kept men in positions of responsibility against their will since civilization began. I'm not indispensable. No one is. And you, and to a lesser extent several hundred other men, are as capable of handling the job of spokesman for Underseas as well as I ever could."

Kurt looked him squarely in the eye.

"That's not true, Eli" he said.

"It is, whether you believe it, or not," said Eli. "I took up politics the way anybody might take up a job as a salesman. I might have easily gone into deep-sea diving. And if I had, Underseas would have gotten along just as well without me. So I can't be all that indispensable and valuable now."

"And I tell you you are!" said Kurt desperately. "Underseas is falling apart without you. Eli—" he hesitated. "The whole world is falling apart without you."

Eli burst into loud laughter. "Don't be a damn fool, Kurt," he said harshly. "I called not only to tell you about publishing my resignation now, but to ask if there was anything I could do to help. But I can see now that if I even twitched a finger you'd have me back carrying the whole load again." He shook his head, grinning a little savagely. "No, no, Kurt, you're going to have to struggle through this on your own. So

long, and good luck!" he reached for the cutoff switch.

"Wait!" called Kurt. "Tell me where you are, at least. Give me a phone number, Eli—"

"No, Kurt," said Eli, shaking his head. "That would make it too easy." He pressed the cutoff switch and the screen went blank.

Eli drew a deep breath. He shook his head and punched another number on the set.

"Scramble," he said, without waiting for the operator to speak to him. There was the customary pause, and then the screen cleared and he saw Hassan looking up at him.

"Are you calling direct?" asked the fat man, without preamble.

"Of course not," replied Eli sharply.

Hassan shrugged and breathed out.

"It might have been an emergency you were calling about; and no time or chance to scramble," he said. "How's it going where you are!"

"Pretty much as expected," said Eli. "But what I called about was that I'd like some information from you."

"Always glad to oblige," said Hassan. "Who on, this time?"

"My former underspokesman, Kurt Anders," said Eli. "Is he in some personal trouble, or something of that order?"

"Anders?" said Hassan. "Nothing political, in any case. He's got a health problem, though."

Eli's eyebrows jerked up.

"Health problem?" he said.

Hassan looked at him ironically.

"He's quivering on the edge of a nervous breakdown, according to his physician," Hassan said. "That job you wished on him is just a little too much for the boy." Eli frowned.

"Well, keep an eye on him," Eli said. "If something serious happens to him, I'd like to know about it."

Hassan shrugged.

"If that's what you want." His eyes narrowed a little as they rested on Eli. "I'd say you had other things to occupy your mind, myself." Eli raised his eyebrows, ironically.

"Oh?" he said. Hassan did not smile.

"That's right," he said. "A whisper's come in to me here that your assassin's already been picked out."

"But you don't know who he is," said Eli, smiling a little

grimly.

"No," replied Hassan. "But according to the word I got, he's at the station with you there, right now."

Eli stiffened suddenly.

"*He*—you said?" he inquired sharply.

"Or she." Hassan spread his hands. "Sex wasn't specified." He gazed curiously at Eli. "You could duck out right now."

Eli shook his head, slowly; his eyes abstracted and thoughtful.

"Up to you, then," said Hassan. "Keep your eye open for the little birds. If I get something definite, I'll ship the information on to you." Eli nodded. Hassan stretched his hand out over the controls of his own phone, and then hesitated. "Was there something more you wanted from me?"

"No," said Eli, rousing himself. "No. Thanks, that's all for now." He reached out his own hand to the communication set and broke the connection. A voice broke suddenly on his ears. He whirled around.

"Oh, there you are," cried Tammy cheerfully, advancing on him. "I've been looking all over for you. Dr. Howell's already down on the operating level of the station. You're to come down and I'll start getting you ready."

Eli was conducted by Tammy to a room adjoining the operating room and put to bed in what looked like a large, quilted stretcher, with an equally thick cover of the same design that covered him completely up to his chin. Only one arm protruded, and into this, at the junction of the medium basilic and median cephalic vein inside the right elbow, Tammy pushed and taped a hollow needle. From the needle a light tube ran up to a bottle hanging head downwards from a T-shaped rack beside the stretcher.

Eli looked at the straw-colored liquid in the bottle.

"That's what Arthur called the lytic mixture, isn't it?" he asked.

"That's right," Tammy smiled down at him, fastening the magnetic strip that held the edges of the top covering to the stretcher and enclose Eli, by the simple expedient of pressing them together at the bottom and then running her pinched fingers along until their full lengths were in contact.

"What's it made of?" asked Eli. "The lytic mixture, I mean."

"Chlorpromazine, mainly," she answered.

"What's that?" Eli wanted to know. "Something new?"

"It's been used like this for over a hundred and fifty years. You relax now," said Tammy.

Eli wriggled uncomfortably in his cocoon. The material that enclosed him enclosed heaviness and coolness. He was aware of the needle through which the lytic mixture was dripping into his arm, not as a pain, for a small amount of local anesthetic had been used, but as a somewhat improper weight and pressure within his flesh.

"I wish this stuff would hurry up and take effect," he growled.

"It will," said Tammy.

Eli yawned and woke. Tammy had vanished and he looked up into the face of Ntoane. Eli blinked.

"Is—it all over?" he asked. His voice sounded a little croaky and unused. He cleared his throat.

"All over," said Ntoane. "How do you feel?"

"Feel?" echoed Eli.

He became conscious now, of the fact that his cocoon was no longer cool, but warm. Inside it his body felt pretty much as it had always felt.

"I feel all right," he answered.

"Good," said Ntoane. He slipped the end of his thumb between the top ends of the magnetic fastening strips and ran it back along their length to separate them. "Take my hand and I'll help you get up now."

"Get up?" repeated Eli. He felt ridiculous to be parroting every word Ntoane said, but the words seemed to come out by themselves, without any authority from him.

"That's right," said Ntoane. "Here, I'll give you a hand." He slid an arm behind Eli's shoulders and helped him level him into a sitting position on the edge of the stretcher-affair. As Eli bent at the waist he felt suddenly as if he had been stabbed in the body, not merely in one spot, but in several places at once.

"Help!" he gasped, grabbing at Ntoane.

"What's the matter?" asked Ntoane.

"Something's wrong inside me," said Eli.

"Merely the incisions. In two days you won't even know they're there. Come on, up now. Eli looked up to see that Howell had come striding into the room, answering as he came.

"What do you mean, up now?" demanded Eli indignantly. "I feel like I'm coming apart."

"Nonsense," said Howell. "Ignore it."

"You *will* feel better after you've moved around a bit," put in Ntoane, sympathetically.

So encouraged, Eli allowed Ntoane to help him to his feet and support him while he took a number of unsteady steps about the room. By the time he had completed a couple of circuits, he was sweating freely.

"That's enough," said Howell, at last. "I'll take him, Ntoane while you get a wheel chair." And he put his hands firmly under Eli's armpits, holding him until Ntoane brought back the wheel chair from the corridor outside the room.

Once in the wheel chair, Eli relaxed.

"Whew!" he said. wiping his forehead.

"A little difficult at first," admitted Howell dryly. "Come along, Eli and I'll pick out something safe for you to eat. After that you can see your new visitor."

"New visitor?"

Howell was already moving off down the corridor.

"The spokesman for Communications," he answered. "Alan Clyde, I think his name is."

Eli's eyes narrowed. He pressed the motor button set in one arm of his wheel chair and rolled after the thin man.

After a lunch consisting mainly of liquids, Eli went hunting Clyde. He found him seated with Seth up in the solar, leaning forward with his slim, handsome face politely attentive to the words of the Member. Both men turned and rose and Eli rolled from the elevator and approached them.

"You two know each other?" he said, smiling up at them.

"We do now," said Alan cheerfully.

"How do you feel, Eli?" asked Seth.

"A little sore about the midsection, otherwise fine," said Eli.

"Good, I'm glad," said Seth. He glanced from Eli to the young Communications spokesman. "I'll leave you to your own conversation, now. Excuse me."

The other two nodded and watched his lean figure as he went to the elevator and down out of sight. Then they turned back to each other.

"Sit down," said Eli.

"Thanks," Alan took a deck chair, pulling it around to

face Eli. "I got your address out of Kurt. He didn't want to let me have it at first. I explained that it was something of an emergency."

"That's all right," said Eli. "You're the one man I don't mind Kurt letting know. I'll ask you to keep the information to yourself, though, if you don't mind. Did he tell you anything except where I was?"

"No," answered Alan. "I couldn't get another word out of him. He seemed worried." And he looked at Eli keenly as if he hoped this statement would surprise a reaction out of the older man that would be more informative. Eli's expression, however, remained unaltered.

"What's on your mind, Alan?" he said.

"Frankly," the younger man leaned forward with his elbows on the arms of his deck chair and folded long, sinewy hands together, "I'm out horsetrading."

"That sounds interesting," said Eli.

"I hope so," said Alan, bluntly. "Because I'm not going to pussyfoot around the business. It boils down to this: Tony Sellars has made Communications an offer."

"Communications, or you?" asked Eli.

"Myself as communications," replied Alan. "Naturally, I can't tell you anything more about it than that it's a proposition for combining forces from now on. But you're capable of reading what you need between the lines on that."

"Well? Why come to me?"

"I haven't accepted yet. As I say, I'm out horsetrading. I thought I'd see what you had to offer."

"Officially," said Eli cautiously, "I couldn't, of course, offer anything. Underseas, of course, would be glad to have Communications on her side."

"That's not what I'm talking about," said Alan. He leaned back in his deck chair. "Understand me, now, Eli. I'm not a cherisher of personal ambition. I'm a representative of a small, but vitally important group who can't afford to make the wrong decision. If things were to go on as they have for the last half century, with the groups balancing the world power between them, I'd never abandon our traditional stand of remaining unconnected with any power association of groups. But you and I know that we're in for a change; and quite bluntly, I want to be on the winning side."

"I see," Eli looked down and rubbed his bad knee thought-

fully, from long habit. "I see I'm going to have to trust you with some further information—if you'll promise to keep this under your hat also until the official announcement is made."

"Certainly," said Alan.

Eli looked up at him. "I've given up the spokesmanship," he said.

Alan sat perfectly still for a long moment, looking at him. Finally he spoke.

"I don't understand."

"I've quit—retired—gotten out of the job," amplified Eli. "Kurt has my resignation. It should, in fact, have been made public before this. Officially, I haven't even the right now to be discussing Underseas business with you."

Alan's chiseled face showed bewilderment.

"I still don't understand," he said.

Eli sighed.

"I never really wanted the spokesmanship," he said. "No, I quit. Kurt is temporarily in charge and there's a very good chance the various Domes will confirm him in the position. I suggest you go back and talk to him."

Alan frowned.

"No," he said slowly. "I don't believe I will."

"Why not?" said Eli. "You wanted Underseas on your side. And Underseas is Kurt, now."

Alan shook his head.

"You evidently don't understand, Eli," he said. "It wasn't Underseas I wanted. It's you. Without you, Underseas is just another little two-bit group—and with even less than ordinary influence because it has no mainland connections."

"Now hold on," said Eli. "Underseas has eighteen other small groups in coalition!"

"And how many will it have once your resignation is announced?" asked Alan. "Be honest, Eli. We all know Kurt on the Island; and he's a nice fellow, but he's not even average spokesman material. Expecting him to step into your shoes is sheer fantasy."

