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COSMIC MANHUNT

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**L. SPRAGUE
de CAMP**



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Meet the author:

Unusually well qualified to write science-fiction, L. Sprague de Camp has risen in recent years to the top ranks of fantasy authors. Born in New York City in 1907, he received his early schooling in California, culminating in his graduation from the California Institute of Technology with a B.S. in Aeronautical Engineering. He continued his studies at Massachusetts Institute of Technology graduate school, and in 1933 received his M.S. degree in Engineering and Economics from Stevens Institute of Technology in New Jersey.

For the next few years he worked as editor, article-writer, instructor, and patent engineer. During this period he spent a year as Principal of the School of Inventing and Patenting of the International Correspondence Schools.

He began writing fiction in 1937 and turned to it full-time in 1938. Among his more recent books have been *Lest Darkness Fall*, *The Tritonian Ring*, *Lost Continents*, and of course *Cosmic Manhunt*.

COSMIC MANHUNT

by L. Sprague de Camp

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COSMIC MANHUNT

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RING AROUND THE SUN

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VICTOR HASSELBORG shook the reins and spoke to his aya: "Hao, Faroun!" The animal swung its head and blinked reproachfully at him from under its horns, then started to move. The carriage wheels crunched on the gravel of the Novorecife drive.

Beside him on the seat, Ruis said: "Give him a looser rein, *Senhor* Victor. And you must learn not to speak to him in so harsh a tone. You hurt his feelings."

"*Tamates*, are they as sensitive as all that?"

"So-yes. The Krishnans carefully grade the tones in which they speak to their beasts . . ."

The drumming of the aya's six hooves mingled with Ruis' chatter to put Hasselborg into a slight trance. He smiled a little as he acknowledged he certainly was no character out of juvenile fiction with ballet-suit, raygun, and one-man rocket. Instead, he was about to invade the planet Krishna in this silly native outfit with its divided kilt, wearing a sword, and driving a buggy!

It had been some weeks before by subjective time that Hasselborg had drawn on his client's expensive cigar and asked: "What makes you think your daughter has gone off the Earth?"

He watched Batruni narrowly. Although at first he had been ready to dislike the man, he was now beginning to think that though the textile manufacturer shed tears a bit too readily, he was a friendly, generous, well-intentioned sort.

Yussuf Batruni shifted his paunch and blew his nose. Hasselborg, visualizing hordes or germs flying out of Batruni's nostrils, shrank back a little.

Batruni said: "She talked about it for months before she disappeared and she read books. You know, *The Planet of Romance*, *The Martian's Vengeance*, and trash like that."

Hasselborg nodded. "Go on."

"She had enough money for the trip. I fear I gave her more than was good for a young girl alone in London. But she was all the family I had, so nothing was too good—" His voice caught and he shrugged sadly.

"I'll go over her belongings," said Hasselborg. "Meanwhile, do you think she went with somebody?"

"What do you mean?"

"I said, d'you think she went with somebody? And I don't mean your Aunt Susie, either."

"I—" Batruni stiffened, then checked himself. "Excuse me.

Where I come from, we take care of our daughters' virtue, so I cannot help— But, now that you bring it up, I am afraid the answer is yes."

Hasselborg smiled cynically. "The Levant ought to advertise its virgins the way Egypt does its pyramids. Who's the man?"

"I do not know."

"Then how d'you know there is one?"

"There are only . . . little things. Nothing you can put the finger on. On my last trip to London, when I asked her about her young man, she evaded. Talked about other things. That was a big change from the times before, when I would learn every detail of the young man's appearance and habits whether I was interested or not."

"Don't you suspect anybody in particular?"

"No, just a vague general suspicion. You are the detective; you draw the inferences."

"I will," promised Hasselborg. "As soon as I've looked over her apartment I'll wire Barcelona for the passenger lists of all the spaceships that have left in the last month. She couldn't get away under an assumed name, you know, because her prints would be checked against the European Central File as a matter of routine."

"That will be good," said Batruni, looking out of the window into a fog that had so far defied the efforts of the fog-sweepers. His great Levantine nose showed in profile. "Do not spare the expense, and when you find where she has gone, follow her on the very next ship."

"Wait a minute!" said Hasselborg. "To chase somebody on another planet takes preparation, special equipment, training—"

"The very next!" said Batruni, beginning to wave his hands. "My God, do you think I like sitting around? Speed is of the utmost importance. I will pay you a bonus for speed. Have you never heard of the early bird, Mr. Hasselborg?"

"Yeah, and I've also heard of the early worm," said Hasselborg. "Nobody gives him a thought."

"Well, this is no joke. If you cannot hurry, I will go to—" He broke off in a fit of sneezing.

Hasselborg held his breath to let the germs settle, then said: "Now, now, I assure you I won't waste a minute. Not a micro-second."

"You had better not," said Batruni. "And if you can return my Julnar—ah—unharmd, I will add fifty percent to the fee."

Hasselborg cocked an eyebrow, thinking that if you could

only strap a howdah to Batruni's back he'd fit perfectly into a circus parade. "I understand. However, Mr. Batruni, while I can trail runaways, I can't bring back the infirm glory of the positive hour, nor can I put Humpty Dumpty together again."

"Then you don't think there is any chance . . .?"

"About as much chance as there is of having an Irishman turn down a drink when you offer it to him. However, I'll do my best."

"Fine," said Batruni. "By the way, Mr. Hasselborg, you do not talk like a Londoner. Are you Swedish?"

Hasselborg pushed back the brown hair that drooped untidily over his broad forehead. "By descent only. I'm a North American; born in Vancouver."

"How did you happen to settle in London?"

"Why. . ." Hasselborg became wary, not wishing to go into the sordid details of his fall and partial resurrection. "After I left the Division of Investigation to go into private work, I specialized in insurance frauds. And Europe offers a good opportunity for that kind of work now." He laughed apologetically. "Investigating them, I mean. Follow me?"

"Yes." Batruni looked at his watch. "My 'plane leaves in an hour, so you must excuse me. You have the photographs, the key to her apartment, the list of addresses, and the letter of credit. I do not doubt that you will live up to your recommendations." However, he said this with a rising inflection that did imply a doubt.

As he stood up, Hasselborg worked the little trick that he sometimes used on dubious clients: he pushed back his hair, straightened his scarf, took off his glasses, pulled back his shoulders, and stuck out his big square jaw. By these acts he changed in a couple of seconds from a nondescript mild-looking person with an air of utter unimportance to a large well-built character whom an evil-doer would think twice about meddling with.

Batruni smiled with renewed confidence as he shook hands.

Hasselborg warned him: "I'm no miracle-working yogi, you know. If she's gone outside the Solar System it'll take years to bring her back. There's no extradition from most planets, and once I get her aboard the *Viagens Interplanetarias* she'll be under Earthly law and I can't drag her by main force. It would cost me my license at least."

Batruni waved a hand. "Never mind that. I will take care of your future if you return me my darling. But to wait all those years . . ." He seemed ready to blubber again.

"You could put yourself in a trance, couldn't you?"

"And wake up to find those terrible Socialists had stolen all my factories? No, thank you. It is not the time—the doctors tell me I have another seventy-five years at least—but the suspense. It will not be so long for you."

"The Fitzgerald effect," said Hasselborg. "If you're not back from Aleppo when I shove off from London, I'll leave a report for you. *Mah salâmi!*"

Viagens Interplanetarias wired back a list of names from Barcelona, and the name of Julnar Batruni turned up on the list for the *Juruá*, bound for Pluto with four other Londoners in addition to other passengers. Of the Londoners, one was a well-known spinster sociologist; two, a minor World Federation official and his wife; the remaining one was a radio announcer named Anthony Fallon.

Hasselborg trotted around to the BBC offices, where he unearthed the Personnel Director and asked about Fallon. He learned that Fallon was in his early thirties (a little younger than Hasselborg himself), a native of London, married, with a varied background as a World Police trooper, a cameraman on a scientific expedition to Greenland, a hippopotamus-farmer, an actor, a professional cricket-player, and other jobs. No, BBC had no notion where he was now. The blighter had simply called Personnel one fine day, told them he was resigning, and walked out. (That was two days before the *Juruá* left Barcelona.) And really you know, this is England, where a chap can go where he pleases without some copper checking on him. . .

Finding the Director of Personnel stuffy, Hasselborg inquired among the staff, adding details to his picture of Fallon. The man, it transpired, had cut something of a swath among the female help; he'd apparently led not a double but a quadruple or quintuple life. The men liked his tall tales without altogether believing them; on the other hand they thought him a bit of a cad and a trouble-maker. Good thing he'd gone. (These uninhibited bastards have all the fun, thought Hasselborg sourly.)

Hasselborg wrote up his visit on his shorthand pad and went to Fallon's address, which turned out to be an ordinary Kensington flat. A pretty blonde girl opened the door. "Yes?"

Hasselborg got a jolt: the girl looked like his lost Marion. "Are you Mrs. Fallon?"

"Why yes. What can I—"

"My name's Hasselborg," he said, forcing what was meant for a disarming grin. "May I ask you a few questions about Mr. Fallon?"

"I suppose—but who are you really?"

Hasselborg, thinking that the direct approach would work here as well as any, identified himself. The strong Britishness of her speech made him almost forget her resemblance to his ex-wife. The girl was of medium height, sturdily built, with substantial ankles, wide cheekbones, rather flat features, and a vivid pink-blue-and-gold coloring.

After some hesitation she asked him in. Most people did, since they were more thrilled than resentful over being investigated by one of those fabulous creatures, a real sleuth. The only trouble was to keep them on the subject; they wanted to know about your romantic adventures, and wouldn't believe you when you assured them that investigation was a dull and sordid trade that brought you into contact with a singularly unlikeable lot of people.

She said: "No, I've no idea where Tony went. He just told me he was going on a trip. Since he'd done that before, I didn't worry for the first week or two, and then I learned he'd quit his job."

"Did you ever suspect him of—uh—playing around?"

She smiled wryly. "I'm sure he did. You know, tales of how he had to stay late for spot broadcasts, which later turned out never to have taken place."

"Do anything about it?"

"I asked him, but he only flew into a temper. Tony's a very peculiar man."

"He must be, to leave a girl like you. . ."

"Oh," she smiled deprecatingly. "I'm afraid I bored him. I wanted the usual things, you know; a real home and lots of children. . ."

"What did you intend to do when he went this time?"

"I hadn't decided. I can't help liking him in a way, and he was wonderful when we first. . ."

"I understand. Did he ever mention a Syrian girl, Julnar Batruni?"

"No, he was cagey. You think he went with her?"

Hasselborg nodded.

"Where to? America?"

"Farther than that, Mrs. Fallon. Off the earth."

"You mean millions and millions. . . Oh. Then I suppose I shan't see him again. I don't know whether to be relieved. . ."

Hasselborg said: "I'm trying to find Miss Batruni and, if possible, bring her back. Want me to try to fetch your man too?" He found himself, he couldn't imagine why, hoping she'd say "no."

"Why—this is all so unexpected. I'd have to think. . ."

Her voice trailed off again.

"Mind if I take down some data?" The shorthand pad appeared. "What was your maiden name?"

"Alexandra Garshin. Born in Petrograd, 2103. I've lived in London most of my life, though."

Hasselborg grinned. "Tony's the only cockney in the case." After a few more questions he said: "While I don't usually mix business with pleasure, it's nearly dinner time, and I think we could pursue the subject better over a couple of reindeer steaks. What say?"

"Oh! Thanks, but I couldn't impose on you. . ."

"Come on! Old man Batruni'll be paying for it." Hasselborg looked studiously friendly and harmless, hoping that his expression would not seem to the unprejudiced observer like that of a hungry wolf. Or at least a coyote.

She thought, then said: "I'll come, but if you ever meet my parents, Mr. Hess—Hass—"

"Vic."

"Mr. Hasselborg, don't say I went out with you on such short acquaintance."

"Cocktail?" he said.

"Thank you, a blackjack."

"One blackjack and a glass of soda water," he told the waiter.

She raised eyebrows. "Teetotaler?"

He smiled regretfully. "No. Narasimachar treatment."

"Oh, you poor man! You mean you're really conditioned so a good drink makes you gag?"

He nodded. "Sad, too, because I used to like the stuff. Too well. That was the trouble, if you follow me." He wouldn't go into the story of his moral collapse after Marion. . . "When I get a case where I've got to drink with the boys for professional reasons, boy, then the going is rugged. But let's talk about you. Are you fixed for support while I chase your errant spouse beyond the cranky comets and behind the mystic moons?" He washed down a couple of pills with his soda water.

"Don't worry. I've got a promise of a job, and if the worst

came to the worst I could go back to my parents—if I could stand hearing them say 'I told you so.'"

The physician laid down his last hypodermic and said: "Really, that's all I can think of." He counted them off on his fingers. "Tetanus, typhus, typhoid, smallpox, yellow fever, bubonic, pneumonic, malaria, Martian jaundice, Venerian leprosy. . . It's a wonder you're not dead from all the shots you've had lately. Maybe you'd like to be shot for whooping cough?"

Hasselborg met the doctor's gaze squarely, though he guessed that the word in the doctor's mind was, hypochondriac. "Thanks, I've had it. Got those prescriptions? Wish I could take time to have my appendix jerked."

"Is something wrong with your appendix?"

"No, but I don't like wandering around some strange planet with one inside me that *might* go wrong. For all I know, I'm going some place where when you get sick they chop off a finger to let out the evil spirits. And I hope to God my teeth hold out; just had 'em checked."

The doctor sighed. "Some chaps with everything wrong can't be bothered with elementary medical care, while the healthiest individual I've seen in years. . . But I suppose I shouldn't discourage you."

Hasselborg went out to Woolwich for an hour's pistol practice at the range; then he headed back to arrange with a colleague to take over his two pending fraud cases. Then home to his apartment to hang on the telephone until he got through to Yussuf Batruni, who waxed emotional all the way from Aleppo: "My boy, my boy, it is noble of you. . ."

Then he took Alexandra Garshin Fallon out to dinner again, saying, "Last date, chum."

"So soon?"

"Yep; I'd rather wait till a later ship, but I'm only the third engineer of my soul; Joe Batruni's the captain. I drop you right after we sheathe our fangs and go home to pack."

"Let me come around to help you."

"No. Sorry." He smiled to counteract her hurt look. "I can't. You know, might give away trade secrets."

"Oh," she said.

He knew that wasn't the real reason. The reason was that he was falling in love with her, and he was not sure he could keep his mind on packing if. . . One of his principles was,

while working on a case, not to leap with lascivious howls upon one of the principals in the case.

Just as well he was going, he thought. The idea wormed into his mind that it would be so easy to fail to find Fallon and his light-o'-love, and then come back and have Alexandra to himself. . . No! While he didn't consider himself a Galahad of purity, he still had his code. And although he had witnessed most of the delinquencies of mankind in the course of his career, and had partaken of some of them, he was still a bit of a fanatic on the subject of wife-stealing. With reason.

He laid out on his bed: one Webley & Scott 6-millimeter 20-shot automatic pistol, one blackjack, one set of brass knuckles, one pair of handcuffs, one pocket camera, one WP standard police finger-print recording apparatus, one pencil flashlight, one two-way pocket radio set, one portable wire-recorder set, one armor vest, one infra-red scanning and receiving apparatus (pocket size), one set of capsules containing various gases and explosives which would accomplish anything from putting an audience to sleep to blowing a safe, one box of knockout drops, a pick-lock, a supply of cigars, a notebook, and pills: vitamin, mineral, longevity, headache, constipation, cold. . . There was also ammunition for all this equipment: HV cartridges, camera film, notebook-fillers, and so on. The most valuable of the equipment he stowed in his pockets until his suit began to look lumpy. The rest he packed.

Alexandra came out to Waddon to see him off, saying: "I wish I were going with you."

He supposed she didn't know she was turning the knife in the wound, so he smiled amiably. "Almost wish you were too. Wouldn't do, of course. But I'll think of you. If you get tired of waiting around for Tony and me, you can always go in trance, or. . ." He meant to say: ditch Fallon and go your own way—but thought better of saying so.

"Speck in my eye." She dabbed at the optic with a handkerchief a little larger than a postage-stamp. "Gone now."

"Look here, could I have that handkerchief?"

"What for?"

"Why—uh—just to take along." He grinned to hide his embarrassment. "In spring, when woods are getting green, I'll try and tell you what I mean. In summer, when the days are long, perhaps you'll understand the song."

"Why Victor, you're sentimental!"

"Uh-huh, but speak it not in Gath. It would ruin my pro-

fessional reputation." They shook hands formally. Hasselborg found it hard to keep up his pose of guileless geniality. "Good-by, Alexandra."

The Barcelona 'plane whizzed down the catapult strip and off the field in a cloud of smoke.

II

WHILE Hasselborg pondered the case on his way to Barcelona, it occurred to him that the fugitive pair might have resorted to some human version of the old shell game. They could have arranged with another pair of passengers to switch identities after they got to Pluto. Then the pair under assumed names could easily return to Earth or one of the other inner planets. They might get away with such a dodge because their prints would not be checked once they had left Barcelona. Having no wish to spend years chasing them through the Galaxy as if they were a pair of rather unholy grails, as soon as the 'plane reached Barcelona he looked up the investigating firm of Montejo and Durruti. He arranged for them to cover all incoming spaceships until further notice.

Then he sent a last-minute postcard to Alexandra (not exactly a professional thing to do; he told himself, but he might be dead before he returned) and boarded the *Coronado* for Pluto.

There were nine passengers besides Victor Hasselborg, who found himself bunking with one K. Yano. They were all squeezed into the little honeycomb of passenger compartments in the nose, below the control rooms and above the cargo and the vast mass of fuel and machinery that occupied nine-tenths of the craft.

After an ineffective effort to unpack his belongings at the same time that Yano unpacked his (without disclosing the professional equipment), Hasselborg said: "Look here, chum, suppose I lie on the bunk while you unpack; then we trade off?"

"Thank you," said Yano, a short thick dish-faced man with coarse black hair turning gray. "You turn crank on the end of your bunk, and the end comes up like hospital bed. What's your line, Mr. Hasselborg?"

"Insurance investigator. What's yours?"

"Ah, I'm economic official to the Sublime Northeastern Republic. A very dull person, I assure you. First trip?"

"Uh-huh."

"Then—ah—I suppose you know your instructions for take-off?"