Mentally, Eli bit his lip. Alan's serving of unpalatable facts was undeniable. And worse than that, it was merely a reflection of the reactions all the group spokesman would be showing when the news broke.

"What I don't understand is this retirement business of yours," Alan went on. He glanced at the wheel chair. "What

is it, Eli? Health?"

"No, no," said Eli wearily. "It's what I told you. I just want out."

There was a slight pause. Then Alan spoke again, with meaning. "I thought I recognized Seth Maguin," he said. "He's a Member, isn't he?"

"And I'm not conducting secret negotiations with the Members, either," said Eli. "Believe me or not, Alan. But it's simply what I tell you."

Alan shrugged and rose.

"Not much point in my wasting your time further if that's the case," he said and smiled. Then the smile vanished. "You realize what this is going to mean, don't you Eli?"

"What?" said Eli.

"It means that Tony is going to have what he wants handed to him on a platter."

"Are you sure you understand him right?" asked Eli.

"Who understands him?" Alan shrugged. "But I know something about what he wants, because he told me in making his offer."

Behind them at that moment, there was the slight rushing sound of displaced air as the elevator capsule rose to the top of the tube; and they turned to see Seth step from it and stride across the floor to the bubble of the three-dimentional screen.

"What is it, Seth?" asked Eli, driving his chair toward the screen. Alan turned and walked over behind him.

"You'll remember, Eli," answered Seth, without turning around, "that I mentioned something about living proof that was to be dug up . . ." Under his fingers a stud snapped and a pinpoint of color in the heart of the bubble screen ballooned suddenly into full representation. The three men found themselves looking down at three bodies with their faces covered, laid out on adjoining tables in what seemed to be either a hospital or a morgue. The voice of an announcer came to them with startling clarity.

"—at approximately ten-twenty this morning. The mob had been aroused by a rumor of an illegal Member gathering in a sub-basement of the Geneva City Library. By ten o'clock mob excitement had reached such a pitch that they moved in a body into the library in search of the sub-basement. It was just a few minutes after then that the explosion occurred.

Aside from the three bodies you are now looking at, no one was injured. Autopsies will be held, however, on these to determine if they show any physical abnormalities such as it has been suggested would be the result of illegal experimentation with gene control or hard radiation. Unofficial opinions by local medicians who have viewed the bodies hint that such physical abnormalities are probably present in all three. If this is true then the long standing accusation that the Members engage in . . ."

As if in a dream Eli watched the slow movements of Seth and Clyde as they turned to look at him. The solar shimmered and their faces seemed to float slowly toward him, growing enormously as they came. Their mouths moved but no sound came out. And in their eyes was a knowledge and a question . . .

"No!" shouted Eli, thrusting himself out of the chair onto his feet. "No! I can't."

And he flung an arm up in front of his face to shut out the sight of their faces. The solar swirled about him and he fell forward—forward into blackness.

He opened his eyes out of drowsy druggedness to find himself lying on the bed in his original room, in the half-light of the sunlit water. Tammy was moving around quietly.

"Tammy," he said.

She turned from what she was doing and came over to his bed. She looked down at him strangely.

"How do you feel?" she asked softly. Her voice was cool and soothing in the hushed room, like a grateful compress on the feverish sickness within him.

"I don't know," he told her honestly. Then he added, "Yes, I do. I feel miserable."

"Oh, Eli!"

The abrupt pain in her cry jolted him, so that he looked up in astonishment, to see tears in her eyes.

"Why, Tammy," he stumbled.

She did not answer. And he looked at her, seeing her really now for the first time—the smooth planes of her face, the delicate, turning line of her chin, the mobile mouth and speaking eyes, all at this moment tightened and touched with the pain of a love he had not suspected.

The helplessness of her went through him sharply; he held

out his arms to her. She came to them; and he drew her down on the bed beside him. He felt the slim weight of her body pressed against him and the warm wetness of her tears against his neck. Clumsily, he reached over his one arm and gripped her gently by the shoulder, holding her to him. She cried softly, but with relief, and he lay silent, staring at the ceiling.

"How did this happen?" he said finally.

She turned her head upon the pillow, so that her face was toward him. The soft warmth of her breath came and went with her words, tickling at his ear.

"I always loved you," she said. "Even when I was a little girl."

"But you didn't know me," he protested.

"Yes. Oh yes," she said. "I did. Twelve years ago, when you were in Acapulco. You were living in one of the beach additions at the Monteferrato. And we were in the addition two doors down. You remember."

Eli let his mind roll back through time to the years of his purposeless wandering, to his twenties. There had been interludes at many places; and yes—there had been a time at Acapulco. It was when he had been dabbling with painting and he had gone down there for the sunlight and the ocean. He remembered now the beach additions to the sprawling Hotel Monteferrato, the morning sunlight bright upon their solar roofs. And there had been a Dr. Wina, a short, round, bearded man whose hobby was marine biology. Dr. Wina, his wife, a tall placid woman, blond like Tammy. And a twelve-year-old daughter.

"Was that you?" he asked incredulously.

"You do remember me," she answered.

The little girl had hiked with him on Hornos Beach in the early mornings, before the crowd arrived. He remembered the long, narrowing curve of the wet sand arcing away ahead of them. Sand so white and water so blue that they looked like the over-coloring of a travel advertisment. There had been two months or so of that before his restlessness drove him on.

"I remember," he said now, lying on the bed. "Twelve years, though. And all the time you were growing up."

"I didn't forget," she said. "And when you went into politics, I followed everything you did. I kept waiting for you to marry and settle down. But you never did. Why didn't you, Eli?"

"I don't know," he frowned at the ceiling. "There were so many other things."

"I watched you on the screens," she said. "I never missed a time that you spoke. Dad knew Howell, and when you planned this—"

"Yes," said Eli gently.

They fell silent together. After a while she kissed him; and then left him. But Eli did not move. He stayed where he was, lying on his back, staring at the ceiling and thinking.

6

"No" SAID Eli. "No reflection on you, Mel. And I'm sorry, Arthur. But we'll stick to the physical side alone, and that's final."

"What if you fold up like that again?" demanded Howell. He turned to the young man beside him. "Talk some sense into him, Mel."

The big young man looked helpless.

"Eli—" he began without a great deal of optimism.

"No," said Eli. He pushed himself upright, wincing at the soreness of his still-painful incisions and swung his legs over the edge of the bed. "I'm sorry, gentlemen, but no psychiatry. And now I'd like to get up. Unless"—he looked at Howell—"you've got some reasons against it?"

"No," scowled Howell. "I want you to get up. But I want you to take care of yourself, too, dammit!"

"Then that's settled," said Eli, reaching for his clothes. "What's next on the schedule for me?"

"Trigger chemicals," Howell was looking hard at him. "Come on down to the lab and Ntoane'll fill you up with the ones for today. Can you walk?"

"I'll try."

It was not easy. The incisions still hurt him; but Eli found that by going slowly and hanging on to things, he could travel all right. Mel left him at the entrance to his room, but Howell followed along and stood over him as Ntoane made the injections.

"I wonder," said Howell, when these were over, "if you realize, Eli, just how drastic and important the changes are we've made in you."

"Tell me," answered Eli, humoring him.

"No point to it," said Howell. "I doubt if a single listing of changes would impress you. But the point I want to make is that you probably still consider yourself to be the same man you've always been. And you're not."

"I hope not," grinned Eli.

"It's nothing to joke about!" Howell flared. "You're in a medical no man's land now. Any sort of development can be expected."

"I read you loud and clear," said Eli. It was the bitter, jibing sort of humor that came on him occasionally, when he was being pushed too far. "And now I think I'll go up to the solar."

He turned away. Howell, his eyes glittering with anger, took a step after him.

"Arthur," said Ntoane pleadingly.

Howell stopped.

On his way up in the elevator, Eli felt uneasiness once more stirring inside him. Hassan had said that one of the other three in the station—or had he meant to include Seth in that as well? —was an assassin. with orders to take Eli's life when the proper time arrived. Hassan was not the sort of man to be wrong. Sliding up the elevator tube in the capsule, Eli ran his mind lightly over the four who shared the station with him; not Howell, he thought, not Ntoane, and never Tammy. His mind recoiled from the suggestion that Tammy might be the one. That left Mel.

With sudden decision, Eli punched the stop button in the elevator and sent it back down to the level of Mel's private working quarters.

When he walked into Mel's office, the tall, young man was there. He was seated behind his desk, with a pile of papers. And he looked up rather sharply, and laid the papers down as Eli came in.

"Busy?" said Eli. Mel shook his head.

Eli pressed the button that closed the door behind him.

"I thought maybe I better have a little private talk with you," said Eli.

"Sit down," said Mel, gesturing to a chair beside his desk. Eli limped over to it and sat down, feeling the stab of his unhealed incisions in his middle as he did so. He was aware of Mel watching him with combined curiosity and wariness.

"I suppose you wonder about the fact I won't let you work on my mind," said Eli without further preamble.

"I can't held but wonder," answered Mel. "The old fashioned fear of the psychiatrist belongs back in the last century."

"Possibly," said Eli, non-committally. "Tell me, just what do you think you would do for me? And just how would you go about doing it?"

Mel shrugged slightly.

"I'd explore first," he said, "to find out what possible psychological basis there is for that limp of yours." He glanced at Eli's leg. "The reason you're doing something like that to yourself may have deeper and more troublesome roots than you expect."

"I know what the roots are, thank you," said Eli dryly. He met Mel's eye squarely across the desk.

"Are you sure?" the young man said with a slight smile. "It's almost an axiom, you know, in fact I could say it *was* an axiom that no person can really know himself, or the reasons that cause him to act as he does. Any more than a microscope can be used—"

"To examine itself. I know," interrupted Eli brusquely. "That's not what I mean. The fact of the matter is, I know of something connected with my limp, which for purely practical reasons, I prefer to keep to myself."

"But you have no idea what harm you might be doing yourself." Mel leaned forward earnestly across his desk toward Eli. I still think that there is a certain amount of actual fear of psychiatry at the basis of your refusal to co-operate about this."

"You do, do you?" grunted Eli.

"I promise you," said Mel eagerly. "You will be running no danger. Whatever it is you think you wish to hide, it will be safe with me, as it would be with any other physician."

Eli continued to look him in the eye; and a slow smile grew on his lips. It was a smile that was more than a trifle sardonic.

"Even if you discovered some relationship between Tammy and myself?" he said dryly.

Mel flushed and straightened up abruptly in his chair. Then, with an effort he sat back again.

"Eli," he said, "you have a certain amount of hostility toward me. To answer you, frankly, yes I would just as soon

not discover anything in your mind connected with Tammy. On the other hand, I *am* a medical man. With a medical man's ethics and sense of responsibility toward my patient."

"I see," replied Eli in a level tone of voice. "You still haven't told me just how you would go about it."

"Hypnotherapy, to start off with," said Mel, looking levelly across the table at him. "We would have to try and bring your conscious mind, of course, whatever painful thing your unconscious is repressing."

"And can you be so sure," Eli said, "that there is something I am repressing?" Mel shook his head with almost an air of annoyance.

"All human beings repress things," he said. "If these repressions cause no trouble, there is no need to disturb them. If they do, then we have to go after them."

"By hypnotherapy, and other techniques which put the patient completely at the mercy of his doctor," said Eli.

"Yes. If that's the way you want to put it," said Mel.

"That's the way I want to put it," said Eli. "And that is exactly what I wanted to get straight with you." He stood up from his chair. "I haven't lived this long, in the world of politics and outside it, without knowing when to make myself vulnerable and when not. In this case, I don't think I should take the risk."