"Sure. Lie down when I hear the warning bell, etcetera."

"That's right. You'll find exercise compartment down the passageway to the right. Better sign up for one hour out of every twenty-four, subjective time. It'll keep you from going mad from boredom."

That proved no overstatement. With every cubic centimeter accounted for, there were no ports to look out of and no deck space for strolling. The small group of passengers had to eat in two shifts, using the tiny compartment that also served as lounge the rest of the time.

When the ship had risen above the plane of the ecliptic and had cut its acceleration back to 1.25 g, Hasselborg played cards, pulled on weights in the exercise room (just big enough to let him do so without barking his knuckles), and pried into the lives of his fellow passengers. Some proved garrulous and transparent; others opaque and taciturn. He found his roommate, oddly enough, to be loquacious and opaque at the same time.

When Yano was asked what official business he was on, he'd reply vaguely: "Ah—just looking into possibilities of high-grade imports and exports. No, nothing definite; I shall have to decide on the ground. Only goods of highest quality for a given mass can be handled, you know. . ."

Hasselborg decided, more in fun than in earnest, that Yano was really a plainclothes agent either of the S.N.E.R. or of the W.F. If such were the case, however, it would do no good to say: "See here, old man, aren't you a cop?" One of the more dismal facts about the profession was that you had to spend so much time playing dumb.

This monotonous half-life, bounded by bare bulkheads and punctuated by bells that reminded the sluggish appetite that the time had come for another meal, continued for days until the warning bell told him they were nearing Pluto. Hours later the pressure of deceleration let up and the loudspeaker in the wall said: "*Passageiros sai, por favor!*"

Suitcase in hand, Hasselborg followed Yano down the inclosed ramp that had been attached to the ship's side. As usual there was nothing to see; space travel was no game for a claustrophobe. The ramp moved slightly under the weight of the people walking down it.

An airlock shut behind him, and he saw a young man sitting at a desk and checking off names on a register. Hasselborg

handed over his passport, saying: "*Tenha a bondade, senhor*, let me speak to the head passenger agent."

Then, while the inspector went through his bag, Hasselborg identified himself to the head passenger *fiscal*, a Brazzy like most of the *Viagens* people. Hasselborg reflected that, public and internationally-owned corporation though the *Viagens* was supposed to be, with all jobs strictly civil service, somehow the citizens of the world's leading power always got a disproportionate share of them.

The agent politely insisted on speaking English. However, Hasselborg, not to be outdone, insisted on speaking the Brazilo-Portuguese of the spaceways to the agent. Finally, Hasselborg, giving up the contest first, asked:

"I believe two passengers named Fallon and Batruni came in on the *Juruá*."

"Let me think—I can check the register. Was not the Batruni that beautiful girl with the dark hair?"

Hasselborg showed a photograph to the agent, who said: "Ah, yes, that is her. *O Glória-Pátri*, such a woman! What did you wish with this girl?"

Hasselborg grinned. "Not what you're thinking, *Senhor Jorge*. Is she still here?"

"No."

"Thought not. Where'd she go?"

The agent looked wary. "Perhaps if you could tell me of the circumstances. . ."

Hasselborg cleared his throat. "Well, Miss Batruni has a father who's anxious to get her back. Mr. Fallon has a wife who's perhaps less anxious, but who is still interested in knowing where he went. And obviously they didn't come all the way out here just to admire the view of the Solar System. Follow me?"

"But—but Miss Batruni is of age; she can go where she likes."

"That's not the point. If she can go where she likes, I can also follow her. Where'd she go?"

"I prefer not to tell you."

"You'll have to, chum. It's public information and I can raise a stink. . ."

The agent sighed. "I suppose you can. But it goes against all the traditions of romance. Will you promise me that when you find them you will not spoil this so-beautiful intrigue?"

"I won't promise anything of the sort. I won't put gyves

on the girl's wrists and drag her back to Earth at gunpoint, if that's what you mean. Now, where—"

"They went to Krishna," said the agent.

Hasselborg whistled. As he remembered it, of all the hundreds of known inhabited planets, Krishna had natives the most like human beings. That was to Hasselborg's disadvantage, since the elopers could take off from the landing station without oxygen masks or other special equipment and lose themselves among the natives.

What did he know of Krishna? There'd been a Sunday supplement article the month before, with a picture of a fat native king in crown and sword.

Hasselborg said: "*Obrigado*. When does the next ship leave for Krishna?"

The agent glanced at the compound clock on the bulkhead. "In two hours fourteen minutes."

"And when's the next after that?"

Senhor Jorge glanced at the blackboard. "Forty-six days."

"And when does it arrive at Krishna?"

"You mean the ship time or the Solar-System time?"

Hasselborg shook his head. "I always get confused on that one. Both, let's say."

"Ship time—that is, subjective time—you arrive in twenty-nine days. Solar-System or objective time, 1,497 days."

"Then Fallon and Miss Batruni will have arrived—how many days ahead of me?"

"Krishna time, about a hundred days."

"Yipe! You mean they take off sixteen days ahead of me; I take 29 days following them—and I arrive a hundred days after they do? But you can't do that!"

"I am sorry, but with the Fitzgerald effect you can. You see they went in the *Maranhão*, one of the new mail ships with tub acceleration."

Hasselborg shuddered. "Some day somebody's going to make a round trip on one of your ships and arrive back home before he left." Meanwhile, he thought that invading an unfamiliar planet required more preparation than he could manage in a couple of hours. On the other hand, he could imagine Batruni's reaction if he arrived back on Earth to spend a month getting ready. The magnate would resemble not merely an elephant but a bull elephant in *must*. Still, for the fee he was getting, a chance was worth taking. He asked:

"Is there a bunk available on the one that's leaving now?"

"I will see." The agent buzzed the clerk in the next com-

partment and held a brief nasal conversation with him. "Yes," he said, turning to Hasselborg, "there are two."

"If you'll visa me, I'll take one of them. Have you got a library with information on Krishna?"

Senhor Jorge shrugged. "Not a very good one. We have the *Astronaut's Guide* and an encyclopedia on microfilm. Some of the men have their own books, but it would take time to round them up. You wish to see what we have?"

"Lead on. I'd also like a look at the register of the *Maranhão*, to compare signatures." He wouldn't put it past this superannuated cupid to give him a bum steer in order to protect the so-beautiful intrigue of the runaway couple.

However, the register checked with the agent's statements. Moreover, the library was not very informative. Hasselborg learned that the surface gravity of Krishna was 0.92 g, the atmospheric pressure 1.34 A, the partial pressure of O₂ 1.10 times that of Earth (with a high partial pressure of helium). The people were endoskeletal, bisexual, oviparous, bipedal organisms enough like human beings so that one could pass himself off as a Krishnan with a little skillful disguise; in fact there had even been marriages between persons of the two species, though without issue.

The Krishnans had a pre-mechanical culture characterized by such archaisms as war, national sovereignty, epidemics, hereditary status, and private ownership of natural resources. The planet itself was a little larger than Earth but with a lower density. Having a higher proportion of land to water, Krishna had a land area nearly three times that of the Earth.

Senhor Jorge opened the door. "You had better come, Mr. Hasselborg; you have only twenty minutes. Here is your passport."

"Just a minute," said Hasselborg, looking up from the viewer and reaching for his pen. He dashed off three short letters to be photographed and sent back to Earth by the next ship. One was to Montejo and Durruti calling them off their job, and one each to Yussuf Batruni and Alexandra Fallon stating briefly where he was going and why.

When he boarded the ship, he found that space was even more limited than on the first lap of the trip. He had as room-mates not only K. Yano but also a middle-aged lady from Boston who found the forced closeness most repugnant. He thought, if I were Fallon, now, she'd really have something to worry about.

They arrived.

In contrast to Pluto, the ramp was open to the mild, moist air of Krishna. Great masses of clouds swept in stately procession across the greenish sky, often cutting off the big yellow sun. Even the vegetation was mostly green. Walking down the ramp, Hasselborg could see, stretching like a gray string across the rolling plain, the high wall that marked the boundary of Novorecife.

The next contrast to Pluto was less pleasant. An official person in a fancy uniform said: "*Faça o favor*, passengers going on to Indra and Vishnu, into this room. Those stopping off at Krishna in here, please. Now, line up, please. Place your baggage on the floor, open, please."

Hasselborg noticed what looked like a full-length X-ray fluoroscope at one side of the room. More uniformed men appeared and began going through the baggage and clothes with microscopic care. Others herded the passengers one by one into the space between the X-ray machine and the fluoroscope to have their insides examined. Some of the passengers made heavy weather, especially the lady from Boston, who was plainly unused to *Viagens* ways.

However, the guard assigned to Hasselborg's pile had barely begun his job when he jumped up as if he had been jabbed from behind with a sharp instrument. "*Alô!* What is this?" He had turned over the top layer of clothes and come upon the professional equipment.

Two guards rushed Hasselborg down the hall, while two others followed with his luggage. They ushered him into an office in which a fat man sat at a desk, and all four talked so fast that Hasselborg, despite a fair command of the language, could hardly follow. One of the guards went through Hasselborg's clothes, making excited noises as he came upon the pistol, the camera, and other items.

The fat man, whose name according to the sign on his desk was Cristôvão Abreu, Security Officer, leaned back in his swivel chair and said: "What are you trying to get away with, *Senhor?*"

Hasselborg said loudly: "Not a thing, *Senhor* Cristôvão. What am I supposed to do, click my heels together and salute? What are you trying to get away with? Why are your men hauling me around in this undignified way? Why do you treat incoming passengers like a bunch of steers arriving at the abattoir? What—"

"Quiet yourself, my friend. Don't bluster at me; it will not excuse your crime."

"What crime?"

"You should know."

"Sorry, chum, but I don't. My papers are in order, and I'm on legitimate—"

"It is not that, but this!" The fat man indicated the wire recorder and other apparatus as if they had been the parts of a dismembered corpse.

"What's wrong with them?"

"Don't you know they're contraband?"

"*Mãe do Deus!* Of course I didn't know. Why are they?"

"Don't you know that the Interplanetary Council has forbidden bringing machinery or inventions into Krishna? Don't tell me anybody can be so ignorant!"

"I can be." Hasselborg gave a short account of his hurried departure from Pluto, without proper briefing. "And why are these gadgets forbidden?"

Abreu shrugged. "I merely enforce the regulations; I don't make them. I believe there is some social reason for this policy: to keep the Krishnans from killing each other off too fast before their culture is more advanced in law and government. And here you come with enough inventions to revolutionize their whole existence! I must say. . . Well, I know my duty. Mauriceu, have you examined the underwear of this one? Then take him to the office of Góis for further examination." And Abreu went back to his papers with the air of having swatted one more noxious insect.

Julio Góis, Assistant Security Officer, turned out to be a good-looking young man with a beaming smile. "I'm sorry you have had this trouble, Mr. Hasselborg, but you gave the Old Man a terrible turn with your apparatus. He was on duty here ten years ago when some visitor introduced the custom of kissing to Krishna, and the excitement from that hasn't died down yet. So he's sensitive on the subject. Now, if you will answer some questions. . ."

After an hour's interrogation, Góis said: "Your papers are as you say in order, and I'm inclined to agree that if you hadn't been honestly ignorant you wouldn't have tried to bring your devices in openly. So I'll release you. However, first we'll sequester the things in that pile. You may keep the little club, the knuckle-duster, the notebook, the pen, the knife. . . No, not the pencil, which is a complicated mechanical device. Take an ordinary wooden pencil instead. No, the breastplate

is one of those wonderful new alloys. That's all I can allow you."

"Huh," said Hasselborg, "how do I catch these people without the tools of my trade?"

Góis shrugged. "You'll have to use the brain, I think."

Hasselborg rubbed his forehead as if to arouse that organ. "That puts me in a hell of a spot. Do you know where Fallon and Miss Batruni took off for when they left Novorecife?"

"They were headed for Rosid, in the principality of Ruz, which is a dependency of the Kingdom of Gozashtand. Here's a map. . ." Góis ran a fingernail north from the green spot that symbolized Novorecife, the *Viagens* outpost.

"Were they traveling under aliases?"

"I don't know. They didn't confide in me."

"What does one need to travel around Krishna?"

"Some native clothes, weapons, and means of transportation. Our barber can give you the antennae and dye your hair. What will you go as?"

"How do you mean?" asked Hasselborg.

"You can't run around without means of support. You can't say you're an Earthly spy using a disguise. They might kill you. Most nearby rulers are friendly to us. But the common people are ignorant and excitable, and there's no extra-territoriality. Once you leave Novorecife we wash our hands of you, unless you disobey the regulation about inventions."

"What do you suggest for a cover? I can be an insurance salesman, or a télélog repairman, or—"

"*Os santos*, no! There's no insurance or radio here. You'd have to go as something that exists, like a palmer—"

"A what?"

"A religious pilgrim. However, that might get you into religious arguments. What's your church?"

"Reformed Atheist."

"Just so. Some of the Earthly cults are established here, you know. Missionaries got in before the ban went into effect. How about a troubadour?"

"That's out. When I sing, strong men pale, women faint, and children run screaming."

"I have it, a portrait painter!"

"Huh?" Hasselborg sat up with a jerk. He was about to say that he hated all painters, but that would involve explanations to the effect that his former wife had run off to live with one in a shack on the California coast. Instead he said: "I haven't painted anything but roofs for years." (He had been trained

in sketching when he was entering the Division of Investigation, but chose not to admit it.)

"Oh, you needn't be good. Krishnan art is mostly geometric, and their portraits are so bad by our standards that you'll be a sensation."

"Wouldn't they recognize my technique as exotic?"

"That's all right too; the Earthly technique is a fad in Gozashtand. The Council hasn't tried to keep Earthly fine arts out of Krishna. Take a few days to practice your painting and learn Gozashtandou while you have your new equipment made. I see by your letter of credit that you can afford the best. I'll give you an introduction to the Dasht of Ruz—"

"The who of what?"

"I suppose you'd say a baron. He's Jám bad-Koné, a feudal underling of the Dour of Gozashtand."

"Look," said Hasselborg, "at least let me take my pills. I have to keep my health, and nobody'll know what's in them. Do you follow me?"

Góis smiled. "Perhaps we can allow the pills."

When Hasselborg reached the barber shop he found his shipmate Yano in the chair ahead of him. The barber had already dyed the man's hair a poisonous green. He was engaged in affixing a pair of artificial antennae to his forehead by means of little sponge-rubber disks that merged with the skin so that it was almost impossible to tell where one left off and the other began. The barber said:

"Those should stay for at least a month, but I'll sell you a kit to glue them back on if they should work loose. Remember to let your hair grow longer in back. . ."

Hasselborg also noted that the barber had glued artificial points to Yano's ears, so that altogether the man now looked something like an overfed leprechaun. "Hello Yano. Going out among the aborigines too?"

"Indeed so. Which direction you taking?"

"They tell me my subjects have gone north. How about you?"

"I don't know yet. You know, I am afraid green hair doesn't become me."

"Better be glad they don't wear those haystack wigs they wore on Earth back in the time of James the Second."

Gozashtandou proved an easy language for a man who already spoke a dozen. Hasselborg spent mornings posting solemnly around the bridle path on the back of an aya, while a member of the *Viagens* staff trotted with him and told him over

and over to keep his elbows in, heels down, etc. These beasts had an unpleasantly jarring trot, especially since the saddle was right over the middle pair of legs.

When he learned that his particular aya had also been trained to draw a carriage, he eagerly bought a light four-wheeled vehicle with a single seat for two. Two or three hundred years before on Earth, he recalled, men had driven a variety of these contraptions and called them by a multitude of special names: buggy, brougham, gig, surrey. . . Something only an antiquarian would know about now. At least, one aya and a carriage should in the long run be as cheap and convenient as an aya to ride and a second to carry his gear. He had no doubt about which would be more comfortable.

Afternoons he put in an hour or two with another staffer, a Norwegian named Heggstad, who flourished a dummy sword and yelled: "No, no, always you are waving the blade too wide!"

"That's how they do it in the movies."

"Damn the movies! Do they try to kill people in the movies? No, they try to give the audience a thrill, which is different. . ."

With Yano he practiced Krishnan conversation and table manners. The main tools were a pair of little spears to be held like chopsticks. Yano had an advantage here. Góis, watching Hasselborg's fumbles, turned beet-red containing his mirth.

"Go ahead and laugh, damn you," said Hasselborg. "I should think the Council would at least let us show 'em knives and forks."

Góis shrugged. "The Council has been very strict since the tobacco habit invaded the planet, *amigo meu*. Some consider the Council unreasonable for saying that by letting these people have knives and forks we'd be inviting an interplanetary war, but. . ."

"Are the Krishnans as dangerous as that?"

"Not so much dangerous as backward. The Council reasons that it will be time enough letting them have an industrial revolution when they have more civilized ideas about politics and the like. I don't think they know what they want; the policy changes from year to year. And some say the stupid Council will always find reasons to stop progress on Krishna. Progress. . . Ah, my friends, I must get back to Earth before I'm too old to see its wonders."

At this outburst Hasselborg exchanged a quick glance with Yano, who said: "What's your opinion of the regulation, *Senhor Julio*?"

"Me?" said Góis in English. "I am but a poor, infirm, weak, and despised young man. I have no opinions." And he changed the subject in a marked manner.

Hasselborg stayed on a week after Yano left and worked on his orientation. Since the authorities wouldn't let him take along the photographs of Julnar and Fallon, he practiced copying them with pencil and brush until he achieved recognizable likeness. He balked at Góis' suggestion that he load himself down with a complete suit of armor, but finally compromised on a shirt of fine chain mail. He also bought a sword, a dagger with a fancy guard, a big leather wallet like an Earthly woman's handbag with a shoulder strap and many compartments, and a native dictionary of Gozashtandou-Portuguese and Portuguese-Gozashtandou. Like all Krishnan books, it was printed on a long strip of paper folded zigzag between a pair of wooden covers.

Then one morning before sunrise, while two of Krishna's three moons, Karrim and Sheb, still bathed the landscape, he set out from the north gate. He felt a little foolish in plumed hat and monkey jacket. But philosophically he told himself he'd lived through worse things. Góis had been adamant about refusing to let him take his rubbers, and Hasselborg, much as he dreaded wet feet, had to admit that rubbers over the soft-leather high Krishnan boots would have looked a little bizarre.