Mel shook his head slowly, with a stubborn but oddly defeated air.

"I can't force you," he said.

"That's right," said Eli. "You can't. But it's interesting to wonder why you might even wish you could."

Mel looked up at him oddly.

"It would be for your own good," he said. Eli considered him for a moment.

"So," he said, "you're one of those. That's what I wanted to find out." He turned about and left the room.

He went thoughtfully down the hall of the level; and then, suddenly recognized he was passing the entrance to Ntoane's laboratory. He checked himself at the door, hesitated a second, and then pushed inside. Ntoane, a laboratory apron on, was busy washing some glass vessels in a sink. He turned about and dried his hands, as Eli approached.

"Eli!" he said. "Sit down. Sit down! How are you feeling?"

Eli found himself a seat upon a tall four-legged stool.

"As well as can be expected," he answered cheerfully. "How's yourself?"

"Oh, I'm fine," replied Ntoane, laying the towel aside. "Well, if you feel as fine as that, what brings you in here?"

Eli smiled.

"Nothing to do with my state of health," he answered. "Or perhaps it has. I've just been having another little talk with Mel about his tinkering with the inside of my brain."

"I take it you still haven't agreed," said Ntoane.

"No. And I won't." Eli looked keenly at the dark-skinned man. "Mel seems to be something of the fanatic." Ntoane frowned, and glanced aside at the equipment he had been washing, before answering.

"He's a very good physician," Ntoane said, "as young as he is."

"If it was your mind, your ego," said Eli, bluntly, "would you trust him with it?"

"Unreservedly," replied Ntoane.

"Even if you suspected that his interest was not all a doctor's might be, in that part of your existence that was concerned with the person of a young lady?" said Eli, grinning twistedly. Ntoane eyes went noncommittally blank.

"That's something I can't judge," he said.

"You see," said Eli, "why I consider important that he's a fanatic. Fanatics are liable to make judgements in terms of their own values of right and wrong—not only for themselves but for others as well. And act upon those decisions, where others are concerned." Ntoane shook his head. His voice was soft and a little gentle.

"We're all fanatics, in one way or another, Eli," he said. "You. I . . ." he spread his hands, in a yielding gesture.

"I can see it for myself," said Eli, watching him. "That's—or it was—part of my business. But don't tell me you're a fanatic."

"I consider myself one," said Ntoane. "I also have my own standards of right and wrong. And I would like to see those standards imposed on more people than they are."

"And just what is it you'd like to impose?" queried Eli.

"The principles of peace and progress," said Ntoane, looking back at him. "Progress toward peace, and peaceful progress thereafter."

"I would say," retorted Eli dryly, "that, far from being a

fanatic, you're simply a somewhat impractical man, Ntoane."

Ntoane spread his hands again, without answering.

"So you don't think I should worry about Mel?" said Eli.

"You might do better," said Ntoane, "to worry about me."

Eli shook his head.

"I might do best of all," he said soberly, "to worry about myself. Where did Howell go to, do you know?

"I think he's getting some sleep," said Ntoane. "He works all hours, you know." His glance at Eli just then had something almost of a pleading quality. "That's one reason he was somewhat short-tempered just a little bit ago. He hadn't had any sleep for quite some time. It's the way he is."

"Ah? I hadn't realized that. Well, I can see him any other time," said Eli. He got up from the stool. "I guess I'll run up to the solar and rest a bit in the sun." He turned and went off toward the door.

"Eli," Ntoane's voice turned him around. "Eli, you have to start opening up to the world somewhere along the line."

Eli smiled a little lopsidedly, shook his head, and went out the door.

Going once more up in the elevator, Eli found himself experiencing an unusual regret, a regret concerned with his unfairness to Howell.

The fault might lie with the older man, but that did not excuse Eli to himself. He knew what Howell's nature was before he committed himself to this business of bodily reconstruction. It was not in Howell to yield the importance of his work to any other thing or person. Eli, who could adapt, told himself that it was therefore up to him to take the initiative.

But no poking around in his mind. No, not now or ever. This was no casual psychosis which had walled off one whole section of himself; but one consciously won by hard dint of agony and long effort. It was over twenty years ago that he had slipped the last block into place, *resquiescat in pace*, but there was no resting in peace, for it—*for the love of God, Montressor!*—it was part of him and would not die, though buried and forgotten. Yes, forgotten; and he could not remember now what it truly was; but he could remember that he must not remember, for hell is this: to be conscious of suffering and helpless before it.

"Eli."

He looked. Tammy.

"Eli," she came toward him, with a gentle smile, "you came out of the elevator as if you didn't even see me."

"With my head in the clouds," said Eli, smiling at her. "I was making plans for the future."

She looked shy and changed the subject.

"How do you feel?"

"Fine," he told her. "Except for the incisions." He reached a deck chair halfway across the solar and sank into it gratefully. "Where's Alan Clyde?"

She sat down opposite him.

"He left, Eli."

"And Seth?"

She sobered, looking at him. "He left, too, Eli."

"Well, that's too bad," he said. "I haven't seen him for some years. I was looking forward to having some more time to talk to him."

She looked down at the floor.

"Does it make much difference?" she asked in a low voice.

He peered at her, with puzzlement. "Does what make much difference?" he asked.

"That you didn't have more chance to talk to him."

"Oh?" said Eli. "Well, I suppose it doesn't make too much difference. Why?"

"Then you didn't turn on the screen in your room!" Tammy looked up with sudden gladness on her face. "I thought you'd heard but you were pretending to ignore it."

"Ignore what?"

Instead of answering, she jumped to her feet and pulled his chair around so that he faced the solar's screen, just a few feet in the center of the floor. Then she stepped across and turned the screen on. The image of an announcer at his desk took form in the bubble.

"It started yesterday," she said.

The announcer's voice came clearly to them.

"—and in other large cities the story remains the same. All known centers of Member activity, all hospitals, Foundations, and laboratories have been raided by impromptu citizens' associations. In some cases the civil or local group authority has attempted to give sanctuary to known Members and this has resulted in fighting between local people—"

"What's this?" snapped Eli, turning on Tammy.

"That first raid on the Members in Geneva City," said Tammy. "That was the beginning. All at once it began to happen in other cities. Clyde left right away."

"Spokesmen of all groups are attempting to restore order. Some cities have been blacked out so that we do not know what is taking place there now. Indications are that full scale riots are in progress in these localities. Among those which we have no information are the cities of Paris, Rio de Janeiro, Prague, Belfast, Ireland, and most of the Atlantic seaboard cities in North America. In other localities provisional local governments are being set up to prevent looting and other criminal disorder; and various organizations, in particular the Transportation people qualified for first-aid and assistance armbands, have been particularly helpful. At present—"

"Turn it off!" said Eli, speaking through tight-clenched teeth. He was frozen in his chair, as rigid as if he had been suddenly paralyzed. Only when Tammy jumped to obey and the picture dwindled and disappeared, did he let go of himself, almost collapsing in his seat.

"Oh, Eli, Eli!" She was on her knees beside the chair, trying against the top of the chair back. "I didn't know. I didn't know!"

Sweat was pouring down his face.

"I'll be all right," he gasped. "Get—get me a drink."

Sleekly humped against the floor, a tiny modernistic bar squatted beside the elevator shaft. Tammy ran to it and returned with a glass half full. He choked on it but got it down; and then slumped back, letting the tumbler fall from his hand.

Slowly his face relaxed; the lines of twisted pain smoothed and a little color came back to his skin. He began to breathe easier. Tenderly, Tammy wiped the perspiration from his face and waited.

Finally he heaved a great sigh.

"That's all right," he said. "I'm all right now."

"I'm sorry, Eli," said Tammy. "Oh, I'm so sorry."

"Not your fault," he said. "How were you to know anything about me? Took me by surprise, too."

"But what was it?" she asked, sinking down on a hassock beside his chair and taking his cold hand in hers. He did not look at her.

"Nothing," he said. "Nothing. Sometimes things bother me." He was silent for a moment; then he spoke again. "Seth went, you say?"

"As soon as the news reports began to get bad," she answered. "He—he told me you two were related, Eli."

Eli looked at her with such sudden horror that she shrunk back.

"Eli!" her voice shook. "What kind of a secret is it?"

On the arm of his chair Eli's hand curled into a fist and he fought himself back into self-possession.

"No one," he said, "ever knew but the two of us, before."

"But I don't understand."

Eli drew a deep breath.

"I'll tell you," he said. He looked away from her. "My father, himself, never knew Seth was his son. I never suspected that I had a brother. I thought I was an only child.

"I was an odd child," he went on painfully. "Things bothered me, and I couldn't seem to make anybody understand why. Ordinary things that didn't bother other people. Once, for example, when I was very young, I remember I'd picked up the notion that if I tried hard enough, I could talk to animals. And I tried hard for a long time without getting any place, so finally I asked my father about it. If I remember correctly, I asked him to send me to a man who'd teach me how to speak to animals, like the man who was teaching me to play the violin. And he told me"—Eli smiled a little bleakly—"in a very kindly way, of course, that no one knew how to talk to animals. And when he told me I never could or never would be able to talk to a single creature except another human, I thought I couldn't stand it. All the living things that moved and felt; would never be able to tell me how it was."

Tammy laid her cheek against the back of his hand where it rested on the arm of the chair. Eli went on talking.

"And as I grew older," he said, "it got worse. Because I couldn't explain to other people. Everything that lived had some power to touch me. When the growing things budded in the spring, I woke with them, and during the long summer as they grew, I grew with them, and in the fall the pride of their maturity was my pride, so that the onset of winter was like one last flaming great and glorious battle with honorable death. My longing went down with the salmon to the ocean; and never got free again, for whale and diatom held it tight

to them. In the end, there was nothing with life in it that I wasn't compelled to feel my kinship with."

Eli stopped and sighed.

"And then, as I grew up," he went on. "I began to be aware of people."

He stopped. Tammy lifted her face and looked at him.

"This," he said, "is the part I cannot explain, never explain, to anyone. I can say I started to feel for them, too, and that's all I can say. From this point on, there are no words."

He stopped again, and was silent for so long, that Tammy spoke up, gently.

"But what about Seth?"

"Oh yes, Seth," he took up his story again. "You see I didn't have any person I could get this across to—all this that bothered me. So, when I was very young, I first started to make up an imaginary friend, who would understand, without my telling him. I got to know my imaginary friend very well, and he grew in my mind until he had a personality of his own, until he was a real person, with his own problems, that only *I* understood."

He paused and looked at Tammy.

"And then when I was fourteen, my high aptitude rating on the General Tests allowed me to be sent to the School for Special Intelligences on Bermuda. And there my imaginary friend and I came face to face; and he was Seth."

"And had he—" said Tammy.

Eli nodded.

"I had been his, too. When we put our minds together at last, we discovered a great many things, among them that we were half-brothers."

"But how did you find that out?"

"It became obvious to us," answered Eli. "I can't explain."

"And then—" prompted Tammy.

"And then?" said Eli.

"What happened to the two of you after that?"

"Oh," said Eli. "We went different ways."

Tammy looked up at him; but with that one flat statement, his face was set in unyielding lines.

"He thinks a lot of you, Eli," she said finally. Eli looked away, out through the transparency of the solar roof, out over the blue waves to the horizon.

"When he left," Tammy went on, "he left a letter for you."

Eli's head came around suddenly, surprise on his face.