Góis was present to see him off. Hasselborg said: "Have you got that letter of introduction?" He half expected a negative, since Góis had been putting off writing the thing on one excuse or another.

"*Sim*, here—here it is."

Hasselborg frowned. "What's the matter? Sit up all night writing it?" For Góis had a nervous, distracted look.

"Not quite. I had to choose the right wording. Be sure not to break the seals or the Dasht will get suspicious. And whatever happens, remember that Julio Góis esteems you."

A funny sort of farewell, thought Hasselborg, but he simply said: "*Até à vista!*" and tickled his aya's rump with his whip until it went into a brisk trot on the road to Rosid.

III

VICTOR HASSELBORG rode for quite sometime, mumbling sentences of Gozashtandou to himself. A couple of Earthly hours after sunrise the sun finally broke through the tumbled clouds.

Hasselborg pulled up alongside an enormous two-wheeled cart drawn by a bishtar, an elephantine draft animal with a couple of short trunks, and asked the driver how far away Avord was.

The driver leaned over, then jerked a thumb towards the rear of the cart. "Twenty-five hoda, master."

Hasselborg knew it was over thirty, but these fellows always deducted a little to make the hearer feel good. The fellow looked like a thinner version of Yano in his Krishnan disguise, with the same slant-eyed, flattened face. Yes, he was more like that of a Mongoloid like Yano than a Caucasoid like Hasselborg. Maybe, he thought, that was why Yano had been sent on his mysterious errand. Fortunately the bishtar driver seemed to find nothing odd about Hasselborg. He merely asked whether it was likely to rain.

Hasselborg said: "If the gods so decide. Thanks for the information." He waved and trotted off, pleased with having passed his first inspection.

From time to time he passed other travelers who were riding, driving, or on foot. Evidently he was on a major highway. Góis had told him that the Dasht had it patrolled to keep the danger from robbers and wild beasts to a minimum. Even so, towards the end of the day, a deep animal roar came over the plain and made his aya skitter.

He put on speed and soon sighted the cultivated strips that meant he was nearing Avord. The sun had disappeared into the towering clouds, and Hasselborg had felt a sprinkle of rain. Now the clouds were getting black and the wind was increasingly bothersome. Perhaps he should put up the collapsible top. He stopped the vehicle and struggled with the contraption. Finally the thing yielded and Hasselborg whipped his animal to a gallop as he drew close to the village.

The houses of Avord were of plaster or concrete, with outside windows few, small, and high. Hasselborg found the inn where Góis had said it would be, and identified it by the animal skull over the door. He hitched his beast and went inside. There he found a big room with benches. Seeing a stout wrinkled fellow with ragged antennae whom Hasselborg took to be the host, he rattled off:

"May the stars favor you; I am Kavir bad-Ma'lum. I wish a meal, a bed, and care for my aya."

"That will be five karda, sir," said the innkeeper.

"Four," said Hasselborg.

"Four and a half."

"Four and a quarter."

"Done. Hamsé, see that the gentleman's baggage is stowed and his animal stabled and fed. Now, Master Kavir, will you sit with two of my regular customers? On the left is Master Farrá, who owns one of the outlying farms. The other is Master Qám, on his way from Rosid to Novorecife. What would you? We have roast unha, ásh stew, or I can boil you up a fine young ambar. Eh?"

"I'll take the last," said Hasselborg, not knowing one from the other and wishing he could inspect the kitchen to see if it measured up to his standards of sanitation. "And something to drink."

"Naturally."

Master Farrá, a tall weather-beaten Krishnan who scratched a lot, asked: "Where are ye from, Master Kavir? From Malayer in the far south? Both your accent and your face suggest it—no offense, of course. I can see ye're a man of quality, so we're delighted to have ye sit with us. Well?"

"My parents came from there," said Hasselborg cautiously.

Qám, a small dried-up man with his hair faded to jade, said: "And where to now, sir? To Rosid for the game?"

"I'm headed for Rosid," said Hasselborg, "but as to this game—"

"What news from Novorecife?" said Qám.

"What are the Earthmen up to now?" said Farrá.

"Is it true they're all of one sex?"

"Be ye married?"

"Has the Dasht had any more woman trouble?"

"What's this about Hasté's niece at Rosid?"

"What do you do for a living?"

"Do ye like to hunt?"

"Are you related to any of the folk at Ruz?"

"What do ye think the weather'll be tomorrow?"

Hasselborg parried or evaded the questions as best he could, until the sight of the landlord with a wooden platter afforded him relief. The relief proved short, however, for the ambar turned out to be some sort of arthropod, something like a gigantic cockroach the size of a lobster, half buried under other ambiguous objects and an oily sauce that had been poured over all. His appetite, ravenous a minute before, collapsed like a punctured balloon.

Evidently the local people ate the thing without qualms, and with these jayhawkers staring at him he'd have to do likewise. He gingerly broke off one of the creature's legs and at-

tacked it with one of the little eating spears. He finally gouged out a pale gob of muscle, braced himself, and inserted the meat into his mouth. Not quite nasty; neither was it good. In fact it had little taste, so the general effect was like chewing on a piece of old rubber tubing. He sighed and settled down to a dismal meal. Though he'd had to eat strange things in the course of his career, Victor Hasselborg remained in his tastes a conservative North American with a preference for steaks and pies.

The innkeeper had meanwhile set down a dish full of what looked like spaghetti and a mug of colorless liquid. The liquid proved both hot and alcoholic. Hasselborg's conditioned revulsion almost brought up his gorge, but he steeled himself and gulped.

The "spaghetti" was the worst trial, proving to be a mass of white worms which wriggled when poked. Nobody at Novorecife had asked him to eat a dish of live worms with chopsticks. Cursing Yussuf Batruni and his addleheaded daughter under his breath, he wound up half a dozen of the creatures in a bunch on the sticks. However, when he raised them toward his mouth, they slipped back into the dish.

Luckily Qám and Farrá were arguing some point of astrology and failed to notice. The former, Hasselborg observed, also had a dish of worms, now reduced to a few survivors who twitched pathetically from time to time. Hasselborg concentrated on the insect and its accessories, gloomily thinking of the billions of bacteria he was forcing into his system. He watched as Qám picked up his dish and shoveled the rest of the worms into his mouth. Hasselborg followed suit, only mildly comforted by the knowledge that the germs of one planet seldom found an organism from another a congenial host. Outside, the rain hissed on the flat roofs.

When the main course was over, the innkeeper set a big yellow fruit before him. Not bad, he thought.

He wiped his mouth and asked: "Did either of you see a man who went through here toward Rosid about ten ten-nights ago?"

"No," said Qám. "I wasn't here. What sort of man?"

"About my height, but less heavy, with a dark-skinned girl. They looked like this." Hasselborg brought the pencil drawings out of his wallet.

"No, nor I either," said Farrá. "Asteratun, have ye seen such people?"

"Not I," said the innkeeper. "Somebody run off with your girl, Master Kavir? Eh?"

"My money," corrected Hasselborg. "I paint for a living, and this rascal took a portrait I'd made of him and went away without paying. If I catch him . . ." Hasselborg slapped the hilt of his rapier in what he hoped was the correct swashbuckling manner.

The others giggled. Qám said: "And you're heading for the Rosid to paint more pictures in hope you'll be paid this time?"

"That's the general idea. I have introductions."

Farrá, scratching his bare midriff, said: "I hope ye've better luck than that troubadour fellow last year."

"What was that?"

"Oh, the Dasht became convinced the man was a spy from Mikardand. No reason, understand; only that our good Jám mortally fears spies and assassins. So, ye see, the poor lute-plucker ended up by being eaten at the gámes."

Hasselborg gulped, his mind racing. There had been something in his indoctrination about the public spectacles run on the old Roman model by certain Krishnan nations.

He drank the rest of the liquor, which was making his head buzz. He'd better locate a good lawyer in Rosid before he began snooping. Of course, he was a lawyer too, but not in Krishnan law. And a lawyer might not be of much avail in a land where a feudal lord had what in European medieval law was called the high justice, and could have a person killed on his say-so.

"Excuse me," he said, pushing his stool back. "After a day's ride . . ."

"Certainly, certainly, good sir," said Qám. "Will you be back for supper?"

"I don't think so."

"Then I hope you leave not too early in the morning, for I should like to ask you more questions of far places."

"We'll see," said Hasselborg. "The stars give you a good night."

"Oh, Master Kavir," said Farrá, "Asteratun has given us the second bed to the right at the head of the stair. Take the middle, and Qám and I will creep in on the sides later. We'll try not to rouse ye."

Hasselborg almost jumped out of his skin as he digested this information. Whatever was making Farrá scratch, the thought of spending a night in the same bed with him filled the investigator with horror. He took Asteratun aside, saying:

"Look here, chum, I paid for a bed, not a third of a bed."

The innkeeper began to protest, but by a lengthy argument a claim of insomnia, and an extra quarter-kard Hasselborg got a bed to himself.

Next morning Hasselborg, not yet used to the slower rotation of this world, was up long before his fellow guests. Breakfast consisted of flat doughy cakes and bits of something that appeared to be meat—organs from an organism, no doubt. He washed down a handful of pills, wrapped himself in his cloak, and sallied forth into the drizzle. Faroun looked hurt at being hitched up and driven forth into the rain, and kept peering back at Hasselborg with an indignant expression: Finally, he balked and had to be stung with the buggy whip to be kept moving.

In thinking over the evening's conversation, it struck Hasselborg that Qām's questions had been unnecessarily pointed, as if designed to unmask one who was not what he seemed. Hasselborg wondered if the lamented troubadour, too, had had a letter of introduction.

That reflection started another train of thought: How about those quotations from Shakespeare with which Góis liked to show off his culture? Wasn't there a place in *Hamlet* where somebody gave somebody else a letter of introduction that actually contained instructions to kill the bearer forthwith?

Hasselborg suddenly wanted earnestly to know what was in that carefully sealed letter to the Dasht of Ruz. When he reached Rosid, he thought.

The drizzle stopped and from time to time the sun threw a yellow beam down from between great bulks of cloud. Hasselborg rolled a grimly appreciative eye at them. Whatever fate awaited him, at least he might this time avoid catching his death of cold.

He drove hard to make his destination in plenty of time and find himself a safe roost. About noon Krishnan time he pulled up, dismounted, hitched his animal to a bush, and sat on a convenient boulder. As he ate the lunch Asteratun's cook had put up for him he swept his eyes over the gently rolling terrain with its shrubby vegetation. Small flying things buzzed around him, and a creeping thing, something like a land crab, scuttled past his feet. A group of six-legged animals fed on the crown of a distant rise.

He was seeing Alexandra's face in the clouds when the faint drumming of animal feet brought his attention back to his surroundings. A pair of riders on four-legged camel-like beasts

were approaching. There was a jingle of armor, and he could see slender lances held upright like radio antennae.

With a flash of alarm he hitched his sword and his dagger around to where he could get at them quickly, though he feared that against two armored men a tyro like himself would have no chance to buckle a wash. True, the look of the men suggested soldiers rather than bandits, but in a country like this the line might be hard to draw.

Hasselborg saw with displeasure that they were going to rein up. Their armor was a composite of plate and chain suggesting a slightly Moorish effect: chain mail over the joints connecting squares and cylinders of plate. As one of the men stopped and signalled his mount to kneel, Hasselborg said:

"Good day to you, sirs; may the stars protect you. I'm Kavir bad-Ma'lum."

The man who had dismounted exchanged a brief glance with his companion and advanced towards Hasselborg, saying: "Is that so? What's your rank?"

"I'm an artist."

The man turned his head and looked over his shoulder and said: "He says he's an artist." He turned back to Hasselborg. "A commoner, eh?"

"Yes." Hasselborg regretted the word as soon as he spoke it. If these birds were going to turn nasty, he should have claimed the rank of *garm* (knight) or better.

"A commoner," said the man afoot to his companion. "A fair aya you have."

"Glad you like him."

Although the man smiled, as nearly as Hasselborg could interpret Krishnan expressions the smile was predatory rather than friendly. Sure enough the man's next words were: "We do indeed. Give him to us."

"What?" Hasselborg instinctively reached for his shoulder holster before remembering that his beloved Webley & Scott was not with him.

"Surely," continued the man. "Also your sword and those rings and any money you have. You're fortunate that we let you keep your garments."

"Forget not the carriage," said the mounted man. "He looks strong; he can pull it himself, ha-ha!"

"I'll do nothing of the sort," said Hasselborg. "Who are you two, anyway?"

"Troops of the Dasht's highway patrol. Come now, make us no trouble, or we'll arrest you as a spy."

The mounted man said: "Or slay you for resisting arrest."

Hasselborg thought that even if he gave up his goods, they might kill him anyway to prevent complaints. A firm line might be equally risky, but he had no alternative. "I wouldn't if I were you. I have an introduction to the Dasht from an important Terran and if I disappeared there'd be a terrible howl."

"Let's see it," said the dismounted soldier.

Hasselborg drew the letter out of his wallet and held it up for the soldier's inspection. The latter put out a hand to take it, but Hasselborg jerked it back, saying: "The address is enough. What do you want the letter for?"

"To open, fool!"

Hasselborg shook his head as he put the letter away. "The Dasht likes his letters untampered with, chum."

"Slay him," said the mounted trooper. "He tries to fool us with talk."

"A good thought," said the man afoot. "Spear him if he tries to run, Kaikovar." And the trooper drew sword and dagger and hurled himself upon Hasselborg.

Tumbling backward to get out of range of the wicked blades, Hasselborg got his own sword out just in time to parry a slash. *Clang! Clang!* So far so good, though the trooper addressed as Kaikovar was guiding his shomal off the road and around toward Hasselborg's rear.

The dismounted man, finding that Hasselborg could stop his crude swings, changed tactics. He stalked forward, blade out horizontally; then suddenly he caught Hasselborg's sword in a *prise* and whipped it out of his grasp. Out shot the blade again; the soldier's legs worked like steel springs as he hopped forward and threw himself into a lunge. The point struck Hasselborg full in the chest, just over the heart.

IV

HASSELBORG thought he was a dead man, until he realized that his hidden mail shirt had stopped the point, and that his foe's blade was bent up into an arc. Then his highly educated reflexes came to his rescue. He braced himself and pushed back against the push of the sword, wrapped his left arm around the blade, and heaved upward. The soldier's sword flew out of his hand, to turning over and over in the air as it fell.

The soldier's mounted companion shouted: "Ao!" but Hasselborg had no time to devote to him. His right hand had been seeking a pocket. As he stepped forward, the dagger in his

opponent's left shot out to meet him. But even faster Hasselborg's own left seized the fellow's wrist and jerked it forward and to the side, so that the soldier took a step that brought him almost body to body.

Then Hasselborg's right hand came out of his jacket pocket with the knuckle-duster. A right hook to the jaw landed with a meaty sound, and the soldier's knees buckled. After another punch Hasselborg dropped the brass knucks and snatched his own dagger, forgotten till now.

A blow from behind knocked him to his knees over the body of the soldier. That damned lance! He rolled over, dragging the feebly struggling soldier on top of him, and found the man's neck with the point of the dagger.

The shomal was mincing around as its rider tried to get into position for another lance thrust. This he found difficult now that Hasselborg was using his companion for a shield. Hasselborg yelled:

"Lay off, or I'll slit your pal's throat!"

"Gluck," said the soldier. "He's killing me!"

Kaikovar pulled back a pace. Hasselborg got to his knees again, still holding the dagger ready.

"Now what'll I do with you?" he said.

The soldier replied: "Slay me, I suppose, since you dare not let me go."

"I can't." He was thinking of a scheme which, though corny, might work on the naïve Krishnans.

"Why not?" The soldier's lugubrious expression and tone brightened at once.

"Because you're the man."

"What do you mean?"

"My astrologer told me I'd get into a fight with a guy like you, whose death horoscope was the same as mine. When were you born?"

"Fourth day, eleventh month of the fifty-sixth year of the reign of King Ghojasvant."

"You're it, all right. I can't kill you because that'd mean my own death on the same day, and conversely."

"Mean you that if I slay you I doom myself to death on the same day?" asked the man gravely.

"Exactly. So we'd better call it off; follow me?"

"Right you are, Master Kavar. Let me up."

Hasselborg released him and quickly recovered his own weapons lest the soldiers start more trouble. However, his vic-

tim pulled himself up with effort, tenderly rubbing the places where he had been struck.

"You all but broke my jaw with that brass thing," he grumbled. "Let me look at it. Ah, a useful little device. See, Kaiko-var?"

"I see," said the other soldier. "Had we known you wore mail under that coat, Master Kavir, we'd have not wasted our thrusts upon it. It was hardly fair of you."

Hasselborg said: "It's just as well, though, isn't it? Looks as though we'd have to be friends whether we want to or not, because of that horoscope."

The dismounted soldier said: "That I'll concede, as the unha said to the yeki in the fable." He sheathed his weapons and walked unsteadily to his kneeling shomal. "If we let you go with your goods, you'll make no mention of our little scrap?"

"Of course not. And likewise if I hear you're in trouble, I'll have to try to help you out—what's your name, by the way?"

"Garmsel bad-Manyao. Hear this: It was reported that you were asking questions at Asteratun's Inn last night: a rash deed in Ruz, though with that letter I suppose you're in order." He turned to his companion. "Let's be off; this place is ill-starred for us."

"The gods give you a good journey!" said Hasselborg cheerfully. They growled something hardly audible and trotted away.

No doubt Qám had reported him to these birds, Hasselborg thought as he watched them grow small in the distance. This local spy-mania would complicate matters. If questions were dangerous *ipso facto*, he couldn't walk in on the local shamus for a cozy chat as to the whereabouts of Fallon and his paramour.

He finished his lunch, the excitement of his recent encounter subsiding as he pondered his next move. Then he resumed his ride, still thinking. To do a good job, he reflected, he should have a tum-tum tree, but Krishna seemed to lack them.

Hours later, as he approached Rosid, men could be seen working in the cultivated strips. He also passed side roads and more traffic: people walking or riding and driving the remarkable assortment of saddle and draft animals domesticated on Krishna. Some of these beasts pulled carriages of ingenious or even fantastic design.

The sun was nearing the horizon in one of the marvelous Krishnan sunsets when the sight of a row of gallows trees, complete with corpses, told Hasselborg he was entering the out-

skirts of the city. In the distance the sun touched the onion-shaped domes of the city proper with orange and red.