"A letter?"

"Yes," Tammy looked troubled and uncertain. "He said to give it to you when I thought it was the right time. I don't know if it's the right time now, or not. Is it, Eli?"

"I don't know," he answered. "Let me see it."

She got up and went over to a table in the solar. From a drawer beneath its polished top she took a single sheet of folded plastic which she handed to him. At the touch of his fingers, it unfolded. He sat, staring blankly at it.

"I'll go downstairs," said Tammy softly. "I'll see you later." She touched his shoulder lightly and went.

Left alone, Eli looked at the letter and read it.

Dear Eli:

I had hoped to talk to you once more before I left, but there's no time. I write these words instead of leaving my message otherwise, because I would like to leave you something lasting and concrete of myself, and this is all there is to leave.

I'm sorry that our paths of life have differed. Had we been born in a different time, you and I, there might have been a job where we could have worked shoulder to shoulder. But there is no point to regret where greater things persist. For a moment, a few days back, my faith in you wavered. It no longer does. I cannot see the future, but I trust in it—and you.

Seth

Eli carefully refolded the letter; and laid it on the small round coffee table next to his chair, as if it was something precious.

7

During the busy days that followed, the station, with its four men and one woman, went about its business of Eli's body rebuilding in the same atmosphere of spurious peace that characterized a small chip bobbing in the sheltered back-eddy while the main torrent of a river at full flood smashes by just

a few feet away. It was, in fact, a moment of historical upheaval and revolution, a convulsion of the race such as had never been possible before, because never before had all people on the face of the globe been interconnected and interrelated in what was, for practical purposes, a single society.

The reasons for this were twofold. First the establishment of the groups, with their announced purpose of destroying the old sectionalism that had given rise to so much conflict, and had inevitably had a much greater effect on the minds of men and women than their founders had originally intended. The intention was to replace an outmoded system with a new and more practical one. The reality was that the death-knoll of all systems that attempted to divide the race arbitrarily, was sounded.

For the eyes of the average human were thereby opened to the fact that the world was not naturally in bits and parts which could be assembled to make a whole; but rather an original whole which could be divided to suit, as you would cut up a pie. And almost at once the foolishness of cutting it up at all became apparent.

Yet the groups endured for eighty years from the first moment of their establishment and mutual recognition. And the reasons for this formed the secondary reasons for the present chaos. First, people were used to some kind of organization. Fear of the stranger still remained a historical habit in a little back corner of many minds and, like most habits, it sought its own justification by demanding a classification into which strangers could be placed. Secondly, though the dynamics of historical progress had been accelerating steadily through the passage of all known time, some years were still required for any universal change to gather enough momentum to overcome the natural inertia of things-as-they-are.

For the group it took eighty years, which is very good time indeed, when compared with the parallel period of the Dark Ages.

But there was the other, second, reason of major importance. And this was a social and emotional one. The society that emerged from the twenty-first century can be compared to the bloom of a plant that finally stops growing and directs its energy to flowering. With the peaceful harnessing of atomic energy and the refinements and developments built upon the sturdy sub-structure of scientific and other discoveries of the

previous centuries, there emerged an everyday existence for the average person that can only be described as free and easy. Population was stabilized, power was unlimited, and necessity had almost ceased to be a driving factor in life.

The result was that, once the second and third generations had accustomed themselves to the novelty of a practical utopia, that the lack of a progressive drive began to be felt. The people of Eli and Tammy's generation found themselves both bored and uncertain in a time when old truths had been rendered obsolete and new ones had yet to take their place. The restless energy that had brought the race up from prehistoric primitive savagery, dammed up, sought for an outlet. Finding nothing, it turned on itself, the beast-instinct that was still a part of man, blindly recognizing man's unhappiness and blindly seeking a physical cause of that unhappiness to blame and battle.

Thus the world was a loaded bomb to which Sellars' pogrom against the Members provided the arming device.

Starting first in the crowded cities and then spreading like fire in dry grass to the smaller towns and countrysides, fanned by the discontent and soul-sickness of man, the last and greatest witch hunt of the human race wrapped the globe in flame and violence. From the few simple original indictments against the Members sprang a veritable Pandora's box of accusations and superstitions. All the ancient monsters of folk-tale and legend came alive again in the name of Members. They were warlocks, hagwives, vampires. They were satanists, voodoo-workers, Frankensteins. Does your neighbor act strangely? Perhaps he is a Member, or a Member changeling. Or perhaps his mind, his soul has been possessed by the Members. Or still and yet, perhaps he is no man at all, but a clever mechanical imitation.

And where were the men of sense? They were there. They were many. They were in the majority. But how many individuals does it take to cause a panic in a crowded theater? How many to start an army retreating on the battlefield? If one man runs amok on a crowded street, how many others flee, how many reach for weapons?

Only in the backwaters like the station containing Eli was there sanity and peace. And while Paris burned and Calcutta mobs tore suspects limb from limb, Eli underwent another operation.

The first operation had been concerned with large body repairs and the replacement of a few major organs. This second was a relatively minor affair which can perhaps best be described as a tinkering with several of the more obscure glands. It was neither as extensive, nor as difficult—though possibly a shade more delicate—than the first. Eli came out of it in short order to find himself feeling very close to normal.

He spent his days recuperating up in the solar, in Tammy's company. Between the two of them an unspoken agreement of intention seemed to have established itself; and Eli found himself, to his amusement and his own quietly intense surprise, literally falling in love. He found also, in this new emotion that he had come to disbelieve in many years before, and now rediscovered with curiosity, a welcome excuse to ignore what was presently taking place in the outside world and to concentrate on such relatively minor things as his own recovery from the operations and the reactions of Mel Bruger.

This unfortunate young man, it became finally apparent, had fallen hopelessly in love with Tammy at the moment at which she had first appeared at the station, some eight months before. And, in spite of the fact, that she had then, as now, been completely dedicated to the worship of Eli, had continued to torture himself by remaining at the station and working himself foolish on the behalf of his elder rival. It was a sort of romantic casting of himself upon the spearpoint that appealed to a type of young and gloomy temperament; and Eli was faintly appalled to find that he, himself, had a good deal more sympathy for Mel, than did Tammy, who was inclined to laugh at the boy.

The other two men that made up the station's complement seemed both aware and unconcerned with the situation, Ntoane's reaction being one of polite acceptance, and Howell's one of somewhat grim amusement. Altogether, Eli floated at the midpoint of four points of view concerning himself; and examined and reacted to these emotional vectors with the same sort of minute sensitivity with which he had formerly held his position among the political heads of the globe.

So he occupied himself, while his body mended and changed. But deeply as he buried himself, it was not possible for him to ignore a general knowledge of how outside affairs were progressing. A certain little portion of his consciousness remained sandpapered-sensitive to the world he had with-

drawn from; and, although he never listened to news broadcasts himself, he could not keep himself from picking up stray remarks of the others concerning it and building from these, against his will, the overall picture of what was happening.

He knew, for example, that the Underseas Domes, alone of the world, had held aloof from the general hysteria, evidently protected by their submarine insularity, and that they were at the present, jammed and overcrowded by refugees from the disordered cities of the land. He knew that the rioting was generally being brought under control; that the groups, were for all practical purposes, dead as effective organizations; and that the people controlled by Sellars spearheaded by his armbanded Transportation members who moved under the guise of relief organizations and temporary local authorities were gradually taking over the reins of government in all important centers. Finally, it was becoming apparent that the news broadcasts were being slanted in Sellar's favor, which was clear indication that Clyde and the Communications Group had, indeed, gone over to the winning side.

Such a state of affairs could, of course, have only one end. It was reached on the morning that Eli walked into the automat for breakfast and found the others violently in discussion —a discussion that cut off abruptly at his entrance.

"What's this?" asked Eli.

He looked from Howell, to Tammy, to Mel, For a moment nobody answered anything and then Howell spoke.

"They're setting up a central headquarters to replace group authority," he said, a little sardonically. "There was a broadcast by Spokesman Sellars asking group authorities to meet at Cable Island to arrange it."

"Ah," said Eli. For a minute he stood silent, looking at them. Then he turned toward the coffee dispenser. "Looks like I got out of the job just in time."

He took his coffee over to the table and sat down.

"Did you?" asked Howell.

"Did I what?"

"Did you actually get out?"

Eli looked at him.

"I don't think I'll bother to answer that," he said a little coldly.

Howell waved his hand, no whit abashed.

"There's been no announcement from the Domes," he said. "I thought I'd make sure. I don't want you dashing off to Cable Island just yet."

"Rest easy," said Eli, and drank from his coffee cup.

"When you get through here," Howell went on, "come back to the lab. I want to check you over again."

Eli nodded and the conversation once more became general. As he followed his coffee with breakfast, eating and listening, he learned that the broadcast by Sellars had come in the small hours of the morning from Cable Island, timed as nearly as possible to hit the whole of the globe during daylight hours. The meeting was scheduled for the soonest possible moment after the necessary representatives of the now non-functioning groups could be gathered together.

Eli finished his breakfast, nodded to Ntoane and Mel, smiled at Tammy, and went off with Howell to the lab. There, the lean medician took samples and went over the surface of Eli's body with an epithelioscope.

"All right," he said, flipping back his head screen at last. "There's no doubt about it now. You're regenerating."

"Regenerating?" echoed Eli blankly, and stared at the older man for a second before the word penetrated. "Oh, regenerating."

It was the moment of climax, the second of triumph for both of them; and yet, somehow, almost it seemed, unfairly, the occasion had crept up on them so naturally that they could not at first react.

"Well that's fine," said Eli, finally, reaching for his tunic. "I suppose this calls for a celebration."

"I suppose so," said Howell. He looked at Eli and abruptly he began to smile. The smile broadened, as Eli, catching on to the humor of the situation began to smile back, until finally it broke into a rare bellow of laughter in which Eli found himself joining.

"The trouble with us," said Howell finally, when they had done laughing, "is that we're getting old. Come on. Let's break the news to the ones who're young enough to appreciate it."

And he led the way out of the lab. Eli followed, wondering a little uncomfortably if his age had really atrophied him to the extent Howell had implied.

This was the second party centering around Eli at the station. It differed from the first mainly in that Seth was not present and that Eli was now allowed alcohol. And of course he discovered, as he had been discovering for the past half-dozen years, that once it was available he didn't want it anyway. He drank several mixed drinks, in spite of that, so as not to spoil the spirit of the occasion.

The chiming tones of the station's message center, coming over the lounge's annunciator, broke in on their hubub. Howell leaned across the bar and flipped the stud on the room screen.

"Yes?" he said.

The voice of the mechanical operator came dulcetly through to them.

"Person to person for Eli Johnstone from Dome One."

"Oh," said Eli, putting down his glass. "I'll be right there." He saw Tammy looking at him, with apprehension, and smiled at her.

"Be right back," he said, and walked out into the hall.

As the soundproof baffles of the lounge entrance cut off the noise behind him, it came home to him that he was really more than a little under the influence of the drinks he had had. He stopped for a second and leaned against the wall to collect himself. Then he went on to the message center, a little room on the same floor with a two-way, three-quarter size screen.

He sat down in the operator's chair and snapped his call-stud. Kurt swelled from a pin-point on the screen before him. The young underspokesman was haggard and thin-looking. His eyes were staring and dark with strain.

"Eli!" he said.

"Hello, Kurt," Eli answered, keeping his voice carefully even. " What's on your mind?"

"Eli," said Kurt again. There was a despair in his voice that touched Eli in spite of himself. He steeled himself against the weakness. "Eli, you've got to come back!"

"No," the word came automatically from his lips, the long-thought-out responses that was the victory note of many self-battles.

"Eli. Don't say 'no' like that. Listen!"

"All right," he said. "I'll listen." And he leaned forward with his elbows on the control board, gazing into Kurt's face

on the screen and wishing he had not the drinks inside him that he had, so that his mind could move swiftly and unclogged.

"Sellars is wrecking the groups," said Kurt.

"I know," Eli nodded.

"We've held out"—the younger man's voice almost broke—"here at the Domes, because the people were all expecting you to come back."

"That's your fault," said Eli quietly. There was an unpleasant, metallic taste in his mouth from the drinks. "You should have published my resignation earlier."

"But there's been no chance!" protested Kurt. "It's been one crisis after another."

Eli looked at him, remembering what Clyde had said about the underspokesman: *we all like him . . . but not Spokesman material . . . let alone fill your shoes, Eli . . .*

"You know that's what politics is, Kurt," he said. "One crisis after another. The only difference is in the order of magnitude of the crisis." Abruptly he was tired of this fencing aground. "You know why you didn't publish the resignation, Kurt," he said. "You were hoping I'd be back."

Kurt's face sagged. "Yes," he said.

"You should know by this time that when I do something I stick to it," said Eli. He sat looking into the hopeless face in front of him, feeling sorry for Kurt, and wondering what to say. "Look," he went on, finally, "you think that if I came back I could pull a rabbit out of the hat for you. Well, I couldn't. You can do anything you want with history but turn the clock back. Remember I told you the world was going to hell in a handbasket? Well, this is it. It's just come along a little faster than I expected."

"Has it?" said Kurt. "Has it?"

"What do you mean by that?" asked Eli.

Kurt's face was tight. "You didn't by chance know this was going to happen, did you?" demanded Kurt. "You didn't by any chance sell out to Sellars, and that's the reason for your resignation?"

Eli looked at him and drew a deep breath. "Kurt," he said. "I'm sorry for you."

And he cut off the connection. For a moment he sat gazing at the blank screen. Then the chime of the operator calling rang once more through the station and he reached over to

shut the sound off. There was left nothing but a signal calling-light winking whitely and mutely on the control panel.

He got up and headed back for the party.

In the elevator, however, as his finger was hovering above the button that would send him to join those below again, he suddenly changed his mind. He jabbed instead at the button that would send him to the solar, and felt the elevator shoot him upward. A couple of seconds later he stepped out into the peace and silence of that glassed-in area.

The call from Kurt had disturbed him; and as usual when he was disturbed he woke suddenly into instinctive struggle with anything that acted as a clog upon his thinking processes. The liquor he had just been drinking was just such a clog. Eli was far from drunk, but he felt his wits slowed and mired by the depressing effect of the drinks. He wanted room and air, to rid himself of their effect.

He stepped over to the center table of the solar and pressed the button that caused the large sections of the transparent dome to sink down into the walls of the station. They slid from view and he felt the sea air fresh on his face. He breathed deeply of it, pacing around the circumference of the solar as he did so, like a man at exercise on an ocean liner.

What was bothering him and what had bothered him from the start of this whole business from the moment he announced his resignation to Kurt on Cable Island was the fact that there had always been something hidden at work in the action of this project of his. Something he had been unable to out his finger on, but which he sensed as certainly as he might have sensed some vague but persistent pain.

He was not used to anything about him remaining elusive for long. Once he had become conscious of anything affecting him, it was his normal habit to track it down in a hurry and bring it out in the open where he could handle it. But this time . . .

He wondered for a second, with a sort of cold shock, if Mel was right, and that there was something about himself he was deliberately refusing to face. And maybe it was this that was taking the control of the present situation out of his hands. He punched his right fist into the palm of his left hand, cursing softly as he limped around the circle of the solar. Whatever it was, it was making him merely one of the pawns of the present situation, instead of leaving him master of it

—as he had always been master of any situation.

Now, it was exactly as if he was being used by some mind, some force greater than himself. And that was intolerable. Intolerable! The very structure of Eli's nature rebelled against it. He was, and life had taught him to recognize the fact, one of those few who were simply incapable of being a servant, let alone a slave to any person or thing. He could not—*could* not—any more than dynamite could be used to make firecrackers. In the days of galleys, Eli would not have survived his first day of being chained to an oar. He would have died—died fighting. It was the one thing about himself over which he knew he had no control; and, for that reason, feared. It was the one piece of knowledge which an enemy could use to force Eli to destroy himself. And it frightened him now to think that perhaps at the present moment Anthony Sellars or someone else did know it.

He broke the circle of his pacing and limped over to the communicator on the center table. He looked at its blank bubble screen and paused irresolute. He had been on the verge of calling Hassan. But before he could touch a button, the thought had come: What could he ask the man? He could not even formulate a question or a demand for information. He could only say, *I feel uneasy. Find out why.*

And to that, Hassan would only return his customary shrug. *And I wouldn't blame him either,* thought Eli, wryly. He turned away from the set, defeated.

The fumes of the drinks were all but gone from his brain. Sheer body adrenalin had counteracted the dullness he had felt after talking to Kurt. He remembered suddenly that the party was still going on downstairs; and if he did not return soon, they were liable to start wondering about him. And someone—it would probably be Tammy—would be coming up to find out what was keeping him.

He turned once more and headed toward the elevator to go back down. Before he reached it, however, there was a movement through the fresh, salt air about him, and out of nowhere, a small brown body sailed to light with no more pressure than an autumn leaf, on the index finger of his right hand.

He stared at it. It was one of Johann's little birds. It cocked an eye at him, then threw back its head and poured forth a short, sweet trill of sound.

Then it pecked idly at his fingernail, once—Eli felt the tiny beak like the touch of a toothpick, faintly against the nail—and flew off. Eli looked around for it, but its smallness had immediately become lost in the immensity of sky and seascape.

Bemused, his fingers went to the ring Johann had given him. He pressed it. The miniscule voice he had heard once before, spoke to him.

"The order for your death has been given. The assassin is someone you know. You are to die tomorrow."

Eli stood for a long moment, not moving, after the voice had ceased, his fingers still on the ring. Then, with an abrupt movement, he let go, stepped briskly into the elevator capsule and punched for the level of the gathering downstairs. The elevator dropped.

Tammy slipped to his side the moment he came back through the lounge entrance.

"What was it?" she whispered.

"Just Kurt wanting me back," he said. "I told him no." He slipped an arm around her. "Let's get me another drink."

8

ELI WOKE suddenly and without warning, sitting bolt upright in his bed.

"What happened?" he said aloud.

Nobody answered; there was nobody in the room.

For a moment he continued to sit there. What had happened? What was he doing in bed? There had been the party yesterday and it had lasted until evening and he had drunk a good deal and then . . .

"Did I get drunk?" he asked himself; and realized immediately that that was not what was troubling him. It was not just that he had drunk too much and could not remember how the evening had ended—something had happened last night that he could not remember. And something else had awakened him suddenly, just now.

What was the matter with him? He was not drunk now. In fact he was oddly clear-headed—almost feverishly bright and awake. His mind seemed to be working at a tremendous pace on something he could not understand. He jumped out of the

bed and began throwing on his clothes. As soon as he was dressed, he limped rapidly out of his room and down the corridor.

He saw no one. A wall clock told him it was near noon. He turned and hurried in the direction of the automat.

The others were all there. They looked up from their lunch, staring at him as if he was a ghost as he came into the room.

"Eli!" cried Tammy. And Howell jumped to his feet.

"What are you doing up?" he demanded. He came swiftly around the table in front of him and steered Eli to a chair.

"Why shouldn't I be up?" asked Eli. "What's wrong with all of you?"

"For one reason," said Howell grimly, "because you're full of nembutalline. You should be dead to the world for ten hours yet. And why ask us?" he checked himself, staring narrowly at Eli. "Don't you remember?"

"Remember what?" asked Eli.

"Mel," said Howell, turning his head.

The tall young medician got up from his table and came over to Eli, peering into his eyes.

"Look at that, Arthur," he said. "His pupils are normal."

"They couldn't be!" said Howell, stooping forward.

"Look for yourself."

"With that drug in him—"

"Never mind that," interrupted Eli, speaking slowly and clearly, and with a strange, furious calmness. "I don't remember what happened last night, or why you should give me nembutalline, and I want you to tell me."

They looked at each other. Howell spoke.

"About ten o'clock last night," he said, "we turned on a news broadcast. There was a report among other things that a number of leading Members had been arrested and would be tried for genocide. They read off some names and one of them was Seth Maguin."

"Seth . . ." white-faced, Eli swayed on his chair. The big hands of Mel caught him.

"Arthur," the young man turned on Howell, "I don't think you ought to tell him now."

"I'll handle this," said Howell, relentlessly, towering over Eli in the chair. "You collapsed, Eli. And when you came to, you were out of your head. You wanted to leave for Cable Island right away. Do you remember now?"

Eli shook his head.

"No," he said faintly.

Tammy brought him a glass of water. He drank gratefully, and a little color came back to his face. He straightened up in the chair.

"I gave you enough nembutalline to keep you out for twenty-four hours," said Howell. "And here you are, bright and awake without any signs of the drug on you."

"Something woke me," said Eli.

"What?" asked Ntoane. His dark face leaned forward between the shoulders of Howell and Mel Bruger. Eli stared back at him as if fascinated.

"I don't know," he said. "Do you?"

"What are you talking about?" broke in Howell sharply. "What could wake you? We were all in here."

Almost with an effort, Eli wrenched his gaze away from Ntoane. He looked over at the worried face of Tammy and smiled at her.

"It's all right," he said.

"All right, hell!" said Howell. "You couldn't come out from under the nembutalline unless somebody pumped a antiactant into you. And none of us here could do it. Is there somebody else in the station?"

"No," said Eli. He got up, suddenly. "What's the news?" he asked.

"Oh, no you don't," spoke up Howell. "You aren't going to listen to any news until we get to the bottom of this. I don't want you going off again the way you did last night."

"They're meeting this afternoon on Cable Island to dissolve the groups and set up Central Headquarters," said Tammy suddenly. "Is that what you wanted to know, Eli?"

"I don't know," answered Eli. "Thanks, Tammy." He sat down again suddenly. "Something's happened to me and I don't know what it is." He got up abruptly and began to walk around the room. The rest of them watched him. He stopped in front of Ntoane.

"You're a Member," he said calmly.

"Yes," said Ntoane.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"You had to find out for yourself," answered Ntoane. "So Seth said."

"What woke me?"

A look of pain crossed Ntoane's sensitive, dark face.

"I'm sorry," he said. "You still have to find out for yourself."

"What is this?" interrupted Howell. He looked at Ntoane, incredulously. "You're one of those crackpots?"

Ntoane smiled sadly. Tammy went to Eli and took hold of one of his hands with both of hers. He looked down at her and patted her comfortingly on the shoulder.

"I'm not going to leave you," he said. "But right now I'm going to have to work this out by myself." He raised his head and included the others in his gaze. "I'm going up to the solar. Please, don't any of you disturb me for a while."

He turned and went out of the room, feeling Tammy's hand slip despairingly from his. But he did not turn and look back.

He walked down the corridor and rose alone in the elevator. The solar, under the high, bright sun of noon, was still and hot. He walked across it and stood staring away across the level, rolling ocean, toward Cable Island.