Hasselborg spotted another house, bigger than the suburban bungalows, with an animal skull over the door.

This time the innkeeper proved a silent fellow who made no effort to introduce Hasselborg to his other guests. These guests huddled in small groups and talked in low tones, leading Hasselborg to suspect that he'd stumbled upon a place frequented by questionable characters. That bulky fellow in the corner with the horn-rimmed glasses, for instance, might be another innocent passerby; or again he might be a plainclothes cop keeping an eye on Rosid's underworld . . .

Hasselborg got a wall seat. He was sitting alone eating a palatable, if still mysterious, meal when a young man who had been idling at the bar came over and said pleasantly: "I am Sarhad; the stars give you luck. You're new here, I think?"

"Yes," said Hasselborg.

"Do you mind?" The youth seated himself beside Hasselborg before the latter could reply. "Some of our old-timers wax tiresome when they drink. Now me, I know when I've had enough; too much spoils your hand in my trade. Foul weather we've had, don't you think? Have you seen old sourpuss's daughter? Some piece, and they do say she's even hotter in . . ."

He rattled on like that until the hot piece herself brought his dinner. Since she was the first Krishnan female he'd had a chance to scrutinize from close range, Hasselborg took a good look. The girl was pretty in a wide-cheeked, snub-nosed, pointed-eared way. Her costume, what there was of it, showed the exaggerated physical proportions that Earthly artists depicted on girl calendars. Hasselborg wondered idly whether the artists had first gotten the idea from photographs of Krishnan women. The Krishnans were obviously mammals even if they did lay eggs.

Sarhad dropped a chopstick. "A thousand apologies, master," he said, squirming around and bending to pick it up.

Something aroused Hasselborg's ever-lively suspicions, and he slid his right hand towards his dagger. A glance showed that Sarhad, while fumbling for his eating spear with one hand, was busily exploring Hasselborg's wallet with the other.

Hasselborg grabbed Sarhad's right arm with his left hand, whipped out his dagger with his right, and dug the point into the young man's lower ribs.

"Bring your hand out empty," he said softly. "Let me see it."

Sarhad straightened up and looked at him, his mouth opening and closing like that of a goldfish whose water needs changing. He looked as if he were thinking he ought to say something but did not know quite what. Then his left hand moved like a striking snake and drove the point of a small knife into Hasselborg's side, where the mail shirt stopped it.

Hasselborg pushed his own dagger until Sarhad said: "*Ohé! I bleed!*"

"Then drop your knife."

Hasselborg heard it fall, felt for it with his foot, and kicked it away. All this had happened so quietly and quickly that nobody else appeared to have noticed.

"Now, young master," said Hasselborg quietly, "we're going to have a little talk."

"Oh, no we're not! If I yell, they'll be all over you."

Hasselborg shook his head and said: "I think not. Dips operate alone, so you have no gang; and you'd be dead before they could interfere and so would get no satisfaction from my demise. Finally, the brotherhood of criminals considers it an unfair business practice to commit a crime in a hideout like this for fear of bringing danger upon all. Do you follow me?"

The youth's naturally greenish complexion became even more so. "How do you know so much? You don't look like one of the fellowship."

"I've been places. Keep your voice down and keep smiling." Hasselborg emphasized the point with a dig of the dagger. "This inn caters to the brotherhood, doesn't it?"

"Surely, all men know that."

"Are there others in Rosid?"

"It's true. The big robbers frequent the Blue Bishtar, the spies collect at Douletai's, and the perverts at the Bampusht. While if you'd have an orgy of the *rámandu* drug, or crave to feast on the flesh of men, try the Ye'mazd."

"Thanks, but I'm not that hungry yet. Now, I want to know about local police methods—"

"*Yá!* So the haughty stranger has a game—"

"Never mind that; I'm asking the questions! Who's the chief of police?"

"I don't understand—*ao!* Don't prick me! I'll answer. I suppose you'd wish the commandant of the city guard."

"Is that part of the army?"

"But of course, what do you think? Or else the captain of the night watch. They've just elected a new one, Master Makaran the goldsmith."

"Hm. Is there any central office where they keep records of your colleagues and other matters having to do with the law?"

"I suppose the archives of the city court—"

"No, not records of trials. I mean a file of records of individuals—with a picture and description of each one, a list of his arrests, and the like."

"I've never heard of anything like that!" cried Sarhad. "Do they do this at the place you're from? It must be a terrible place. Not even Maibud, god of thieves, could make an honest living, let alone a poor mortal cutpurse. How do they manage?"

"They get along. Now, where can I buy some artists' supplies?"

The youth pondered. "Oho, so you're one of those who falsify copies of old pictures? I've heard of such; fascinating work it must be. You'd not like an assistant, would you?"

"No. Where—"

"Well, let me see. . . Keep along Novorecife Pike until you pass through the city wall, then continue for two blocks to the public comfort station, then turn right for one block, then left for half a block, and you'll see the place on the left. The street's called Lejeu Lane. I don't remember the name of the shop, but you can tell it by the—you know, one of those things painters hold in one hand while they mix their hues on it—over the door."

Hasselborg said: "I suppose you could enjoy your meal better without my dagger pricking your skin. If I put it away will you be a good boy?"

"But surely, master. I'll do anything you command. Are you absolutely sure you crave no partner? I can show you your way about here, as Sivandi showed Lord Zerré through the maze in the story. . ."

"Not yet," said Hasselborg, who thought he could trust Sarhad about as far as he could knock him with a feather. He ate with his left hand, keeping his right ready for trouble.

When he finished, he hitched his wallet around and said: "Has anybody around here heard of another stranger from Novorecife coming this way about ten-days ago? A man about my height. . ." He went into his description and produced the sketches.

"No," said Sarhad, "I've seen none like that. I could ask around though I doubt it will help, because I keep close track of new arrivals myself. I make the rounds of the inns, and watch by the city gates like an aqebat watching a hole,

and keep myself generally informed. Little goes on in this city that Master Sarhad doesn't know of, I can tell you. . ."

Hasselborg let him chatter until he finished. Then, rising, he said: "Better get that scratch taken care of, chum, or you'll get infected."

"Infected? *Äö!*" Sarhad for the first time noticed the dark-red stain on his jacket. "The cut's nothing, but how about paying me for my coat? Brand new. Only the second wearing; just got it from Rosid's finest tailor—"

"Stow it; that's only a fair return. The stars give you pleasant dreams!"

Next morning Hasselborg, not trusting these great clumsy locks, checked his belongings to make sure nothing had been stolen. Then he set out afoot. The city gate was decorated with heads stuck on spikes in what Hasselborg considered questionable taste. A couple of spearmen halted him, and let him through after he had waved his letter to the Dasht and signed a large register.

He strolled through the city, taking in the sights, sounds, and smells—though the last could not very well be avoided, and caused him to worry about picking up an infection. He was almost run down by a Krishnan boy on a scooter, and then had to jump to avoid a collision with a portly man in the robe, chain, and nose mask of a physician, whizzing along on the same kind of vehicle.

At the artists' shop he asked for some quick-drying plaster (he meant plaster of Paris, but didn't know the Gozashtandou for it) and some sealing wax. With these purchases he returned to his hotel, signing out again at the gate. The calendar girl, having let herself in with a passkey, was doing his room. She gave him a good-morning and a smile that implied she'd be amenable to further suggestions. Hasselborg, knowing that there were limits beyond which it would be useless to try his disguise, merely gave her the cold eye until she departed in a marked manner.

When alone, he put on his glasses, lit his candle, and got out his bachelor sewing kit and his little Gozashtandou-Portuguese dictionary. With the plaster he made molds of the three big waxen seals on his letter to the Dasht. Then he broke open the seals, carefully so as not to tear the stiff glossy paper. He detached the fragments of the seals from the ribbon that wrapped the letter by heating the needle from his kit in the candle flame and prying the wax loose from the silk.

He held the letter towards the light from the little window and frowned in concentration. When he had puzzled out the Pitman-like fishhooks of the writing, he saw that it read:

Julio Góis to the Lord Jam, Dasht of Ruz:

I trust that my lord's stars are propitious. The bearer is a spy from Mikardand who means you nought but ill. Treat him even as he deserves. Accept, lord, assurances of my faithful respect.

V

HASSELBORG, reading the letter through again, did a slow burn and suppressed an impulse to crumple the letter and throw it across the room. That dirty little. . . Then his sense of humor came to his rescue. Hadn't he been up against this sort of thing often enough not to let it get his goat, or whatever they had in lieu of goats on Krishna?

So, Góis *had* been getting ideas from Hamlet! Hasselborg shuddered to think of what might have happened if he'd handed the letter to the Dasht without reading it first.

What now? Gallop back to Novorecife to denounce Góis? No, wait. What had possessed Góis to do such a thing? The man had seemed to like him, and he didn't think Góis was off his wave length. It must be that Hasselborg's presence on Krishna threatened Góis's interests; just how this was so would become clear in due course. If Góis were involved in some racket or conspiracy, his superiors like the pompous Abreu might be also involved. In any case these Brazzies, while good fellows for the most part, would stick together against a mere *Americano do Norte*.

Could he forge a new letter? It would take a bit of doing, especially since he was not sure that his written Gozashtandou would fool a bright native. By consulting his dictionary, however, and experimenting with a pencil eraser, he found that he could erase the words for "spy" and "ill" and substitute "artist" and "good" for them. He did so, folded the letter, and tied it up. Then with the candle he melted gobs of sealing wax onto the ribbon where it crossed itself. He used the plaster molds of the original seals to stamp new impressions on the wax that were perfect duplications of the old.

However, before he mounted his noble aya and galloped off in all directions, a little reflection was in order. Working with needle and thread on the cuts in his coat left by the affrays of the previous day, he pondered. Since Góis had tried

this treacherous trick, he'd probably also lied about the direction in which Fallon had gone. Since Hasselborg could neither be sure of the direction, nor return to Novorecife for more instructions, he'd have to do the job the hard way. He'd have to make a complete circuit of the Earthly outpost: rivers, mountains, bandit-infested swamps, and all. He would have to investigate the routes radiating out from Novorecife until he picked up the trail of the fugitives. Of course, if his circuit failed to find the trail, he'd have a good excuse to—stop it! he sternly told himself. This is a job.

Meanwhile he'd better try the Dasht, as he originally intended. There was the chance he might be able to pick up a lead at the court. Then a quick getaway with an introduction to some bigwig in Hershid. . .

A brisk, cool wind flapped the pennons on the spires of the onion domes of the palace and drove great fleets of little white clouds across the greenish sky. This green and white pattern was reflected in puddles around the palace gate. The wind also whipped Hasselborg's cloak as he stood talking to the sentry at the gate. The guard said:

"His high-and-mightiness will take your letter within, and in an hour he'll come back to tell ye to come round tomorrow to learn when the Dasht'll give ye an audience. Tomorrow he'll tell ye the schedule's not made up for the next ten-night, and to return next day. After more delays he'll tell ye to be here twenty days from now. So ye'll sit on your behind and drink and wench until your money's gone, and when the day arrives ye'll be told that at the last minute they gave your time to some more worshipful visitor, and ye'll have to begin over, like Qabuz in the story who was trying to climb the tree for the fruit and always slipped back just afore he reached it. I envy ye not."

Hasselborg jerked the strap of his wallet so that the coins inside jingled, saying: "D'you suppose a little of this might help, if you follow me?"

The sentry grinned. "Mayhap, so that ye know how to go about it. Otherwise ye'll lose your coin to no advantage. . ."

The guard shut his mouth as the black-clad major-domo waddled back to the gate, wheezing: "Come at once, good Master Kavir. The Dasht will see you forthwith."

Hasselborg grinned in his turn at the sight of the guard's drooping jaw and followed his guide across the courtyard and through the vast entrance. They passed Krishnans of both

sexes in bright clothes of extreme cut. The women wore gowns like those of ancient Crete on Earth. He followed the guide through a long series of halls dimly lit by lanterns held in wall brackets that looked like scaly dragon-like arms. Occasionally a page whizzed by on a scooter.

Hasselborg was beginning to wish for a bicycle when they halted at the entrance to a large official-looking room. At the far end he saw a man talking to another who sat on a raised seat: the Dasht, no doubt. The major-domo whispered to another functionary. Other men sat at desks along the walls or stood around as if for want of anything better to do.

The standing man bowed, put on his hat, and went over to one of the desks to talk to the man there. Then a drum rolled briefly, a horn went *blat*, and the functionary at the door cried:

"Master Kavir bad-Ma'lum, the distinguished artist!"

Who the hell ever said he was distinguished? thought Hasselborg. Maybe they were trained to do that to impress the yokels. During the long walk forward the figure of the Dasht grew larger and larger. Hasselborg realized that he was quite a big fellow, stretching in all directions. He had plump ruddy features and bulging green eyes behind thick-lensed spectacles; except for the glasses, he was altogether like the Krishnan version of a jolly medieval baron.

When Hasselborg reached the end of the line down the middle he doffed his hat, knelt, and cried: "I abase myself before Your Altitude!"

Evidently he'd done it right, for Jám bad-Koné said: "Rise, Master Kavir, and advance to kiss my hand. With the recommendation from my good friend Master Julio, all doors shall be open to you. What's your business to Rosid?"

Jám's hand was noticeably dirty, so that the thought of kissing the germ-infested object almost made Hasselborg puke. Still, he managed the ceremony without a visible tremor, saying:

"I have some small skill at portrait painting, may it please Your Altitude, and thought you or some of your court might like their pictures painted."

"Hm. Have you mastered the new Terran style?"

"I'm tolerably familiar with the methods of the Earthmen, Your Altitude."

"Good. I may have a commission for you. Meanwhile feel free to frequent the court. By the way, how's your hunting?"

"I— I've had but small experience. . ."

"Excellent! My gentlemen pine for amusement, and you shall attend my hunt on the morrow. If you're truly not good at it, so much the better; it will afford the rest of us some honest laughter. Be at the lodge an hour before sunrise. It's been a pleasure meeting you."

Hasselborg gave the formula and went slowly back until he came to the line that indicated that he could turn and walk out forwards. As he did so, the drummer gave five ruffles, and the bugler blew a toot after each. The doorman shouted:

"A message from His Supreme Awesomeness, the Dour of Gozashtand!"

Hasselborg stood aside to let the messenger by, then went in search of the Charon who had brought him in. He walked slowly, partly to appear at ease, and partly to watch the others to observe how they behaved. There was even a remote chance of stumbling upon Fallon and Julnar—at least he should keep his eyes open. . .

He got lost for a while, wandering from room to room. In one room a pair of bare-breasted women were playing Krishnan checkers; while other people kibitzed; in another, a group of Krishnans seemed to be rehearsing for a play. Finally Hasselborg entered a room where Krishnans were eating food from a buffet table. Cautiously, he tried some of the stuff, though the heavy perfume used by the Krishnans kept his appetite down.

"Try some of this," said his neighbor, a man in white satin. "You're the portrait painter, aren't you?"

"Why yes, sir, how did you know?"

"Gossip, gossip. My good sir, with neither war nor jury duty at the moment, how else can one occupy one's time?" Presently they were in friendly chit-chat about superficialities.

"I'm Ye'man," the Krishnan explained, as if everybody should know the patronymic and titles that went with his given name. "This ugly fellow on my right is Sir Archman bad-Gavveq, the glider champion. Don't paint him; he'll curdle your pigments, as the salt demons curdled the Maraghé Sea in the myth. You should hear Saqqiz read his poem on the theme; a masterpiece on the old epic style. . ."

When he could get a word in, Hasselborg asked: "Who's the lady in the transparent blue outfit with hair to match?"

"That? Why, that would be Fouri bab-Vazid, of course. You know, old Hasté's niece. Could you not tell by the Western hue of her hair? There are various stories of the whys and wherefores of her staying here; whether that she's enamoured

of our good Dasht, or promoting her uncle's cult, or spying for the Dour. . . But you'll hear all that in due course. You'll be in on the hunt? We should have a good fall, not like last time, when the field crossed the reach and the drum led porridge up the chimney. . ."

Since his companion's speech seemed to have become suddenly unintelligible, and since mention of hunting reminded him that he had preparations to make, Hasselborg excused himself and sought the exit. He found the major-domo in a kind of sentry box just inside the main entrance to the palace, whence he could keep an eye on the gate.

He said, "Thank you for your courtesy," and dropped a couple of silver karda into the man's hand. As the latter's expression implied that he'd guessed the size of the tip about right, he continued:

"I'd like to ask you some questions. The Dasht just invited me to go hunting tomorrow, and being new here and no hunter anyway I don't know how to go about it. What do I need, and where's this lodge, and what's he going to hunt?"

"You'll need a hunting suit, sir, which you can get any good tailor to make you, though he'll have to hasten. His Altitude will probably hunt yekis, since the pair he kept for games died but lately. As for the lodge. . ."

Hasselborg copied down the directions, thinking that to one who had hunted the most dangerous game, man, riding out and spearing some poor animal would seem pretty stupid. However, orders were orders.

At the appointed hour Hasselborg presented himself at the Dasht's hunting-lodge, ten hoda outside the city. The rest of the previous day he had spent buying himself a hunting outfit and a saddle and bridle for Faroun, and moving his gear to another and he hoped a more reputable inn within the walls.

The hunting suit he had obtained ready-made from the Rosido. This swank establishment had also tried to sell him a wagonload of other equipment: a short hunting-sword, a canteen, and so on—all of which he had refused. The suit was bad enough: an affair of shrieking yellow satiny material with indecently tight breeches that made Hasselborg feel as if he were made up to play the toreador in *Carmen*.

Hasselborg heard the racket in front of the lodge long before he reached that structure. The gentlemen were sitting on their ayas in the half-light, drinking mugs of kvad and all talking at once. It did Hasselborg little good to listen to them,

because he found that hunting enthusiasts used a vocabulary of their own, incomprehensible to outsiders.

Other characters ran about afoot in red suits; some were struggling with a pack of six-legged eshuna, the size of large dogs—but much uglier. Somebody pressed a mug of kvad upon Hasselborg, who downed half of it before he had to stop to keep from gagging. The Dasht, trotting past, shouted:

"I'll watch you, Master Painter! If you play not the man, I can always feed you to the yeki, ha ha ha!"