—And now it was time to remember. It was time to bring back what he had buried and forgotten, what he had locked away by exercise of his own will. A point in time had been passed, a peak to which he had climbed, and now it was downhill, and the only way was forward. There was no alternate. And now that he had reached this point it was inevitable, so that while once he had known that it might not be and always he had struggled against it, now he knew that it had always had to be and therefore there was a sense of relief at last in facing it.

Remember, he said to himself. Do you remember? A man has eyes and he sees, a man has ears and he hears. And once a man—no, a boy—had something and he somethinged, and he could not bear it. And so he denied it, as a man will say, I will not see, I cannot see. I will not hear. I cannot hear. I will not . . .

For the anguish of it was very great. Day by day, from the time that the world was small, it had grown. For as the world grew, he saw more, he heard more. So, day by day, the load became more heavy in beauty and in pain. And he was only a boy, a young boy, alone. You cannot blame him. There was the world of which his widening perceptions showed him more and more every day. And there was this faculty of his which more and more revealed to him; until he

could not bear it.

Was it my fault? O, cry in agony! I did not make the world. The boy alone and the night sky above Bermuda as he walked, a child, lonely and different. I did not make myself. Blessed are the blind for they shall not see tears. Blessed are the deaf, for they shall not hear the sound of weeping. And blessed are they who do not understand.

And he was a child, a child—a boy who should have played and fought and studied and struggled and grew. Instead he walked the level island by the sea in the dark night, under the many stars, hunting for peace. Peace, peace, in the name of mercy, a grown man is little enough and weak enough to face the hunt for peace! And even there, it followed him, the knowing and the feeling, until he could bear it no longer.

And so he denied it. By function of sharp will he amputated this greater-knowing section of himself, denied it utterly and put it from him, walled off the channel to it in his brain.

And now it was time to remember. For something terrible had wakened him from his sleep, something that left him no choice but to remember, and something that he would not know with clarity until he did remember. And now it was time. And now it was time. And now it was time. . . .

He stood facing the ocean with his arms stiff at his sides, his fists clenched and the sweat streaming down his face.

And now it is time. Now is the time. Now. Now.

No.

Now!

Mentally, he reached out his strong hands to tear down the long-held barrier walls. And emotionally the weakling spirit within him cringed and cowered and the hands faltered.

You have no choice.

I can't!

You can handle it now.

I can't!

You are older. You are ready now.

I can't. I can't . . .Ican'tIcan'tIcan'tIcan't . . .

Out of swirling darkness he came back, a failure, wondering what had roused him. And then, looking out through the glass with seeing eyes once more, he saw an airboat landing in a furious cloud of spray dashed high against the jetty.

The hatch swung back, a figure leaped out, came sprinting toward the solar. Moving automatically, Eli went to meet him and opened the transparent door in the dome wall.

It was Clyde.

Haggard face to haggard face, they stared at each other.

"Downstairs," said Clyde. "Downstairs quick and block the shaft. There're ships behind me."

Eli turned and together they ran for the elevator. The capsule was waiting for them and once in it, they plummeted down the shaft to the fourth level. Howell, passing down the corridor, saw them explode from the capsule and swung about on his heel to face them.

"Arthur!" said Eli. "Where's the switch for the storm blocks?"

Howell stared. From the lounge entrance behind him, Ntoane came hurrying out, followed by Tammy and Mel.

"What's this?" cried Howell, annoyed.

Eli swung on Ntoane.

"The storm blocks!"

But the other man was already moving off down the corridor. At the midpoint of one corridor wall, he pressed an unobtrusive stud and a panel swung back. Within was a heavy, single-handled switch, and he pulled it, over and down.

In the silence that held them all, a faint metallic grating sound came from distant parts of the station and down the elevator shaft. The heavy blocks that scaled the station's weaker spots from anything an angry sea could do were now in place. They were sealed in now, by metal and concrete, nowhere less than half a foot in thickness.

"What *is* this?" Howell shouted again. Clyde answered.

"I'll show you," he said.

He looked around him, and Eli pointed toward the entrance of the lounge. Quickly, the younger man led the way to and into the room where the viewing screen sat, a bubble of blankness. He set it for exterior scan and switched it on.

The ocean above them ballooned into miniature reproduction within it, the solar as its central point.

"Look," said Clyde, pointing to the sky to the station's northeast.

They looked and saw, high and distant, dots approaching swiftly, dots dropping and swelling into flattened, individual

shapes, five of them, growing into recognition as ten-man police airboats.

"They're after me," said Clyde. He swung on Eli. "And after you. And the rest of you because you're connected with Eli. They didn't expect me to come here."

"Why did you?" asked Ntoane.

Clyde grinned, a weary, but cheerful grin.

"They've got nothing but small arms," he said. "And they're all air and surface craft. While they sit around up there and wait for another boat to answer their call for heavy arms or explosive, we can get away in your underwater tender."

"Good work," said Eli, approvingly.

"Look here," said Howell, breaking in suddenly, "I don't understand this at all. Whose ships are those? Why should I run away? Perhaps this man's a criminal of some sort." He looked at Clyde unfavorably.

"Don't be a fool, Arthur!" said Eli.

"Don't call me a fool!" Howell turned on him. "I've got nothing to do with politics!"

"That's beside the point," broke in Clyde. "We're wasting precious time," he pointed to the screen in which they could see the ships now coming in for a landing at the jetty. "Let's get into the tender and out of range before they can trace us."

"You just sit tight," said Howell, "until we thresh this out. In the first place, you can't get away from here by tender. There isn't any tender."

Clyde stared at him.

"Are you crazy?" he demanded. "Nobody builds in the ocean without some kind of submersible for general use."

"Well there was one," said Howell. "But it developed some kind of warp in the hull so that its lock leaked. I told the university to haul it to the mainland for repairs."

"Good God, Arthur!" said Mel. "Didn't you requisition a replacement?"

"What am I supposed to be, a submarine polo enthusiast?" snapped Howell. "Of course I didn't requisition a replacement. What did we want an underwater runabout for?"

"Are you asking me that now?" asked Mel meaningfully.

Clyde let out a heavy breath and sat down suddenly on the arm of one of the big chairs.

"Sorry," he said, heavily, looking at all of them. "If I'd had any idea of this, of course I'd never have led them here."

"I still don't see what all the fuss is about," fumed Howell. "If those are Transportation ships up there, they've got no authority over the rest of us. We're Medical Group and Eli's Underseas."

Clyde stared at him.

"Where have you been these last few weeks?" he asked. "Jupiter?"

"Forgive him," put in Ntoane. "Arthur never has paid much attention to anything outside medicine." He turned to the older man. "Arthur," he said. "The groups are gone. Remember how we've been talking about it? That means the group rights are gone, too."

"It's Tony Sellars world," added Clyde. "Those are his ships up there; and they'll take whatever he wants them to take, which in this case is us."

For a moment Howell glared around at the grim faces of the others. Then, gradually, the fire began to go out of him and be replaced by uncertainty. He shook his head and sat down without saying anything further. Suddenly he looked tired and very old.

Above them, the sudden slam of an explosion came echoing through the material of which the station was made, down to them. They listened but it was not repeated. In the silence Eli spoke to Clyde.

"What happened?"

"I woke up," answered Clyde. He looked at Eli. "Sit down," he said gently. "I've got some bad news for you."

"Bad news?" echoed Eli.

He stared at the younger man and his own words seemed to buzz in his ears. Abruptly he seemed to go away from Clyde and all the others, as if he was standing at the end of a long tunnel and they were at the far end, shouting at him.

"At first I thought I could work with Tony," Clyde's distant voice came to him. "Then something happened to make me realize that the way he was going was a road I couldn't follow . . ."

The tunnel was whirling about Eli. Thunder rolled in the back of his mind.

"I didn't think he would scrap all justice—"

The thunder was growing louder. . .

"—when they arrested the Member leaders and brought them to Cable Island . . ."

Eli could no longer see and the thunder drowned out the voice of Clyde.

"You needn't go on," he felt himself saying. "You needn't tell me any more now, because I know."

And out of the elemental fury that beat about him, out of the storm that tore and tossed him, came a pitch, a climax, a point beyond which nothing could endure—from the thunder, lightning, a single jagged streak that struck and split and broke and utterly destroyed that which had stood so long.

And then there was knowledge and an end. He came back to the land of the living and the room in the station where they stood about him.

"I remember now," he said. "Seth is dead. They shot him and the other Member leaders without a trial early this morning. I was with him; and it woke me.

"I know it all now," he said. He looked at the faces of those about him and smiled. "There are no more barriers between us."

9

ELI LOOKED at them all; and it was as if he had never seen them before—had never seen any people before with such bright clarity. He was like a man who, after years of poor eyesight, had suddenly been fitted with glasses. And the room, and the people within it seemed suddenly shrunken, but hard and clear with a shocking minuteness of detail, like a picture seen through an artist's reducing glass that makes a scene smaller but more intense.

"Yes," he said, softly, "I understand you all, now."

"Eli!" Tammy ran to him, but stopped, suddenly uncertain, an arm's length from him. "Eli?" she said.

"It's all right," said Eli. "I'm all right," He turned slowly until he faced Ntoane. "It's all right, Ntoane," he said. "I know now. I know you've been guarding me for the Members. But it's all right, now."

Ntoane shook his head slowly. His eyes went past Eli. "I'm not so sure," he said.

Eli spun around to find himself facing Howell. Howell had

a gun in his hand. It looked incongruous there, as out-of-place as a bongo drum or a paper hat. But the thin physician held it firmly enough.

"I can't believe it," said Eli softly.

"Back up, all of you," ordered Howell. He gestured with the gun and they retreated across the room before him. When they were well back, he walked to the communicator in the center of the room and punched buttons. There was a moment's hesitation and then the bubble screen cleared to show the figure of Hassan.

"And *you!*" said Eli to the image.

Hassan shrugged.

"You should know that much about me, Eli," he said. "Money I have and most things. But intrigue, that's my life. While you were in a position to use me, I played the game for you. But now there's only one man to play for—Sellars."

Eli glanced at the man with the gun.

"And Howell?" he said.

"Intrigue is my line." Hassan shrugged again. "Research is Howell's, isn't that right, Howell?"

Howell flushed, but said nothing.

"Sellars threatened to cut him off from his work, for life," said Hassan. "Everybody's for sale, one way or another."

"Shut your mouth!" said Howell suddenly and viciously, but holding the gun steady on Eli. "My work will benefit millions in the long run."

"Arthur—" began Ntoane, and bit his lip.

"Kind of unnecessary, isn't it?" said Eli dryly, "with Sellar's armed men knocking on the door?"

"Oh, they don't have authority to do anything but arrest you," said Hassan. "Dr. Howell here is really just acting the part of a good citizen in holding you until they can be let in."

"Except that gun is just liable to go off accidentally, isn't it, before the men get in?" said Eli. He had been watching Howell, and there was sweat on the other's forehead, glistening there.

"*No!*" it was Tammy, crying out. She ran to Eli. The gun in Howell's hand wavered for a moment at her action and then centered once more on Eli's chest.

"Of course not! How can you think such a thing, Eli?" said Hassan smoothly. "Dr. Howell *is* a little nervous, it's true, but . . ."

"Arthur, for the love of God!" cried Ntoane, stepping forward.

"Stand back!" said Howell thickly, lifting the gun.

"Yes," said Eli. "Stand back, Ntoane. Stand back, all of you." He took a step himself toward Howell.