Hasselborg smiled dutifully. A group of servitors were wrestling with a great net and a set of poles that went with it; another pair was lugging out a rack in which were stuck a couple of dozen long lances. They must import timber for their bows and spears, thought Hasselborg; this country seemed to have few decent trees. As the workmen set up the rack in front of the lodge, the hunters began guiding their mounts past it to pick out lances. As Hasselborg snatched his, he heard the Dasht shouting behind him:

". . . and if I find some knave's slain our quarry without absolute necessity, I'll do to him what I did to Sir Daviran. . ."

Somebody blew a horn that sounded full of spit. The mass of men and animals pulled itself into formation and streamed out onto the road: eshuna and their handlers first, then hunters with their lances, then more servants with the net and other equipment like gongs and unlit torches.

The parade stretched itself out over a long piece of road, as the eshuna pulled away from the hunters and they from the slower assistants in the rear. Though the sun had not yet risen, it seemed to Hasselborg that he had been riding at a trot, his sword hanging against his left leg, for at least an hour.

"A good rally," said a vaguely familiar voice, and Ye'man, his smörgasbord acquaintance of the day before, pulled up alongside. "Let's hope the ball doesn't scramble in the beard."

"Yes, let's," said Hasselborg, not having the faintest notion what the man meant. The loud voices died away leaving only the drumming hooves, the rattle of equipment, and the occasional mewing of the eshuna up front. Hasselborg, whose riding muscles had never gotten properly hardened at Novorecife, found the whole enterprise very tiresome.

As the sun came up in the egregious glory of a Krishnan sunrise, the hunt left the road and headed up a shallow valley. Hasselborg, in his first taste of cross-country riding, found that he had to pay full attention to simply staying in his seat.

Seeing the bigger animals of his fellow hunters pulling ahead, he spurred his aya to an occasional canter.

On they went, up one gentle slope and down another, over cultivated fields (which wouldn't be of much use to their owners thereafter) and through brush. The hunt came to a low stone wall. Eshuna and aya flowed over it in graceful leaps—except Hasselborg's aya, which, having been trained for road work only, refused the jump, almost spilling its rider. As the rest of the party began to leave it behind, the animal galloped in a wide curve around the end of the wall and scurried to catch up. Hasselborg swore scorching Earthly oaths under his breath.

Next time he again had to detour around a fence which the rest jumped. This was getting more tiresome every minute, though no doubt his aya showed better sense than those that let themselves be forced to jump.

A horn blew raucous notes up front, and the eshuna gave a weird howl. Everybody broke into a run. Now Hasselborg found himself really falling behind. Another detour around a wall put him back among the servants.

At the next obstacle, he spurred his mount right at a fence, holding the reins tightly to keep the animal from turning. He let go at the last minute as he'd been taught. The aya hesitated, then jumped. While Hasselborg went up with it all right, he kept on rising after the beast had started down, with disastrous results. In his fall he caromed off its rump into the moss. For an instant he saw stars. Then the stars gave place to the bellies of the servants' aya, leaping the wall after him. They all looked as though they were coming right down on top of him with all six hooves. However, somehow he was missed.

Then as the universe stopped whirling he climbed to his feet. A sharp stone had bruised his fundament; he had bitten his tongue; his pants were burst open at the right knee; his sword belt had somehow gotten wound around his neck, and altogether he was not feeling his best.

The servants were disappearing over the next rise, and the notes of the horn and the weird howl of the eshuna died in the distance.

"Give me an automobile," he muttered, picking up his lance and limping toward his aya. Faroun, however, wanted a rest and a quiet graze. The animal stopped eating as Hasselborg approached, rolled an indignant eye, and trotted off.

"Come here, Faroun!" he said sternly. Faroun walked a little farther away.

"Come here, damn it!" he yelled. He was tempted to throw a stone at the perverse creature, but refrained for fear of driving it farther away.

He tried stalking. That did no good either, for the aya looked up between mouthfuls of moss and kept a safe distance between itself and its owner. Perhaps he'd just have to walk after the animal until it tired. He grimly plodded toward it. . .

A Krishnan hour later he was still at this forlorn pursuit, when something erupted out of a little bushy hollow with a frightful roar and charged. Hasselborg had just time to swing the point of his lance toward this menace before it swerved and leaped upon the truant Faroun. There was a crunch of neck bones, and the aya was down with the newcomer standing over it. From descriptions he had heard, Hasselborg recognized the animal as a yeki, the very beast they were after: a brown furry carnivore about the size of a tiger, but resembling an overgrown mink with an extra pair of legs to hold up its middle.

For a few seconds the yeki stood watching Hasselborg and making guttural noises, as if wondering whether to drag off the dead aya or to try to dispose of this other prey too. Then it slithered forward towards the man.

Hasselborg resisted the impulse to run, knowing that such a move would bring the beast on his back in a matter of seconds. He wished harder than ever for a gun. Since wishing failed to produce one, he gripped his lance in both hands and stepped towards the beast, shouting:

"Get the hell out of here!"

The yeki advanced another step, growling more loudly. Presently Hasselborg, still shouting, had the lance point in the creature's face. As he thought of trying for an eye, the yeki reared up on its four hind legs and batted at the point with its forepaws. Hasselborg sent a jab into one paw, and the beast jumped back a step roaring furiously.

Hasselborg followed it, keeping his spear ready. How long could he keep this up? There was little chance of his killing it single-handed. . .

Then the howl of the eshuna came across the downs. The hunt was flowing past behind a nearby rise. Hasselborg shouted: "Hey, I've got him!"

This was perhaps a debatable point, and in any case he did not seem to have been heard. He screamed:

"Over here! Yoicks, tally-ho, and all that sort of thing!"

Somebody swerved over the crest of the rise, and then in

no time many mounted men were pounding towards him. The yeki began to slink off, snarling right and left. The eshuna swarmed around the yeki, howling like banshees but not closing, while their quarry roared, and foamed and made little dashes at them.

Then the servants unfolded the net and four of them, still mounted, hoisted it by the corners on poles as if it were a canopy. They dashed forward and dropped the net over the yeki, who in another second was rolled up in it, chewing and clawing at the meshes in a frenzy of rage.

"Good work!" roared the Dasht, clapping Hasselborg on the back so hard as almost to knock him down. "We'll have our game now after all. Your mount dead? Take mine. *Äo*, you!" he shouted at a servitor. "Give Master Kavir your aya. You, Kavir, keep the beast with my compliments, for the manful part you've played."

Hasselborg was too conscious of his bruises to worry about how the servitor would get back to Rosid. He salvaged his saddle, mounted, and rode home with the rest, acknowledging their praises with smiles but saying little. When they got back to the road they passed a big bishtar wagon driven by men in Jám's livery; evidently the wagon was to bring home the captive.

The Dasht told him: "We're having an intimate supper this night; third hour after sunset. But a few friends—you know, people like Namaksari the actress and Chinishk the astrologist. Come and we'll talk of that portrait, will you?"

"I thank Your Altitude," said Hasselborg.

Back in Rosid he spent some time window shopping. Although he knew better than to load himself down with more chattels than he absolutely needed, the temptations of Batruni's unlimited expense account proved too great. He arrived back at his hotel bearing an umbrella with a curiously wrought handle, a small telescope, a map of the Gozashtando Empire, and an ugly little ivory god from some backward part of the planet. When he got home (after wasting another hour by getting lost in the crooked streets) he felt sticky and suspected himself of being stinky as well, not having had a bath since leaving Novorecife.

When he asked the landlord about baths, the latter referred him to a public bathhouse down the street. He went to have a look at the place, identified by a sea shell, big enough for a bathtub, over the door. He paid his way in, then found to his

dismay that the bath customs of Ruz were much like those of Japan. While as an ex-married man he had no inhibitions about soaking in mixed company, a close look at the male Krishnans convinced him that he'd never pass as one under those circumstances. For one thing, Krishnans had no navels. For another. . .

He returned to his inn and told the landlord: "Sorry, chum, but I just remembered: I'm under a religious penance not to bathe in public. Could you furnish me with a tub and some hot water in my room?"

The landlord scratched the roots of his antennae and reckoned he could.

Hasselborg added: "Also I'd like some—uh—" What was the word for soap? "Never mind; I'll tell you later." He climbed the stairs on aching feet to consult his dictionary in private, learning that there was no such word in Gozash-tandou. Evidently the stuff hadn't been invented. No wonder the Krishnans used perfume!

The scullery maids who arrived in a few minutes with tub, brush, and buckets of hot water showed an embarrassing interest in their guest's eccentricity; they wanted to scrub his back and had to be curtly dismissed. He'd have to depend upon a prolonged soak and a vigorous scrub to dislodge dirt and deadly germs. No more soapless expeditions to strange planets for him, even if he had to smuggle the stuff past the *Viagens'* vigilance!

As soon as the water had cooled to a bearable temperature, he lowered himself into it as far as he could go and settled back with a sigh of relief. Boy, that felt good on his poor beat-up feet! With a glance at the door to make sure the bolt was home, he burst into song. He had just gotten to the second verse when a loud knock interrupted him.

"Who's there?" he said.

"The Law! Open up!"

"Just a minute," he grumbled, getting out of his tub and trying to dry himself all over at once. What was he getting into now, in the name of Ahuramazda?

"Open right away or we'll break the door!"

Hasselborg groaned internally, wrapped the towel around himself and slid back the bolt. A man in black entered, followed by two others in official-looking armor. The first said: "You're arrested. Come."

VI

"WHAT FOR?" said Victor Hasselborg, looking as innocent as a plush teddy-bear.

"You shall learn. Here, drop that sword! You don't think we let prisoners go armed, do you?"

"But somebody might steal—"

"Fear not; we'll set the seal of the Dasht upon your door, so that if acquitted you'll find your gear intact. Not that you will be. Hasten, now."

The Dasht, thought Hasselborg, must somehow have found out about his alteration of that letter from Góis. He was given little time for reflection, though, for they bundled him out of the hotel and on to a led aya. Then they set off at breakneck speed through the city, yelling "*Byant-hao!*" to clear their way.

The jail, about a block from the ducal palace, looked like—a jail. The jailer proved to be a wrinkled individual with one antenna missing.

"How now?" cried this one. "The gentleman from Novorecife, I'll be bound! Ye'll wish one of our better chambers, won't ye? A fine view of Master Rau's counting house, and the rates no higher than in some of the more genteel inns, heh heh. What say ye, my fine lad?"

Hasselborg understood that he was being offered a cell to himself if he could pay for it, instead of being tossed in the general tank. He took the jailer up on his offer with only a slight haggle. While the jailer and the black-clad one fussed with papers, an assistant jailer led Hasselborg to his cell. This contained a chair, which was something to be grateful for, and being on the second story had fair lighting despite the smallness of the barred window. More importantly from Hasselborg's viewpoint, it seemed fairly clean, though he would still have given a lot to know whether the previous tenant had anything contagious.

He asked: "What's the head jailer's name?"

"Yeshram bad-Yeshram," replied the assistant jailer.

"Will you please tell him I should like to see him at his convenience?"

The jailer arrived with disconcerting promptness, saying: "Look ye, Master Kavar, I'm no monster joying in the sufferings of my wards, like the giant Damghan in the legend, nor yet a saintly philanthropist putting their welfare ahead of my own. If they can pay for extras to lighten their last hours, why, say I, why not let 'em have 'em? I had Lord Hardiqásp

in my personal charge for thirty ten-nights before they headed him, and before they took him away he said: 'Yeshram, ye've made my captivity almost a pleasure!' Think of it! So fear not that if ye treat Yeshram right, obey the rules, not try to escape, not form seditions with the other prisoners, and pay your way, ye'll have little to complain of, heh heh."

"I understand," said Hasselborg. "Right now I most want information. Why am I here at all?"

"That I don't know precisely, save that your indictment reads 'treason.'"

"When am I to have a hearing? Do they let you have lawyers?"

"Why, as for your hearing, know ye not that ye're to be tried this afternoon?"

"When? Where?"

"The trial will take place in the chambers of justice, as of always. As to the precise time I can't tell ye. Possibly the trial's beginning even now."

"You mean one doesn't attend one's own trial in Ruz?"

"Of course not, for what good would that do? Anything the prisoner said in his defense would be a lie, so why ask him?"

"Well then, when the trial's over, can you find out what happened?"

"For a consideration I can."

Left alone, Hasselborg wondered whether to unmask himself as an Earthman. They'd be at least a little more careful how they treated him. Or would they? At Novorecife he had been specifically warned not to count on any interplanetary prestige. Since the Interplanetary Council had ordered a policy of strict non-imperialism and non-interference in Krishnan affairs, the native states did pretty much as they pleased to the Terrans in their midst. Sometimes they pleased to treat them with honor, and at other times they looked upon them as legitimate prey. When people protested some particularly atrocious outrage upon a visiting Earthman, the I. C. blandly replied that nobody had compelled said Englishman to come to Krishna.

Moreover, undue revelation might jeopardize the success of Hasselborg's mission. He decided to stick to his role of Krishnan artist for the time being, at least until all its possibilities had been exhausted.

The jailer reported back: "It seems ye came here with a letter from an Earthman at Novorecife, saying ye are an

artist or something. Well, now, that would have been all right, only this morning, while ye were out hunting with the Dasht, who comes in but a messenger from this same Terran, with another letter. This letter would be about some other matter, some different thing entirely, ye see, but at the end of it the Earthman puts in one little sentence, something like: 'Has that Mikardando spy I sent on to ye with a letter of introduction arrived yet, and if so what have ye done with him?' That makes the Dasht suspicious, the gods blind me if it don't, and he takes the original letter—the one ye brought—and looks it over carefully, and sees where it looks like some knave's rubbed out part of the writing and put in some new words over the old. Tsk, tsk, ye spies must think our Dasht a true simpleton."

"What happened at the trial?" said Hasselborg.

"Oh, now, the Dasht presented his evidence, and the lawyer for the defense said he could find nothing to be said in your favor, no indeed he couldn't, so the court sentenced ye to be eaten in the game, day after tomorrow."

"You mean they're going to stick me in an arena with that yeki I helped catch?"

"Surely, surely, and great joke the Dasht thought it, heh, heh. Not that I have anything against ye, Master Kavir, but it does seem like the gods are taking a hand to blow up a man with his own firework, now don't it? But don't take it too hard, lad, all must go when their candle's burnt down. I'm truly sorry to lose so fine a guest so soon, however; truly sorry."

Hasselborg said: "Never mind that. What happens at this game?"

"A parade, and fireworks, and a show at the stadium: races afoot and mounted, boxing and wrestling, you being eaten, and finally a battle between some tailed Koloftuma and some of our own condemned criminals with real weapons. That'll be an event worth waiting for; too bad ye'll not be there to see it!"

Though not a vain man, Hasselborg felt a slight pique at not being deemed good enough for the main attraction. "What's this game in celebration of?"

"Oh, now, some astrological conjunction; I misremember which. They come along every few ten-nights—that is, the well-omened ones do, if ye believe in that star-gazing foolishness—and the apprentices quit work to riot in the streets and the Dasht stages a big party for his court with a circus for the common folk."

"Do I fight this critter with weapons?"

"Oh, my honor, no! Ye might hurt the beast or even slay it. Time was when the victim was given a wooden pretend sword for the amusement of the people, but one of them—an Earther it was, too—hurt the eye of the favorite yeki of the Dasht, so he ordered that thereafter they should be sent in with nothing in their hands, heh heh. It's quite a sight; blood all over the place."

Hasselborg leaned forward intently. "Did you say an Earthman was eaten at one of these celebrations?"

"Aye, to be sure he was. What's so singular about that? It's true it's been said in Ruz that the Dasht ought to give special consideration to the Earthmen, because it's rumored that they have weapons of such might that one of their fireworks would blot Rosid off the face of the planet. But the Dasht will have none of it, saying, so long as he's Dasht of Ruz he'll see that justice is administered in the good old Ruzo way: nobles to have precedence over commoners, commoners over foreigners, and all over slaves. That way everyone knows where he stands and what he faces. Start making exceptions, and where's justice? For isn't consistency the essence of justice? Though I am no doctor of laws, I think he's right. Don't you agree?"

Hasselborg looked at the ceiling in thought. Evidently the fact of his being an Earthman, if made known, might prove more a liability than an asset. "Yeshram, what would you do if you had—let's say a half-million karda?"

"*Ohé!* Do you think you can fool me, Master Kavar? Ye've no such sum on your person, for we looked into that when ye came here. That's a Dasht's ransom. Let's talk sense, lad, for the little time ye have left."

"I'm serious. What would you do?"

"Truly I don't know. Quit this dirty post, surely. Buy up some estates and have a try at being a gentleman. Perhaps even get my eldest male-chick knighted in time. I don't know. There's hardly a limit to what one could do with so vast a sum. But don't tantalize me or I'll take it ill."

"Even if I don't have that much on me, I might be able to get hold of it."

"So? Don't tell me that besides being a spy and a picture painter, ye're a spinner of fine tales of fire-breathing dragons and invisible castles to boot?"

"No, this is no romance. I've got a letter of credit on deposit at Novorecife that's worth that amount, and if somebody

could get me out of here I'd naturally be willing to pay liberally."

Now the jailer was thoughtful. "But how could I get this money? How can I be sure it's there to be had?"

"You'd have to send somebody to fetch it. Let me see—I know who'd be glad to go: a trooper of the highway patrol named Garmsel bad-Manyao. If you can get word to him he'll ride day and night to Novorecife with a draft from me on that letter."

The jailer made the negative head motion. "I see difficulties, lad. We'd have to fake a delivery, ye see, and that means letting more people into the scheme and paying them off. Then, too, no matter how fast this soldier friend of yours rode, he couldn't make Novorecife and back by the time you were down the yeki's gullet. Moreover, if ye didn't appear for the games the Dasht would have my head for it, or at least my post. No, I couldn't chance it, especially I couldn't chance it before I had the money in hand. Once I had it in hand, of course, I'd defy anyone but the Dasht himself."

After they had brooded in silence a while, the jailer resumed: "Perhaps I can get ye through the games alive, despite all. Yeshram has a scheme. If ye'll give me the draft now, I'll do my best, and if I fail ye'll have no use for gold anyway, will ye now?"

Hasselborg, disinclined to trust the jailer so far, countered: "Tell you what. I'll write you a draft for a quarter-million karda now, and another quarter-million when I get out."

"But how do I know ye'll pay me the second half, once ye're free and fleeing with the eshuna baying on your track?"