"Stand back," said Howell, sweating. Eli took another step toward him.

"Howell," said Eli. "You know who I am." He took another step forward. "I'm the man you made over. You constructed me, Arthur. I'm your masterpiece. Are you going to destroy me?"

"Stop," said Howell. "Stop."

"You know me, Arthur," Eli took another step toward him. "Millions of people know me. I tell the truth and I'm as good as my word. Let me tell you something . . ." he made one more step and saw the gun jerk in Howell's hand. "If you shoot me and kill me for Sellars, Tony'll have to get rid of you sometime later on to cover up his own part in it. You know that."

"I've got to have my work." Howell's voice suddenly shot up the scale. *"Stay back, Eli!"*

"No," Eli said, slowly continuing to approach him, "you'll get nothing out of it. And you're not constitutionally fitted to murder a man, Arthur. You don't want to do it. You *can't* do it . . ."

"For the last time, stop!" shouted Howell. The gun straightened out in his hand.

"Look out!" cried Clyde, diving forward. The gun in Howell's hand jerked, wavered and then exploded. Eli twitched backward, stumbled, and sat down. Then Clyde and Ntoane were on Howell. Tammy was all over Eli.

"I'm all right—I'm all right. Let me up!" Eli was saying. "He was pointing clear over my head when he pulled the trigger. I just flinched and lost my balance." He got to his feet and went over to where Ntoane and Clyde were holding Howell. Howell's face was paper-white and his body rigid. He made no attempt to get away from the two men holding him.

"Let him go," said Eli. "It's all right. Let him go."

Slowly Clyde and Ntoane released him. Howell stared wildly at Eli for a moment, then suddenly the stiffness went out of him and he crumpled. Eli caught him and eased him

into a chair. Howell was shaking.

"Mel!" said Eli sharply, over his shoulder to the tall young man. "Give him something to calm him down. He'll be all right." He put his hand on Howell's shoulder. "You'll be all right, Arthur."

"God! Oh, God!" said Howell brokenly, his face buried in his hands.

Eli patted him on the shoulder and turned to Ntoane. There was a weary but triumphant smile on his face.

"And now," he said. "I'm ready to go to work. I imagine you can help me?"

Ntoane stared back at him and slowly a smile crept out to erase the strain on his own features and he nodded.

"Yes," he said. "Yes, Eli, I can. Several million of us can."

10

ANTHONY GEORGE SELLARS sat frowning at the desk before him in the Speaker's anteroom of the Main Council Room of Cable Island. Swelling up from the polished desk top a small screen showed him the station on Calayo Banks Cay, from the point of view of one of the airboats at rest beside it. The solar roof was smashed and broken where the door to the jetty had been blasted loose from its hinges, and the furniture of the solar itself was overturned and disordered, but that was all.

The storm blocks that closed the elevator shaft had not yet been cracked.

This was unfortunate—but merely as a matter of timing. An airboat with sufficient explosive to blast an entrance should make its arrival within minutes. No, the station would undoubtedly be opened. That was not what bothered Anthony Sellars at the moment. It was the fact that he had handled the whole business very badly—first by not taking care of Eli the minute his men had taken young Poby Richards and forced the knowledge of Eli's location from him, and secondly by mistakenly putting his trust in Clyde. He had thought he had observed in the young Spokesman for Communications a hardheadness equal to his own; and, as always when he allowed himself to trust to anyone besides himself, he had been disappointed.

He sighed and rose from the table. In a few moments the remnants of what had been the Council of Group Representatives would be gathering in the amphitheatre beyond the small door to his right that led into the Speaker's Section of the Main Council Room. Some would come from the lower levels of the Island where they had been virtual prisoners since his unobtrusive coup here several days back. Others would have been salvaged from cities around the world where and when his men could find them. In some cases both the spokesman and the underspokesman of a group were dead or unobtainable and a local group head had been brought in in their place. But, one way or another, there was a representative for every group; and even now they would be entering the Main Council Room, for their last official meeting.

When they were all seated, it would be his job to go in and tell them that the group system was ready to be abolished and hint that those of them who wished to co-operate would be absorbed into his own governing organization. After that there would be nothing left but the formality of a vote. It was not a prospect to which Tony Sellars looked forward with any particular triumph. Nor could it be said that it affected his emotions adversely, either. It was merely the next step that should be taken in its proper order, one more duty to be performed.

He turned and began to pace the room, not nervously, but with a measured steadiness, as if the occupation was some particularly necessary exercise. There was in his walk the same thing that marked all his action, a studied acknowledgement of duty. Tony Sellars was in fact, in the truest senses, a slave to duty.

Few people understood this man who had been Spokesman for Transportation for over twenty years. People did not warm to Anthony George Sellars the way they warmed to Eli Johnstone. Rather they were chilled by him and in many cases, repelled. The majority disliked him and were a little afraid of him. A minority found things to admire in him; and surprisingly, within the ranks of this minority, he was capable of inspiring an almost fanatic attachment to himself. But far and away the greatest asset of his nature was the strength he very obviously possessed.

Sellars was strength personified. For this reason even people who disliked him would follow him. This single virtue was

obvious in him. In fact it shone through him, not like an inner light, but like the hidden molten glow of a quiescent volcano, sullen, dogged and unquenchable. The physical coercions of an earlier age would have wasted themselves on such a man. They could only have broken his body and left his will untouched. A few such men are born from time to time and Anthony Sellars was one of them.

And he was not insane; and he did not desire power for its own sake. Like Eli, he was a child of his time—but while Eli had opened himself to the uncertainty and self-doubt of his period, seeking, asking, letting himself be tossed in any direction in his hunting for a logic to life. Tony Sellars had narrowed himself, admitting only those questions that permitted of a clear-cut positive or negative answer. And when it became necessary to go farther afield into the grayness of an unclear problem, he judged as justly as he could and then forced a decision in terms of black and white. For his own purpose, he had reduced the problems of his day to his own common denominator; and the answer had been clear-cut—absolute control for the world, and by himself, the only man he could be sure would do each and every thing that Tony Sellars believed should be done if the race was to continue.

And now he had done what he ought and won what he should—with the single exception of Eli. He regretted having to destroy Eli for the loss of talent it entailed. He did not like Eli, the natures of the two men had been too antipathetic for that. But that did not enter the problem, for the dislikes as well as the likes of his emotional being had long since been whipped to heel by his imperious will. He neither loved nor hated. He neither felt joy nor sorrow. In this hour of his triumph he tramped the floor of the anteroom without elation or apprehension, or consideration of reward. Personal reward to him was a term without meaning. As near an automaton as living flesh and blood can make itself, he merely surveyed the arena of his recent victory and paced away the moments intervening before the inexorable developments of events should move him to a further arena, a further struggle, and a further duty.

He looked once more at his chronometer. A few minutes yet remained.

He turned abruptly out of the path of his pacing and went

back to his desk. Seating himself, he pressed the catch on a drawer and sprang it open. Then, reaching inside he took out the small white cube impressed with the notes of the speech he would make. He closed the drawer again; and, lifting the cube, placed it on the desk.

As it touched the dark, gleaming surface a sudden sensation flashed through him—as if he had suddenly come in contact with a live wire. And he froze abruptly, like a man paralyzed, one hand on the arm of his chair, the other outstretched and lying on the desk top, fingers holding the cube.

It seemed then, to Tony Sellars, so long the complete master of himself, as if contact with the desk had without warning burst open some long-forgotten unguarded door in his mind and that he now stood helpless and aghast at what entered through its rusty portal. Some thing he could neither describe nor understand reached through and held him. Caught by a strange compulsion, he sat for a moment staring at the cube in his fingers, then raised his eyes to look beyond the desk.

Before him it seemed that the air was thickening and taking form. And, as he watched, the figure of Eli Johnstone, who should by rights have been trapped in the station his men were now beseiging, seemed to coalesce into shape before him. And the figure looked at him and spoke.

"I'm not really here, Tony," it said. "You and I are just in contact by courtesy of the Members."

Sellar's vocal cords broke free of their control.

"What is this?" he said.

The figure that was Eli smiled.

"I suppose you could call it a telepathic chat," he answered. "Or a meeting of minds or some such thing. I don't know anything beyond the fact that I seem to be a good subject for such things, and frankly I don't consider it important. On the other hand what I have to say, is important."

The door still stood ajar in Sellar's mind. Looking through it he was forced to accept the truth of what he saw and heard; and the truth in Eli's words presented itself to his mind like a palpable thing. It was a weird sensation, but an undeniable one. And Sellars who had trained himself to face anything, forced himself to face this.

"So you're a Member," he said.

"No," said Eli. "You'd think so, wouldn't you? But I'm not."

"What do you call yourself then?"

"That's going to be a little hard to explain," answered Eli. "I suppose you'd call the Members who had psi-abilities—*freaks*?"

"I would," said Sellars.

"Yes," agreed Eli. "And now suppose you consider them for the purposes of argument to be just one small minority in a much larger class of freaks in the sense that they have unrecognized abilities beyond the ordinary human."

"Such as?"

"Perhaps an eidetic memory," said Eli. "Perhaps a peculiar color sensitivity, or an instinct for putting musical sounds together so that they have meaning."

"Ordinary people can have talents."

"How about a homing instinct, an unfailing sense for direction? An immunity to all diseases? Perhaps a green thumb for growing things or a knack for handling wild animals?"

"Go on," said Sellars.

"How many of these would be recognized even by the people that possessed them as extraordinary human abilities? What if the race is multi-talented, much more so than has been recognized, but that only during these latter years of our civilization have ignorance and social pressures abated enough for the more dramatic talents to show themselves?"

"Suppositions," said Sellars. "But go on."

"Well then," continued Eli, "there might be more "freaks" in the world than anyone suspects; and some of them might live and die without calling any undue attention to themselves because their particular ability could find no use in the society of their time."

"I can guess that this is all leading up to your own supposed ability," said the older man immovable. "Let's get directly to that."

"You want to know what I am?"

"Yes."

"I'm an instinctive leader," said Eli. He looked at the other, at Sellar's flat, expressionless face above the desk. "Not a ruler, Tony, a leader, a forerunner of the race. My instinct is to pick a path, like the bellwether of a flock of sheep, so that the rest can follow safely behind me."

Sellars smiled, one of his rare, wintry smiles.

"*This* is your ability?" he said.

"No," for a second Eli looked a little sad. "No, Tony, that's just my instinct, the thing that drives me. My freakish ability is something different but very handy for a bellwether. I have what you might call 'understanding'."

The hint of an impatient sigh escaped from between Tony Sellars' straight lips.

"Understanding," he echoed, with faint derision and disgust.

"Not ordinary understanding," said Eli. "Listen to me, Tony. This is something based on empathy and refined to a point of complete comprehension. It's like seeing or hearing. I *must* understand; I can't help myself. When I was a child it bothered me so much that I deliberately drove myself into partial insanity to escape it."

He looked at the unyielding face of the man before him.

"Anything that lives," he went on softly, "but most of all my own people. To come into contact with anyone is to know them completely. Don't ask me how I do it. Some of my understanding comes from what I see and hear them do. I meet them and I feel immediately what it is like to *be* each one, individually. And then I know them, mind, and body and soul." He looked at the other man and spoke gently, "As I know you, Tony."

"Of course," said Sellars, with quiet sarcasm. "You know me. You understand everybody. And you're a natural leader. So now you've shown up with the help of the Members to kill me and take over the government."

"No," answered Eli. "I can't kill anything—as you can." And his eyes accused Sellars.

"You're thinking of the Member leaders I had executed, no doubt," said Sellars, unmoved.

"Yes."

"I doubt if your understanding reaches to a comprehension of that," Sellars told him, "of the very necessary reasons for getting those troublemakers out of the way before the general population could have its inevitable change of heart."

"You're wrong," said Eli. "I do understand why you thought it was necessary. I tell you no one has secrets from me now, Tony."

Sellars made a sudden impatient effort to break loose from the compulsion that still held his body bound to the chair he sat in. A glance at the chronometer on his wrist told

him it was now time for him to make his entrance into the Council Room beyond the door. But he could not move.

"Let's get this over with," he said harshly. "You're here for a reason. Get to the point."

"All right," answered Eli. "Your coup is all but completed. The world is practically yours."

"It *is* mine," said Sellars grimly.

"Not quite yet," said Eli. "It can still go in a different direction from what you planned."

"No, it can't," retorted Sellars. "My organization is in control. There is no possibility of going back. The groups have been discredited forever as a form of government; and no one will ever trust them again."

"You're right," said Eli. "There *is* no going back. But there is another way of going forward."

"No," repeated Sellars. "No one can change the path of development now. Even if I'm killed or removed the world will go on in the direction I've pointed it. No one can change that now."

"Yes," Eli looked at him. "There is a person who can. A single person."

"You?" The wintry smile was back on Sellars' lips.

"No," said Eli. "You."

"Me?" The older man stared at him.

"If you changed your mind," Eli said. "If you saw a different path and took it, even though it meant giving up your personal gains, the world would go that way."

For a moment Sellars said nothing. Then he spoke.

"You *are* insane," he said, with almost a touch of awe.

"No," said Eli. "Remember, I said I know you, Tony. I can speak to you with the voice of your own conscience. That's what puts me in the bellwether position before all others. And because I understand individuals I understand the race that is the sum of the individuals; and I know which way the race should go."

"You do?"

Eli nodded.

"It should govern itself and follow me."

For a long moment Sellars just looked at him.

"Sweet Heaven!" he said at last, breaking his self-control for the first time since he had been a very young boy. "You'd *talk* me into letting go of the world?"

"I have no weapons but words," answered Eli. "Listen," he spoke swiftly, "let me tell you first why you want to bind the Earth together under your own single rule. You thought that people had outgrown the groups, and you were right. They outgrew the groups as they had outgrown all other forms of government in the past. Down through history, you said to yourself, the pendulum has swung, first toward the extreme of a strict rule, then toward loose rule, first toward a centralization of power. Then toward a dispersal of power. The cities of Greece to Alexander. Rome to the Caesars. Feudalism to the strong monarchies. And so on down to our own time with the groups foundering in their own dissentions, tangled in their conflicting authorities, and the world at a standstill."

"This is fact," said Sellars.

"As *you* see it."

"As it is," insisted the older man. "The world is sick. I've operated to cut out the cancer of a sick government. My way was the only way."

"No," objected Eli softly. "There is a better way and I will show it to you. And you will take it, because you must obey your conscience. Now listen! Down through history, the same history that you surveyed, two points of view have marched side by side. One has always said, 'This is the way it has gone in the past. Therefore accordingly, this way it must continue.' And the other has said, 'all things develop or die. What is past is gone forever. The road ahead is always new.' "

"In the end everything follows the cyclic theory," insisted Sellars, "always repeating and repeating."

"So the amoeba said, floating on the surface of the ocean, with his highest point the crest of the wave and his lowest the trough between two waves," replied Eli. "And if he was right, what are we doing here, a hundred feet above the water level of mid-Atlantic?" But suppose it was true? Is there any reason it must continue to be true? And if it was true, what useful purpose do you perform by assisting what needs no assistance to continue?" He paused and looked at Sellars. "That reason wasn't your real one. I know what is."

"Oh?" said Sellars.

"Yes," answered Eli. "And I'll tell you what it is without your asking. Because I know you won't ask."

Sellars' eyes had dropped toward the desk top. He did not look up as Eli went on.

"You're a strong man, Tony," Eli said. "Almost too strong for your own good. You can't face a problem without doing something about it. If it can't be resolved you find a solution that, if nothing else, will make it appear to be settled for the time being. And that is exactly what you've done with the world at the present time."

Still Sellars said nothing and did not raise his hand.

"Regimentation," went on Eli. "Forced order and activity commanded by a single central head. All the appearance of progress and development. That was your idea. Keep the pump going, even if the well is dry. Pretend that we have not yet reached the decisive end-point."

Sellars raised his eyes finally. His face was hardened with pain.

"What else is there?" he said.

Eli smiled.

"Thank you, Tony," he said. "You asked. And I'll tell you." He smiled again at the bitter incredulity in Sellars' eyes.

"The Members had the right instinct, you know," he said. "They've been dreaming of a superman without the faults of man. It was a young immature dream, because it assumed that we would suddenly hop to the top of the mountain without the labor of climbing it. But they were looking in the right direction. Man has battled his external world and won. Now he begins a new campaign to conquer his inner self. The old time of physical struggle is behind us. From now on we march into new land, so different and unknown and vast that no one can even guess at what lies waiting for us there."

He stopped and looked at the other man.

"Well, Tony?" he said.

Sellars was free of the compulsion that had so long held him. But he did not notice. He put his elbow on the desk and leaned his head against his hand, wearily rubbing his forehead with slow movements of his fingertips.

"If I believed this . . ." he said. "If I could believe this . . ."

"Why do you think I've come here, except to prove it to you?" replied Eli. "The proof is here for you to discover for yourself. The first and biggest block we face—"

"No!" said Sellars suddenly and sharply, interrupting him. He straightened up behind the desk and shook his head briefly, like a man coming out of a daze. "This is fantastic. No, Eli!" he put both hands palm down on the desk and shoved

himself up onto his feet. Solid and unyielding he looked across the desk at Eli.

"It was a good try; and you almost made it," he said. "But I'm a little beyond the years of believing in fairy tales just because they're what I want to hear. Sorry." And he stepped out from behind his desk and turned for the door, picking up the memnonic cube with his speech notes.

"Fairy tales?" said Eli. "Are you sure that what I told you was just a fairy tale?"

Sellars paused and faced him once more.

"I'll become sure," he answered. "One day I'll be positive. And what will you do now?"

"Nothing," said Eli quietly. "I told you I had no weapons but words. There is your door. Beyond it, your representatives are waiting for you. If you choose to walk to and through that door without facing what I have to offer you, all I can do is stand and watch you go."

Sellars lowered his head and started toward the door. There was something ponderous and awesome about this last gesture. It was as if his great will had such mass that sheer momentum must carry it slowly but inevitably to disaster, as the thousand-ton ocean liner turns slowly from a broken towing cable and with deceptive and terrible gentleness swings in toward the silent, waiting crowd on the fragile pier. He almost made it to the door, but before he reached it, his feet had slowed to a halt and he turned painfully and with hesitation to face Eli—this man who had never hesitated over a decision in his life and who now stood torn and helpless with the agony of his indecision.

"Damn you!" he said. "What's your proof?"

Eli moved toward him until they looked into each other's face across a distance of only inches.

"First," he said, "comes trust. It is the first step for all of us on this new road we walk. The walls of secrecy and shame and hidden fears must go down. If you want to, Tony, you can look into my mind with the help of the Members and see that what I told you of the future is true and possible. But the only way this is possible, is for you to let me, at the same time look into your mind. If we do this, we will have no secrets from each other; and no one can force you to it. You must agree and be willing to trust."

"Trust . . ." echoed Sellars, his voice struggling.

"The time will come when everyone will trust and be open with each other," said Eli sympathetically. "For people brought up as we are in our time it is very hard. I can do it because I know in advance now, what I will see and meet. It's my particular strength. But everybody has his own—and yours, I think, lies in your urge to be right, no matter what the cost. Can you do it?"

"Yes," said Sellars. He seemed to gather himself. "I can do anything," he said.

"I know you can," answered Eli softly.

Sellars lifted his eyes to Eli's and there found reassurance.

"I think I could trust you anyway," he said.

And with those words the barriers between them fell forever.

"You see?" said Eli, after a long while.

"I see," said Tony Sellars.

There was a deep emptiness in his voice. He walked over and sat down heavily at the desk.

"What will I do now?" he asked hopelessly, suddenly very human and defenseless.

"Believe in a different future, that's all," said Eli. "And work for it. Work is something we'll never lack. Not this generation, nor the next, nor even the next after that, will everyone in the world be willing to do what you've just done." He moved forward toward the desk. "You think I've taken something from you, Tony; but you're going to find that in losing that you've gained something much bigger and better to replace it. Hope, Tony."

"Yes, hope . . ." As if roused slowly from his preoccupation with himself, Tony's eyes went to the screen on his desk which showed his ships still clustered about the station. He reached out with one hand and depressed a stud. Invisibly a direct connection flared between his desk and the pilot room of the lead ship. The scene vanished to be replaced by the features of a slim young man wearing a pilot's uniform on which the green Transportation facings were still to be seen.

"Your orders are canceled," said Sellars wearily. "Return to Cable Island." And he cut the connection in the face of the young man's startled expression.

"Thanks," said Eli. "And now?"

Sellars took a deep breath and rose to his feet.

"Now," he said, his voice gaining firmness as he spoke. "I'm due to talk to the group heads in the Council Room."

Across the open channel of his understanding, the cost and meaning of this statement reached through to Eli.

"I could tell them for you, Tony," he said.

"No," Sellars shook his head. His old certainty was flooding back. "The mistake was mine. The explanation will have to be mine."

He turned from the desk and made his way toward the door as Eli watched him go. With his hand on the button of it, he turned and looked back."

"Those Members," he said, "the ones I had executed. I suppose the Members I hadn't caught told you about them."

"No," answered Eli. "I'm not ordinarily telepathic, but that one time I was in actual contact. One of the men executed was Seth Maguin, a half-brother of mine."

Sellars' face went bleak. "I see," he said. He paused for a moment. "I'm sorry."

"I know," said Eli softly.

For a second more, Sellars hesitated. Then he turned and, pushing the door open, went through it. It started to swing closed again, but some invisible force caught it and held it open.

"Thank you, whoever that was," said Eli. "I did want to watch."

He drifted forward to where the angle of the room hid him from the eyes of those in the amphitheater. Beyond the square, flat back of Sellars he saw the faces of the group leaders in their sections about the room, silent and waiting.

"Spokesman and representatives," began Sellars and hesitated, as if gathering strength.

Eli turned and saw a movement in the air beside him; and as he watched he saw Tammy coalesce out of nothingness.

"I wanted to come too," she said, looking up at him. "Eli, do you know you don't limp any more?"

He put his shadow arm around her shadow shoulders, feeling, distant miles away across the ocean, in the station, the warmth and softness of her as his physical body duplicated the action. He smiled back at her.

"That's because I've given up being a cripple otherwise," he said. "Now hush. And listen. This is something that in our present civilization it takes a great man to do."

They fell silent. Out before them Sellars lifted the cube he held in his hand and looked at it for a second. Then quietly, he dropped it into the disposal slot of the desk before him and watched it being incinerated. He looked out once more at his audience and put both his big, square hands palm down on the desk in front of him. He leaned forward and began to speak.

"Gentlemen," he commenced simply, "I have made a mistake. . . ."