"How do I know you'll get me out once you get your hands on the first instalment? Wouldn't you be happier with me inside the yeki and so unable to expose our little deal? Not that I distrust you, Master Yeshram, but you see how it is. You trust me, I trust you. Whereas if we fail to agree and I get eaten, you'll have nothing but what I've got on me, which won't set you up in any baronial splendor."

They haggled for an hour before Hasselborg won his points. Yeshram, for instance, wanted a half-million net, while Hasselborg insisted on a half-million gross, out of which Yeshram would have to pay such other bribes as proved necessary.

Finally Hasselborg wrote his draft, saying: "What's this scheme of yours?"

"I'd rather not tell ye, since a secret known to many is no secret at all, as it says in the Proverbs of Nehavend. How-

ever, face the beast boldly and ye'll find him possibly less inclined to devour ye than is usual for him."

Then Hasselborg had the excruciating experience of waiting for two Krishnan days and nights until the time neared for his execution. He tried to read a textbook on Gozashtando law which Yeshram furnished him, but found it tough going: the law here was mostly precedent, and Hasselborg was not yet fluent enough in the written language to read it with any ease. He paced, smoked, ate little, and spent half-hours gazing sentimentally at Alexandra's tiny handkerchief.

He also kept sending the assistant jailer out to ask if there were any news from Trooper Garmsel yet. He knew there wouldn't be, but couldn't help hoping for a miracle. He got some small comfort out of the fact that he had exercised enough self-control to strike this bargain with Yeshram for less than half the total amount of his letter of credit. There had been a time, when Yeshram was hesitating, when he'd been strongly tempted to throw the entire amount at the jailer, though he knew that would be money wasted.

The second afternoon after his arrival, Yeshram came in, saying: "Are ye ready? Courage, my master, and ye may yet live to tumble your girl in the moss. No, no, for the hundredth time, no news. Garmsel would need a glider towed by trained aqebats, like Prince Burujird in the legend, to have gotten back by now. Why are ye shaking so? I run a risk like yours, don't I?"

Hasselborg was loaded into a kind of cage on wheels; then he was driven across the city to the stadium. Armed men let him out and led him to a room under the tiers of seats. The men watched him silently while noises of the entertainments filtered in from outside. One said to the others:

"The crowd's in a bad mood today."

"A dull performance," said the other man. "They do say the Dasht has been too much wrapped up in his love life to put the care he should upon the events."

Then silence again. Hasselborg lit a Krishnan cigar and offered one to each of his guards, who took them with a grunt of thanks.

More waiting. At last a man stuck his head in the door and said: "Time!"

The guards nodded to Hasselborg, one saying: "Leave your jacket here. Stand up and let us search you." After a last-

minute frisk they led him into one of the tunnels connecting the dressing rooms with the arena.

At the end of the tunnel was a heavy gate of criss-crossed iron bars. A man creaked it open and Hasselborg looked back. The guards had a tight grip on their halberds in case he should get any ideas about bolting.

Hasselborg, seeing no alternative, stuck his thumbs into his belt and strolled out into the arena with elaborate unconcern. The place reminded him of some of the bowls he'd played football in years before as a college undergraduate; he'd played fullback. However this arena was a bit too small for football, more like a bull ring than a North American athletic theater. The seats pitched down at a steep angle and the floor was sunk a good twenty feet below the lowest tier of seats so that there would be no question of a mighty leap into the audience. In front of the first row of seats, guards placed a catwalk. Could he somehow get one of those halberds and do a pole vault up to the catwalk? Not likely, especially for one who, while something of an athlete in his day, had never practiced pole vaulting.

The sky was overcast, and a dank wind whipped the pennons on the flagpoles around the upper edge of the stadium. Wrapped in his cloak the Dasht sat in his box. He was too high up for his expression to be seen.

As the gate clanged shut behind Hasselborg, he saw a door on the far side of the arena open and his friend the yeki issue from another tunnel.

The people in the stands gave a subdued roar. Hasselborg, facing this particular jabberwock without any vorpal sword, stood perfectly still. If Yeshram had had a bright idea, let it work now!

The yeki padded slowly forward, then stopped and looked about. It looked at Hasselborg; it looked at the people packed in the seats above the surrounding wall. It grumbled, walked a few paces in a circle, flopped down on the sand, yawned, and closed its eyes.

Hasselborg stood still. The audience began to get noisy, louder and louder. Hasselborg could catch occasional phrases, the rough Gozashtandou, equivalent of "Kill dose bums!" Objects began to whizz down into the arena: a jug, a seat cushion.

Here a couple of Gozashtanduma were punching each other; there another was throwing vegetables in the direction of the Dasht's box; there some more were pushing one of the

guards off the catwalk. The guard landed in the sand with a jangle, got up with an agility astonishing for one burdened with full armor, and ran for the nearest exit, though the yeki merely rolled an eye at him before shutting it again. Another guard was beating a group of enraged citizens over the head with the shaft of his halberd. Other members of the audience were prying up the wooden benches and making a fire. . .

"Master Kavir," cried a voice over the uproar, "this way!"

Hasselborg turned, saw that the barred gate was open a crack. He walked quickly out without waiting to see how the riot developed. One of the assistant jailers shut the gate behind him.

"Come quickly, sir." He followed the man out of the warren of passages into the street, where he was put back into the cage on wheels. Thunder rumbled from the sky as the conveyance rattled on its springless wheels over the cobbles and headed back toward the jail. They were nearly there when the rain began. The driver lashed his ayas and yelled "*Byant-hao!*" Hasselborg could only huddle helplessly in the cage and take the pelting rain.

"We did it, heh heh," said Yeshram afterward.

"How?" asked Hasselborg, who was rigging a string across his cell so that he could hang his wet clothes.

"Well, now, then, I suppose it will do no great harm to tell ye, since the deed's done, and if one's betrayed all are lost. It was simple enough; I bribed Rafun, the beast keeper, into keeping the yeki awake all night by squirting water into its cage. Then I prevailed upon him to let it eat an entire boar unha just before the game. So, to make a long story short, it was far more interested in sleep, sweet sleep, than in forcing one Mikardando spy into an already overstuffed paunch. Are ye adequately equipped for blankets? I wouldn't like ye to perish of the rheum owing me half my reward. Let's hope Garmsel makes a speedy return, before the Dasht thinks to look into his pet's curious lack of appetite."

However, the rest of that day passed, and the night that followed it, without word from either the soldier or the Dasht. Hasselborg tried to console himself with the thought that another of these games wouldn't be along for some days at least, until the next conjunction. . . Though no doubt if sufficiently annoyed, Jám could have Hasselborg executed out of hand.

After dinner there were sounds of voices and movement in

the jail. Presently Yeshram came in with Garmsel, the latter wet and worn-looking.

"You still live, Master Kavir?" said the latter. "Thank the stars! I didn't believe it when this knave, my friend Yeshram, said so, for it is notorious that of all slippery liars he's the chief. At least, now I'll not have to worry about my death horoscope for a time."

"What's this?" asked Yeshram. "What death horoscope?"

"Just a private understanding between Garmsel and myself," said Hasselborg, who didn't want the soldier's faith in the pseudo-science undermined by the jailer's skepticism. "How'd you make out?"

"I got it," said Garmsel. "The ride to Novorecife I made in record time on my good shomal, but coming back I was slowed by having to lead three great stout pack-ayas behind me with the bags of gold. It's in the foyer below, and I trust there'll be no unseemly forgetting my just recompense for this deed."

"When has Yeshram forgotten a faithful friend?" said Yeshram.

"Never, the reason being you've never had one. But come; pay me my due and I'll back to the barracks to dry. *Fointsaq*, what weather!"

When Yeshram returned to Hasselborg's cell, the prisoner said: "Since it's still raining, wouldn't this be a good night to get me out of here?"

The jailer hesitated, which immediately suggested to Hasselborg that the former was thinking that he now had the money it might be safer to hold Hasselborg after all—rather than risk his present gain in trying to double it. Careful, Hasselborg told himself; whatever you do, don't show despair or fly into a rage.

Hasselborg said: "Think, my friend. As you've said, the Dasht may do some investigating sooner or later. Something seems to have interfered with it so far, and rumor tells me he's having love-life trouble. Now, when he does come around, wouldn't you rather have me far away from here, making arrangements to send you another quarter-million, than here where the Dasht can lay his red-hot pincers on me and perhaps wring the truth from me?"

"Certainly, such was my idea too," said Yeshram readily—a little too readily, Hasselborg thought. "I only pondered how to effect this desired end of ours. Ye'll want your gear, won't ye? It wouldn't be prudent to leave bits of it lying about Rosid

for the agents of His Altitude to find and perhaps trace ye by. What stuff have ye, and where's it stowed?"

Hasselborg gave him the information.

Yeshram said: "Clothe yourself for a speedy departure, lad, and try to snatch some sleep, for the arrangements will take some hours to perfect. By which road would ye wish to flee?"

"The road to Hershid, I think."

"Then leave all to Yeshram. We'll have ye out as neat as the Gavehon thief spirited away King Sabzavar's daughter. And if ye get clean away, when ye're feeling that wonderful relief that'll be yours, think whether Yeshram maybe deserves not a mite extra for his trouble, heh heh. May the stars guide ye."

Next to Earthmen, the Krishnans were perhaps the most mercenary race in the galaxy, thought Hasselborg. Despite Yeshram's advice, he found that his physical organism perversely refused to sleep. He tossed on his bunk, paced the floor, and tossed some more. His sleeping pills were still in his room at the inn and so out of reach. Over half this interminable night must have gone past when to his delight he at last found himself getting sleepy. He threw himself down on the bed, closed his eyes, and instantly was aroused by the opening of the door of his cell.

"Come," said a figure holding a candle.

Hasselborg jumped up, whipped his cloak around him, and strode out the door. As he got closer to the figure, he saw that it was masked and that it held a cocked crossbow in one hand. As he brushed past he was sure that he recognized the eyes of one of the assistant jailers. The size and voice were right too. However, no time for that now.

Below, he found another masked man standing guard with crossbow over the jailer and his remaining assistant, both thoroughly bound and gagged. Yeshram caught Hasselborg's eye and wiggled his antennae in the Krishnan equivalent of a wink. Then out they went into the rain, where a man held three saddled ayas.

Hasselborg's companions stopped to uncock their bows and remove their masks. They were two of the assistant jailers, sure enough. All three, without a word, mounted and set off at a canter for the east gate.

Hasselborg, practically blind in the rain and darkness, hung onto his saddle, expecting every minute to be thrown out or to have his mount skid and fall on the wet stones. He concentrated so hard on keeping his seat that he did not see his com-

panions pull up at the gate. When his own mount stopped too, he almost did take a header.

One of his deliverers was shouting at a spearman: "Fool, where is he? Who? Who? Why, the prisoner who escaped from the jail! He came through here! If ye caught him not, that means he's out of Rosid and away! Stand aside, idiots!"

The gate swung open. Hasselborg's escort spurred their animals to a furious run, though how they could see where they were going mystified the investigator. He bounced along behind them as best he could, barely able to make them out in the murk. A glob of soft mud thrown up by a hoof smote him in the face, spreading over his features and for a few minutes cutting him off entirely from the world. By the time he could see again, his companions were just visible ahead. Turning around he was relieved that the lanterns of the city gate were no longer in sight.

After a few minutes more of dreadful riding, one of the two men ahead held up an arm and he slowed his mount. Before he knew it, Hasselborg came upon his buggy, parked on the edge of the road. A man was holding the head of his new aya, which was already hitched up.

"Here ye are, Master Kavar," said a voice in the dark. "Ye'll find your gear in the back of the carriage; we packed it as best we could. Waste no time on the way, and show no lights, for a pursuit might be sent after ye. May the stars watch over ye!"

"Good-night, chums," said Hasselborg, handing the reins of the aya he had ridden to the man who was holding the carriage. The man swung into the saddle and he and the two jailers splashed off into the dark.

Hasselborg got into the buggy, gathered up reins and whip, released the brake, and started off at the fastest pace he could manage without blundering off the road—a slow walk.

VII

WHEN THE sky began to lighten, Hasselborg had been alternately dozing and then waking up just in time to stop himself from falling out of the vehicle. He had discovered one of the very few advantages that an animal-drawn vehicle has over an automobile: that the animal can be trusted not to run off the road the second the driver takes his mind off the business of driving.

The rain had stopped, though the sky was still overcast. Hasselborg yawned, stretched, and felt monstrously hungry.

No, his friends of the jail at Rosid, who had thought of so much else, hadn't thought to provision the buggy with food; moreover no villages were in sight. Thank the pantheon they'd packed his pills and disinfectants, without which he felt himself but half a man!

He whipped his new aya, Avvau by name, to a brisk trot and for some hours rolled steadily over the flat plain. Finally a ranch house provided him with a meal. He bought some extra food to take with him, drove on a few miles, and pulled up where the road dipped down to a ford across a shallow stream. He forced the aya to draw the buggy downstream around the first bend, where the walls of the gully hid him and his vehicle from the view of the road. There making himself as comfortable as possible, he caught an uneasy nap before going on.

Just before sunset the clouds began to break. The road was now bending and weaving around the end of a range of rugged hills: the Kodum Hills if he remembered his map. Here were trees, real trees, even if they did look like overgrown asparagus ferns with green trunks and rust-red fronds.

The sunset grew more gorgeous by the minute, the undersides of the clouds displaying every hue from purple to gold, and emerald sky showing between. Hasselborg thought: If I'm supposed to be an artist, maybe I should learn to act like one. What would an artist do in a case like this? Why, stop the buggy on the top of a rise and make a color sketch of the sunset, to be turned into a complete painting at his leisure.

The aya was trotting toward just such a rise: a long spur that projected out from the dark Kodum Hills into the flat plain. The animal slowed to a walk as it breasted the slope, while Hasselborg fussed with his gear to extract his painting equipment. Just short of the crest he pulled on the reins and set the brake. The aya began munching moss as Hasselborg got out and dragged his easel up to the top of the rise. As his head came above the crest, so that he could see over the spur into the plain beyond, he stopped short, all thoughts of surpassing Claude Monet driven from his head.

There on the plain below a dozen men on ayas and shomals were attacking a group of vehicles. The attackers were riding up one side and down the other shooting arrows, while several men in the convoy shot back. The first vehicle had been a great bishtar cart, but the bishtar, perhaps stung by an arrow, had demolished the cart with kicks and gone trumpeting off across the plain.

Hasselborg dropped his easel and snatched out the little

telescope he had bought in Rosid. With that he could make out details: one of the defenders lying on the ground beside one of the wagons; another lighting a Krishnan firework resembling a Roman candle. (Hasselborg knew that the Krishnan pyrotechnic was not gunpowder, but the collected spores of some plant, which, while it did not explode, made a fine sizzle and flare when ignited.) The firework spat several balls of flame, whereupon the movement of the attackers became irregular. One shomal, perhaps singed by a fireball, broke away and ran across the plain towards Hasselborg, who could see its rider kicking and hauling in a vain effort to turn it back.

Shifting his telescope back to the convoy, Hasselborg saw a female Krishnan in the last carriage. Though she was too far to recognize in the fading light, he could see that she wore clothes of good cut and quality. She was also of an attractive size and shape, and seemed to be shouting something to somebody up forward.

Although Victor Hasselborg was a seasoned and self-controlled man who seldom let himself be carried away by emotion, this time his adrenal glands took the bit in their teeth and ran away with him. Even as he told himself sternly that he ought to hide until the fracas was over and then continue quietly to Hershid, he ran back to the carriage. He unhitched the aya (he was getting fairly expert with harness), got his saddle out of the buggy, took off the animal's harness, saddled and bridled the beast, buckled on his sword. Mounting, he spurred the aya, and headed for the fray as fast as the animal's six legs would carry him, as if he were the legendary Krishnan hero Qarar out to slay a slither of dragons.

The robber riding the runaway shomal had finally gotten his animal under control and turned it back toward the convoy. Therefore he did not see Hasselborg until the latter was almost upon him. Hearing the sound of hooves behind him, he turned. He was just reaching for an arrow when Hasselborg struck him from behind with his sword. Not quite sporting, thought Hasselborg, but this was no time for chivalry. The blade went in clear to the hilt. Unfortunately, the aya carried Hasselborg past so fast that the handle was wrenched out of his hand before he had time to withdraw the blade from his victim's body.

And there he was, riding full-tilt and weaponless towards the convoy. Resistance had died down. One man was tearing off across the plain with a couple of robbers after him, while another fenced with three more from aya-back. The other robbers were busy with the remaining people of the convoy, bind-

ing those who had fallen to their knees and subduing those who had not. The woman was still standing in the rearmost vehicle, as if waiting for the first robber who felt so-minded to ride by and scoop her up.

Hasselborg headed for her, calling: "I'll try to get you away!" As he came nearer he saw that she was young and beautiful, with the light-blue hair of the western races.

She hesitated as he held out an arm, then let herself be lifted down to the back of the aya behind Hasselborg. He spun his mount and headed back the way he had come. Behind him rose a chorus of shouts indicating that the robbers did not intend to let this act go unnoticed.

While Hasselborg wondered how to get out of the predicament into which his impulse had plunged him, his aya carried him past the robber he had run through. The Krishnan had fallen off his shomal and was crawling on all fours with the hilt of the sword sticking out of his back. Hasselborg, feeling that he was likely to need a whole arsenal of weapons in the next few minutes, reached down and retrieved his sword. I ought to have a movie film of that stunt, he thought; anybody'd think I planned it that way.

"Here comes one," said the woman. Hasselborg looked around to see another robber riding hard at him.

He said: "Hold on!" and put his mount into a sharp curve, leaning inward as he did so. These six-legged creatures could certainly turn on a dime, he thought. The robber pulled up a little, as if surprised to see a supposedly unarmed man suddenly whirl and charge him with a sword.

As Hasselborg went by, too excited to remember to thrust, he aimed an overhead cut at the robber's head. Too late he realized that he'd probably break his blade on the man's iron hat. But Da'vi, the Krishnan goddess of luck, was still with him, for the blow missed by just enough to shear off an ear and come down between neck and shoulder. The man dropped his mace with a howl.

"You'd better hurry," said the girl. A glance showed that at least three other bandits were riding toward them.

Hasselborg turned again and resumed his flight, wishing he had some plan of escape all figured out, instead of being in a kind of exalted confusion and anxiety. Still, if he could make the hills before they caught him—on rough ground he'd have an advantage over those on the long-legged shomals. In the darkness, he might be able to give his pursuers the slip.

Hasselborg's aya loped up the slope of the rise. A glance

back showed that the pursuers were gaining. Even though his beast was one of the Dasht's big hunting breed, it was slowed by its double load. Something went past with a faint whistling screech. Some flying creature of the night? No; as the sound was repeated, Hasselborg realized that arrows were being shot at him. He pulled off the road and headed cross-country up into the wooded crest of the ridge; no use leading them right to his carriage. Another arrow clattered among the branches.

"Are they gaining?" he said.

"I—I think not."

"Hold on tight."

Hasselborg's own heart was in his mouth as the animal leaped fallen logs, dropped out from under him as it took a dip, and swerved to avoid trees. He clamped the beast's barrel with his knees, leaned right and left, and ducked branches that were upon him almost before he could see them. He thanked providence that the hunt and the flight from Rosid had given him at least a little practice at rough riding. The aya stumbled a couple of times, and Hasselborg blessed its six legs as it recovered each time without dropping its riders.

There was a crash from behind and a volley of shrill curses. "One of the shomals fell," said the girl.

"Good. Hope the rider broke his procreating neck. If it gets dark enough . . ."

They reached the base of the spur, where the land rose and fell irregularly in all directions. Hasselborg pulled to the right down a shallow draw. The animal crashed through a thicket that tore at its riders' legs; then up . . . down . . . left . . . right . . . The aya almost spilled them as in the darkness it ran head-on into a sapling. To his horror Hasselborg felt his saddle, put on in such haste, beginning to slip out of place.

"I think we've escaped them," said the girl.

Hasselborg halted the aya and listened for sounds of pursuit over the heavy breathing of the animal. A distant crashing and the sound of voices came faintly, but after several minutes the noise seemed to be dying away altogether.

Hasselborg dismounted stiffly and helped the girl down, saying: "Haven't I met you somewhere?"

"How should I know? Who are you, that goes about rescuing damsels in distress?"

"I'm Kavir bad-Ma'lum, the painter," he said, adjusting the girths. He seemed to have gotten half the straps buckled together wrong.

"So? I heard of you at the court of the Dasht."

"I know where I saw you! Somebody pointed you out to me at the court as Fouri bab-Something."

"I'm Vazid's daughter."

"That's right, bab-Vazid. And you're somebody's niece, aren't you?"

"You must mean my uncle Hasté. Hasté bad-Labbadé. You know, the high priest."

"Sure." He wasn't, but no matter. He felt bound to trot out the courtly manner. "I'm glad I was of service to Your Ladyship, though I'd rather we'd met under less strenuous circumstances. Were you on your way home from Rosid?"

"Yes; I just came there to visit my friend the Lady Qei, and since the Dasht made himself unpleasant, I thought it time to go home to Uncle. After all, I am who I am. Charrasp, the merchant, had collected a group to take the new tabid crop to Hershid before the price dropped, and some people of quality had elected to go with him for safety. So, I thought, why not go at once? I hope no ill came to my man and my maid, who were with me. What do we do now?"

"Try to find our way back to the road, I suppose."

"What then?"

"If my buggy's still there we'll hitch it up and ride to Her-shid in it. Otherwise we'll have to ride pillion all the way."

"Where does the road lie?"

"Maybe the stars know, but I don't." He listened, hearing nothing but the breathing of three pairs of lungs. Although one of the three moons was up, the sky was still partly cloudy, so that the moonlight came through only in fitful beams.

"Seems to me," he mused, "that we came down this little valley after running along that ridge to the left . . ."

He started up the draw, leading Fouri with one hand and the aya with the other. He proceeded cautiously, watching for obstacles and listening for robbers. He led them along the ridge he thought they had come by, then along another that branched off from it. But soon he realized that the terrain was quite unfamiliar. He retraced his steps a bit and thought he saw his mistake . . .

An hour later he said: "I'm afraid we're lost good and proper."

"What do we do then? Wait for the dawn?"

"We could, of course, though I don't like the idea with these hijackers hanging around." After further thought he added: "All we need to make things perfect is to be treed by a yeki."

As if in answer, a low roar came across the mountains. Fouri threw her arms around his neck. "I'm afraid!"

"There, there." He patted her back. "It's many hoda away." Although he could have stood in that agreeable position all night, they had more urgent things to think of. "If I could only find that long ridge again, we could walk right down the top of it . . . I know, you hold Avvau." He wasn't taking any chance of letting his mount run loose.

He took off his sword belt, found a tree with low branches, and climbed. While he found hard going, especially since the trunk was smooth and the branches widely spaced, he nevertheless managed to raise himself eight or ten meters above the ground.

He saw in the fitful moonlight only hills dotted with patches of woods and isolated trees. Was that the missing spur? He couldn't be sure.

Then he snapped his attention to one thing: a little spark of night, far off, like a fifth-magnitude star. He strained his eyes, then remembered to look just to one side of it. Yes, there it was all right, twinkling like a star on a cold Earthly night.

He studied as much as he could see of the terrain, noted the position of the moon, and descended. "If we go over that way we may run into trouble. On the other hand if they're sitting around the fire they probably won't see us if we're careful, and we should be able to find our road at least."

"Whatever my hero says."

Hasselborg's eyebrows went up with a jerk. So, he was a hero now? He set out again briskly, stopping from time to time to verify his direction. At the end of an hour's walk he could see the spot of light from ground level.

"We shall have to be very quiet," he whispered. "At least I know where I am now. Come on."

He began a big circle to the left of the fire, spiraling gradually closer to it. After another quarter hour he halted at the top of the steep slope.

"Here's the road," he said. "The damned thing seems to go right towards our friends."

The fire was now out of sight. As they skidded down the slope and started along the road, Hasselborg recognized the incline up which he was walking the aya that afternoon when the idea of painting a sunset came to him. He dropped Fouri's hand and held his sword to keep it from clanking.

"Here's the buggy," he breathed.

He poked about it and found no sign of its having been

tampered with. Up ahead, though the fire itself was invisible, he could see its light against the trees over the crest of the rise.

"Hold the aya a minute," he said.

He left Fouri and walked slowly up the slope, crouching as he neared the top lest he mistakenly blunder into the gang. For the last few feet he lowered himself to hands and knees, then peered cautiously over.

Seven robbers stood or squatted about the fire, which had been built alongside the road. Two, crudely bandaged, sprawled in the dirt; the others ate in hasty gulps. Hasselborg could hear the snorts of their animals tethered nearby and the words:

"Why in the name of the stars didn't you . . ."

"Fool, how did I know you'd run off after . . ."

"You *zeft*! The caravan was no matter; we were being paid for the girl. All should have . . ."

"Where's Gherdavan?"

"A fine thing: four slain, two hurt, one missing, and not a *karda* to show! The damned Dasht can keep his gold for all..."

"Why didn't you kill the folk of the caravan? Then they'd not have taken courage and . . ."

"Ransom, idiot."

". . . hasten, lest the soldiery find us . . ."

". . . the Dasht promised . . ."

"*Ghuvoi* the Dasht! I think of the Dour. It's time his bourne . . ."

Hasselborg crept back and whispered: "If we hitch up quietly we can drive right through them. Are you game to try? I don't think they'll follow us very far into the Dour's dominions."

"Whatever you say."

They unsaddled the aya, jumping fearfully at every click of a buckle. Then they fastened its harness, moving slowly to avoid noise.

"Now," said Hasselborg when they had hitched Avvau to the carriage, "can you drive?"

"Well enough."

"All right, take the reins. To get speed up fast I'll have to run alongside and then swing aboard. When I say 'go,' use the whip for all it's worth. Ready? Go!"

He reached in and snapped off the brake as the whip whistled and cracked. The carriage shuddered, the wheels crunched, and dirt flew from the six hooves of the outraged animal. Hasselborg, walking alongside with one hand on the

body of the carriage, broke into a trot, then into a run, and then swung aboard.

"Give him the business!" he said. Hanging onto the dashboard with his left hand, he drew his sword with his right and leaned out.

As they topped the rise into the firelight they picked up speed, until they were hurtling at the group of men by the fire.

The minute they appeared, some of the robbers looked around at the noise. These jumped to their feet and reached for weapons as the vehicle bore down upon them. One held up a hand and shouted, then leaped for dear life. Another stepped forward with a sword. Hasselborg thrust at him. His stroke was parried with a clang, and then they were through and thundering into the dark.

VIII

"THEY don't seem to be coming after us," said Hasselborg, leaning out of the buggy and looking to the rear. "I guess they were as badly scared as we were, and didn't know their chosen victim was in this rig."

"What do you mean, chosen victim?"

Hasselborg told her what he had overheard.

"That reeky lob!" she cried. "Not satisfied with pawing me all over until I'm forced to flee his court, Já m hires cutthroats to kidnap me! I'll make him pay for this, the way Queen Nirizi made the jeweler pay for what he did."

Although Hasselborg would like to have known what drastic fate Queen Nirizi inflicted upon the jeweler, he had other things to occupy him at the moment. They passed the place where the caravan had been attacked. Aside from a brief glimpse of the ruins of the bishtar cart and a couple of unburied bodies, nothing remained.

Hasselborg said: "I think I see what happened. The bandits thought they had everything under control, and so they did until a couple of them tore away after us. Then some more followed, which left only a couple guarding the prisoners. Seeing this, the prisoners grabbed up the weapons they'd just laid down and smote the robbers, hip and thigh. When the others came back after hunting for us, the caravan was miles away. They didn't dare follow it out of Já m's territory, since they'd bought their protection from him."

"Then my people may still live! We should catch them before they reach Hershid, don't you think?"

"Don't know. I'd have to scale it off on the map, and I don't know how accurate that is."

"Well then, will you take over the driving now?"

"In a minute." Hasselborg gave another look to the rear. The robbers' fire slid out of sight. A couple of miles more and he said: "Let's stop long enough to light the lanterns. This tearing around in the dark *à la* Ben Hur gives me the bleeps."

"Is that an expression in your native tongue? Surely my lord showed courage enough on that ride through the hills. I could have done nothing without you, O man of might."

"Oh, I'm not so hot as all that," he said, fumbling with the lanterns and glad that she could not see his look of embarrassment. "In fact the whole idea—" He was about to say that the whole idea of rescuing her had been a piece of irrational folly, which he'd never have undertaken if he had stopped to think, but judged such a remark tactless. "There," he said, finishing with the lanterns, "now at least we shan't miss a turn and smash up."

He took up the reins again. Since her costume was inadequate protection against the long Krishnan night, he wrapped his cloak around both of them. She snuggled up to him, tickled his face with her antennae, and presently kissed the angle of his jaw.

So, sex was raising its beautiful head? How nice that the Krishnans had adopted this Earthly practice! And how nice that one could take one's eyes off the road and trust one's steed to find the way! *O quente cachorro!*

"Anything that my hero wishes . . ." she murmured, looking up at him through half-closed eyes.

The blood pounded in his ears—until he remembered that he was after all an Earthman superficially disguised as a Krishnan, and that the success of his mission might depend upon his keeping that disguise intact.

"Giddap, Avvau," he said. Hell, why was it his luck always to be called upon to play the man of stone? Well, nearly always.

The sun was well up before Fouri awoke and stretched, her silly little jacket gaping wide. Hasselborg thought it was just as well that he hadn't been able to see her clearly the previous night, or passion would surely have had its way.

"Where are we?" she asked.

"Somewhere on the road to Hershid."

"I know that, man of little wit! But where?"

"I can only guess that we'll arrive some time this afternoon."

"Well then, stop at the nearest farmhouse. I want to eat."

This sharp, imperious tone was something new. He thought, some of the hero-worship must have already worn off, and gave her a silent, wooden look.

Thereupon she was all contrition: "Oh, did I wound my hero? I crawl! I abase myself! I'm a foul-tempered and selfish witch!" She seized his hand and began kissing it. "You break my liver! I cannot bear unkindness from you! Say I'm forgiven, or I throw myself from your carriage to my doom!"

"That's okay, Lady Fouri," he said, wishing she wouldn't be so damned theatrical about it. Life was complicated enough without superfluous histrionics. He patted her and kissed her and cheered her up, while his mind ran far ahead, anticipating their arrival in Hershid.

Presently she said: "We must be well into the Dour's territory. Didn't we pass his bourne during the night?"

"You mean that place with a gate across the road and a sentry-house? You were asleep."

"How about the sentries? Did they admit you without cavail?"

"Matter of fact they were asleep too, so I just got out and opened the gate myself. Seemed a shame to wake the poor guys."

They stopped at a hamlet for a meal, during which Hasselborg asked: "What's a good respectable inn in Hershid? I landed in some thieves' rest in Rosid and don't care to repeat the mistake."

"Oh, but Kavir, you shall stay at no inn! What do you think of me? Chambers of the best in my uncle's palace shall be yours, where I can see you every day!"

Although the last item made it plain that more than simple gratitude was involved in this offer, Hasselborg suppressed a smile as he protested: "I couldn't accept such unearned hospitality! After all I'm a mere nobody, not even a knight, and your uncle doesn't know me from Ad—from Qarar."

"Who Ad may be I do not know, but accept you he shall; he'd welcome his niece's rescuer in any event, and should he not I'd make him wish he'd never been hatched."

He didn't doubt that she could, too. "Well—if you insist . . ."

She did, of course, which fact pleased Hasselborg mightily, despite its threat of future complications. He was being given a free and perhaps luxurious lodging right in the midst of things. While, despite his fear of germs, he could cheerfully put up

with the worst in the way of accommodations when he had to, he still enjoyed the best when he could get it.

The rest of the journey proved uneventful. They failed to overhaul the caravan, which must have been making good time to get away from the perils of the Kodum Hills.

Hershid, as befitted the capital of an empire, was a larger and more splendid city than Rosid. As expected, they were halted at the gate. However, the guards recognized Fouri before she had said two words. They jumped to present arms with their halberds and waved the carriage through.

Fouri guided Hasselborg through the city until they stopped at the gates of a palace. The gates were adorned with geometrical gimmicks that Hasselborg recognized as Krishnan astrological symbols.

The inevitable gatekeeper stepped out, cried: "Mistress Fouri!" and ran across the court shouting. A whole swarm of people thereupon erupted out of the palace and crowded around the carriage, all trying to kiss Fouri's hands at once.

Then a tall Krishnan in a long blue robe appeared and the crowd opened to let him through. He and Fouri embraced. The girl said: "Uncle, this is my rescuer, the gallant Master Kavir . . ."

Hasselborg had his hand shaken (another borrowed Earthly custom) and tried to follow the conversation with everybody talking at once: "What happened?" "Sandu, run to the barracks and tell the commander not to send out that squadron . . ." "Aye, the caravan arrived but a few minutes past with their tale of woe . . ." "What ever befell Your Ladyship? You look as if you'd been trampled by wild ayas!"

An exaggeration, even though Fouri's flimsy costume did look beat-up as a result of her ride and hike through the Kodum Hills. He hoped they wouldn't suspect him of having tried to tear it off her, since, if he remembered his Krishnan anthropology, these people were not promiscuous like the Mikardanduma south of the Pichidé.

As he was led to his room, it occurred to Hasselborg that if anyone needed valet service it was himself. He could see that his suit was torn and mud-splattered. He could feel the whiskers sprouting on his chin and the weal where a branch had lashed him across the face on that wild ride into the hills. He'd have to shave soon or it would be obvious that his bristly beard was reddish-brown instead of Krishnan green.

Besides, Krishnan beards were so sparse as to be practically non-existent.

However, all was taken care of by Hasté's household, which ran with un-Krishnan efficiency. An hour later he was shaved, bathed, perfumed (something he had to endure for the sake of verisimilitude), and his clean suit had been laid out for him. After a short nap he dressed and went down to meet his host, whom he found awaiting him with what appeared to be a cocktail shaker.

Hasté bad-Labbadé was unusual among Krishnans in having lost most of his hair. What was left was silky white. His wrinkled parchment-like features were also sharper than those of most of the race. In fact, had it not been for the organs of smell sprouting from between his brows he might have passed for an Earthman.

"My son," said Hasté, pouring, "there's little I can say to impress upon you my gratitude, save this: Feel free to call upon me at any time for anything I can do for you."

"Thank you, Your Reverence," said Hasselborg, warily eyeing his drink. However, so skillfully had it been mixed that the taste of alcohol could hardly be detected, and he got it down without gagging. He reminded himself that as a habitual non-drinker he'd have to be careful and count his drinks, stretching them out as long as possible.

When Fouri joined them, Hasté said: "Tell me all about this extraordinary feat of rescue."

When they had told, Fouri asked her uncle: "Do you think the Dour will finally take action against Jám on your representation?"

Hasté smiled thinly. "I know not, madam. You know how little weight I have with the Dour these days."

"It's only because you lack courage to face down the old aqebati!" she snapped. "I could do better with him myself."

"Why, so you could, the reason being he likes you, looking upon you as a sort of daughter, while he holds me in disfavor."

"No matter of liking at all. It is only that he's a hard man and a clever one, who's gained his ends by struggle, and expects those about him to be equally hard and clever. Beat him and he'll respect you; yield to him, as you've done, and he'll trample you into the mire. Would I were a man!"

Hasselborg felt a suppressed tension between these two, too strong to be accounted for by a simple difference of opinion on how to manage the king. This might bear looking into. He said: "I—uh—perhaps you could explain this to me, Your Reverence? I've never been in Hershid, and so don't know the local situation."

Hasté gave him a keen look. "My niece is no dissembler; were she on trial for her life she'd tell the judge what she thought of him, be it ever so libelous."

"How about the difference between you and the Dour?"

"It's a long tale, my son, going back many years and touching upon the very wellsprings of men's actions. I know not how they think in your land, but here in Gozashtand men have been of several minds as to why events follow the course they do.

"The old belief had it, you see, that all was due to the will of the gods. However, with the growth of knowledge that belief seem insufficient for divers causes, such as the question of why the gods seemed to make such a mess of human affairs, or why they should interest themselves in us mortals at all. In fact, some blasphemers were heard to say that the gods did not exist, though these thoughts were soon suppressed.

"Then about three hundred years past, our theologians proved to their satisfaction that the gods were neither a crew of lustful brawling barbarians reveling on the heights of Mount Meshaq, as thought our simple ancestors, nor yet a set of impalpable abstractions, the 'spirit of love' and the like, which none ever understood. Instead, they were in truth the luminaries of heaven: the sun, the moons, the planets, and the stars, which as they spun about our world sent down their occult influences singly and in combination and so controlled the fortunes of men. You'll recall it was about this time that the roundness of the world was discovered.

"So, we thought, we had at last the true scientific religion which should perform the proper offices of religion: to explain man and the universe, to predict the future, to comfort men in affliction, and to inculcate sound morals in the minds of the young. And so it seemed; the faith was made official in Gozashtand and its neighboring nations, and any deviation therefrom was condignly punished. Later, if you like, I'll show you one of the old cells in my own cellar, where heretics were kept for questioning. Now we can do nothing of the kind, though the Dour sometimes uses the accusation of heresy to dispose of politically inconvenient persons.

"Then what happened? The Earthmen landed in their spaceships at the place that is now Novorecife, bringing news of other suns and other worlds revolving about them, for they told us for the first time that our world went around the sun and not vice versa. The planet Qondyor" (he meant Vishu) "for instance, far from being the god of war, was but another

world like our own, save warmer, with creatures on it not wholly unlike those of this world.

"So you see, good Master Kavir, the result has been a falling away from the true faith. The Church may no longer punish her foes directly, but must sit in silence while a host of minor cults, even some brought in by the Terrans, spreads over the land like a murrain, sapping our spiritual strength and," he smiled wryly, "pre-empting our income. And as our power declines, that of the Dour waxes; wherefore, relations are less cordial than once they were."

A little astonished by such frankness, Hasselborg asked: "Your Reverence, what's your opinion about the gods, the planets, and so on?"

Hasté smiled faintly again. "As head of the Church, my official views are of course in accord with those adopted at the Council of Mishé forty-six years past. Privately, though I prefer that this be not repeated, I'm somewhat puzzled myself. Let's go to dinner."

Fouri had put on another of her dazzling variety of personalities: grave and formal. She said: "Kavir's in Hershid to get commissions for painting portraits. Could we not put him in the way of some business? That would be the least recompense for his heroism."

"To be sure we could. Let me think—I'd order one myself, had I not had one done within the year. I'll still do so if all else fails. As for the court, I know not quite how—my star is not in its dominant sector at the moment, but—"

"Oh, come, Uncle! Why don't you try the Dour himself?"

"The Dour, Fouri? But you know how blows the wind in that quarter . . ."

"Rouse yourself, you old man of jelly!" she cried suddenly, the grave manner gone. "Always excuses. The privy council meets on the morrow, doesn't it?"

"To be sure, my child, but—"

"No buts! Take Master Kavir with you and present him to His Awesomeness as the world's greatest portraitist. Unless," she added ominously, "you prefer to try contentions with your loving niece?"

"Dear stars, madam, no; I'll take him! Assuming he'll come, that is. You're for this scheme, my son?"

"Sure," said Hasselborg, adding a murmur of inexpressible thanks.

"I feared as much," said Hasté.

Later, over the cigars, Hasselborg brought up another matter: "Your Reverence, I'm on the lookout for a certain young man who bought a portrait from me and then decamped without paying. He had a girl with him."

"Yes?"

"I wondered if there were any place in Hershid where it would be known whether he passed through here?"

"Why let me think—the Dour has a good spy service, though I doubt it would keep track of every traveler who passes this way, since Hershid is after all the crossroad of the empire. What were these runaways of yours like?"

"Like this," said Hasselborg, producing the sketches.

Hasté frowned at them, then began to laugh. "How much did he owe you?"

"Five hundred karda."

Hasté rang a bell, and when a silent young man in a plain blue priestly robe answered, he said. "Draw five hundred karda from my privy hoard and give them to Master Kavir."

"Stars preserve me!" said Hasselborg. "I didn't mean to collect it from Your Reverence—"

"All's well, my son, and count not the teeth of a gift shomal, as Qarar did in his dealings with the Witch of the Va'andao Sea. First, it is but a mean recompense for your rescue of my niece; and second, time which brings all things will bring me the chance to collect the debt from this, your debtor."

"You know him?"

"Slightly."

"Who is he?"

"Can it be that you're yet so new to these parts? Why, unless I'm vastly mistaken, this is the true ten-days' wonder, the paragon of the political virtues, the new Dour of Zamba, and the other's his Douri."

"The King of Zamba?" said Hasselborg. "Since when? And what's Zamba?"

At this point the young priest glided back into the room with a heavy canvas bag which he set down with a clink beside Hasselborg.

Hasté said: "Fetch a map of Gozashtand and adjacent lands, Ghaddal. Master Kavir, for a traveled man, your knowledge is most—shall I say, spotty? Whence came you originally?"

"Malayer, in the far South," said Hasselborg.

"A Suriau, eh? That may be. Know, then, that Zamba is an island in the Sadabao Sea, lying just off the end of the Harqain peninsula, which forms the eastern extremity of Gozashtand.

For years have the Zambava been plagued with seditions and uprisings, party against party and class against class. Finally the commons overthrew the aristocracy altogether and slew all those who did not escape. Thereupon, having no more common foe, the commons fell into factions with battles and murders, leader against leader.

"The upshot was that a few ten-nights ago your friend Antané—his name, is it not?—landed upon the isle with a gang of bullies, which he'd collected from the stars know where. In a few days he built a new aristocracy of leaders of the commons—those who came over to his side. that is—with all the titles and trappings of the old order. However, the titles but cover the official posts of his little kingdom. They are not hereditary and are withdrawn the instant the incumbent fails to give satisfaction. No more young noblemen wallowing in the sin of idleness on Zamba!"

The classical pattern of Caesarism, thought Hasselborg; maybe Fallon had been reading a life of Napoleon, or maybe in that social situation things just broke that way. Although he would have liked to hear more about King Antané, Hasté seemed disinclined to discuss the subject further; the priest preferred to talk about large generalities like progress versus stability, or freewill versus predestination.

"For look you," he said, "there are those who pass rumors to the effect that King Antané's no true man at all, but an Earthman in disguise. Not that it would matter greatly to me, since for years I've been telling my flock that it's wrong to judge people on a basis of their race rather than of their individual merits. I'm sure, however, that Antané's no Earthman, for they believe, most of them, in the curious doctrine of equality for all men, while this, our young paragon, has set up no such system in his island kingdom. Now, you were among the Terrans during your stay at Novorecife, my son; enlighten an old man on these matters. What is this doctrine of equality, and do all Earthmen indeed adhere to it?"

"As a matter of fact," Hasselborg began. He would have launched into a brilliant ten-minute speech on the subject when it occurred to him that a Krishnan painter would hardly know that much about Earthly political theory. Was the old boy trying to trap him? He cautiously qualified his reply:

"I don't know about these things from first-hand knowledge, Your Reverence. All I know is what I heard my Terran friends saying in the course of conversation. As I get it, this theory is now the dominant one among Earthmen, though it has not

always been and may not always be. Moreover it doesn't mean literal equality of individuals, but a legal equality or equality in matters of law: rights, obligations, and so on.

"They told me there were two great difficulties in building a political system on such a basis: first, that people aren't biologically equal, that individuals differ widely in ability; second, that you have to have some sort of political organization to run the society except among the most primitive groups, and those in power have a natural tendency to try to alter the setup to make themselves legally superior to the governed. They all do it whether they call themselves counts, capitalists, or commissars . . ."

As they fenced with ideas, Hasselborg thought that Hasté showed flashes of a rather surprising knowledge of Earthly institutions.

Fouri maintained her gravity all evening, through supper, until they were saying good-night. She gave Hasselborg her hand to kiss, glanced at Hasté's retreating back, leaned forward, and whispered: "Are you married, my hero?"

Hasselborg raised his eyebrows. "No."

"Oh, excellent!" She gave him a swift kiss and went.

Oh-oh, thought Hasselborg, you don't need X-ray eyes to see what she's leading up to! Now that he knew where Fallon was, he'd better get away from Hershid quickly. Could he sneak out that very night on the pretext that he liked to take buggy-rides in the moonlight? No. In the first place that wouldn't get him to Zamba; the map showed the rocky Har-qain peninsula as roadless. He would have to take a ship from Majbur.

Moreover, he didn't want to go to Zamba so precipitately. If he simply walked in on Julnar to argue that she should return to her papa, Fallon might have him liquidated out of hand. Maybe he'd better hang around Hershid for a few days, despite the matrimonial menace of the fair Fouri, and try to work out an angle. He tried to convince himself, without entire success, that this decision was not influenced by his fondness for the fleshpots of Hasté's palatial establishment.

Hasselborg was surprised when Hasté presented him to the Dour. From Fouri's remarks he'd been led to expect someone physically impressive, like the Dasht of Ruz. Instead, King Eqrar bad-Qavitar reminded Hasselborg of nothing so much as an Earthly mouse.

"Yes, yes, yes," squeaked the mighty monarch quickly, offer-

ing his small hand to be kissed. "I've often thought of the same thing. A portrait. Hm, hm. A fine idea. An excellent suggestion. I am glad that you brought this person around, Hasté. I'll wager that niece of yours put you up to it; she knows how to get around the old man, ha. If you knew as much, you'd be a power in the land. Master Kavir, how many sittings would you require?"

"Perhaps a dozen, Your Awesomeness."

"Right, right, right.—We'll have the first this afternoon. An hour before dinner. West wing of the palace. The valets will pass you in and show you where. Bring all your gear. All of it. Nothing vexes me more than an expert who comes to perform some office for one and then has to return home for more tools. Mind you, now."

"Yes sir," said Hasselborg. Eqrar was evidently one of those who believed that "what I tell you three times is true."

"Good, good. And it is my command that you leave not the city of Hershid until the portrait be completed. I am a busy king, and I shall have to fit the sittings into my schedules as best as I can. You have my leave to go."

Hasselborg, outwardly obsequious, swore under his breath. Now he was stuck in Hershid for the gods knew how long, especially if the Dour was given to canceling appointments. While he might run away in defiance of the Dour, he might also be caught and dragged back before he reached the border. At best he'd land in this nervous but powerful king's black book.

When he got back to Hasté's palace, he asked Fouri: "How do you get to Majbur?"

"Do you depart so soon?" she cried, her voice rising in alarm.

"Not yet; the king says no. Still, I'd like to know."

"Then you might drive your carriage—there's a good road from the south gate—or you might take the railroad."

"Railroad?"

"Of course! Don't you know that Hershid's on the end of the line to Majbur and on down the coast to Jazmurian?"

This I must see, thought Hasselborg, forbearing to ask more questions for fear of revealing ignorance. "Care for a ride before lunch?"

She would, of course, and showed him the way to the terminal outside the wall, on the south side of the city. The rails were about a meter apart; the cars, little four-wheeled affairs with bodies like those of carriages; and the locomotives, bish-tars. A couple of the beasts were pushing and pulling cars

around the yard under the guidance of mahouts who sat on their necks and blew little trumpets to warn of their approach. Fouri said:

"Alas, my hero, you're too late to see the daily train for Qadr pull out, and that from Qadr doesn't come in till around sunset."

"Where's Qadr?"

"A suburb of Majbur, on this side of the Pichidé. No through train to Jazmurian, you see, because the river's too wide to be bridged. One must detrain at Qadr and cross the river by boat before continuing on."

"Thanks."

After they had watched for a while she continued: "I can see we're truly soul mates, Kavar, for I too have always loved to hang on the fence of the railroad yard and watch the trains made up."

Hasselborg gave an imagined shudder, as though he had cut himself on a dirty knife with no disinfectant available.

She went on: "If you're really set on going to Majbur . . . I can wheedle anything I wish from the Dour. Should I, for example, tell him that my affianced husband wished to travel, I know I could persuade him . . ."

Hasselborg changed the subject by asking about Zamba and its new ruler, though Fouri could add but little to what he already knew.

The king proved a difficult portrait subject, always fidgeting and scratching and wiping his pointed nose on his sleeve. To make matters worse, characters kept coming in to whisper in his ear or to present papers for him to sign. All this distraction reduced Hasselborg, who had little enough confidence in his ability as a painter, to a state bordering on frantic despair. He complained:

"If Your Awesomeness would only hold that pose for five minutes on end . . ."

"What mean you, painter?" yelled the king. "You scoundrel, you criticize me! I've held this pose without moving the breadth of a hair for the better part of an hour, and you dare say I've not? Get out! Why did I ever let you begin this thing? Begone! No, no, no, I didn't mean it. Come back and get to work. Only let it be understood, no more irreverent criticisms! I'm a very busy man, and if I don't work on my royal business every minute, I never get it fulfilled. You're a good and faithful fellow. Fall to, waste no time, don't stand gaping, get to work!"

Hasselborg sighed and stoically resumed his sketching. Then another man came in, this time omitting to whisper. The newcomer cried:

"May it please Your Awesomeness, the Dasht of Ruz has arrived unannounced, with fifty men-at-arms! He seeks an escaped prisoner who he thinks has fled to your court!"

IX

AFTER SITTING with his mouth open for a few seconds, the king jumped up with a yell. "That blundering ninny! It's just like him to descend upon me without an hour's warning! No permission, no invitation, no request, no nothing—*Ohé!*" He looked keenly at Hasselborg, who had given up trying to make a sketch for the time being. "You, master painter, arrive at my court one morning with a fine story of rescuing Hasté's niece from robbers in Jám's domain. Then at the close of that self-same day comes Jám himself hot on the trail of an alleged fugitive. A singular coincidence, would you not say?"

"Yes, Your Awesomeness."

"Well, show him in, show him in! We'll soon get to the bottom of this coil." The king paced up and down. "I doubt not that the rescue took place as stated, for my men questioned the survivors of that unlucky caravan at length. Still there's a mystery here; there's a mystery; there's a myst—Ah, my good vassal Jám!"

The Dasht of Ruz strode into the room, made the barest pretense of dropping to one knee in front of the king, and then went for Hasselborg with a roar, pulling at his sword. "*You zeft!* I'll show you to bribe your way out of my jail!"

Hasselborg, who was getting a little tired of hairbreadth escapes, looked around frantically for a weapon, since he had been required to check his sword before being closeted with the king.

Eqrar, however, took care of that. Placing one of the big rings on his fingers in his mouth, he blew a high, piercing whistle. Instantly a pair of inconspicuous little doors in the wall flew open, and out of each sprang a couple of guards with cocked crossbows.

"Stand, or you're a dead vassal!" squeaked the king. "I am who I am!"

Jám sheathed his sword reluctantly. "Your Awesomeness, my humble apologies for an irreverent intrusion. But by Qondyor and Hoi, it is not to be borne that this heap of reeky

foulness who calls himself a painter shall be allowed to encumber our soil with his loathsome presence any longer!"

"What's he done?"

"I'll tell you straight. He comes to me, pretending to paint portraits, and is welcomed as an old friend. What happens? Within the day I learn that he's no painter at all, but a spy from Mikardand sent to assassinate me. So, naturally, I fling him in pokey to be expended at the holy games. Then by some witchcraft he magicks the yeki so the beast won't eat him, and subsequently is spirited out of jail by a pair of fellow-desperadoes and disappears. It is apparent he corrupted someone in my service, or it would not have passed off so smoothly, though the villains all swear innocence and I can't hang 'em all in the hope of getting the right one."

"How do you know he's a spy?" asked the king.

"My friend at Novorecife, Julio Góis, sent word. Here's his letter, see you, and here's another he sent with that *baghan* who altered it."

Hasselborg broke in: "May it please Your Awesomeness, I'm not a Mikardandu, as you'll find out if you inquire there. I only stopped a night at Mishé on my way to Novorecife, since Mikardand is no place for an artist. At Novorecife I made Góis' acquaintance and asked for an introduction to somebody in Rosid; that's all I know about it. The reason the Dasht is so sore is that I busted up his attempt to have the Lady Fouri kidnapped by his gang of tame bandits."

"What's this? What's this?" said Eqrar.

"Sure, he did it. She told me herself she left Rosid because he wouldn't let her alone, so he had her snatched, and I don't think it was because he wanted a partner to play checkers with either."

"What about this, My Lord Jám?" said the king.

"Lies, all lies," said the Dasht. "Where's his proof?"

Hasselborg said: "I heard the robbers discussing the matter around their campfire. Bring some of them in and they'll tell you."

The king asked: "Where be these robbers now?"

"Hanged, every one of 'em," shouted Jám. "I chanced upon 'em while in pursuit of this wretch, and applied the high justice on the spot."

Hasselborg immediately said, "Because they'd failed to get her as he ordered, or else to shut their mouths for good."

The Dasht started to bellow obscenities when the king said: "Peace, peace, peace, both of you. Now, here's a veritable

puzzle. You, Jám, say that Master Kavir's a spy, though your only evidence is the word of the Terran Julio, which is inadmissible in Gozashtando law and worthless as a matter of general experience. Then you, sir painter, accuse my faithful vassal of planning the abduction of the niece of the high priest of the Established Church for fell purposes—though the fellness of these purposes might be mitigated by the damsel's excessive beauty, which would rouse thoughts of love in the liver of the holiest. Still, the chick's a favorite of mine, since I have no girl-children of my own, and therefore I'd take a grave view of the matter were it substantially proved. Yet your only proof is the word of men whose word would carry little weight were they alive and none at all since they're deceased.

"I could of course have both of you interrogated with hot pincers." He smiled unpleasantly, whereupon both Hasselborg and Jám looked gravely respectful. "However, in my experience that treatment, while often beneficial to the victim as well as edifying to the spectator, fails to elicit that for which we're most eager—to wit, the truth. What would you with this man, Lord Jám?"

"I would snatch him back to Ruz, Your Awesomeness, to commute his sentence from death-by-beast to death-by-beheading, thereby showing my merciful nature, though I doubt he'll appreciate the change. If his magic'll glue him back together after his head's been separated from the rest of him, I'd say he'd earned his worthless life."

"But," cried the king, "how then shall my portrait be finished? From his sketch I can see that it will be the best ever made of me, which implies that, spy or no, he's a true artist even as he claims. No, no, no, Jám, you shall not grab him away before he's finished the great work. We owe that to the empire and to posterity!"

Jám chewed his lip, then said: "Could we not leave him here under guard long enough to complete the picture, and then slay him as he deserves?"

Hasselborg said: "Your Supremacy, do you really think a man with my artistic temperament could give his best to his art with a death sentence hanging over him?"

"No, no, I see your point, Master Kavir, and moreover there's the matter of your charge against Jám."

"You're not crediting these fantastic lies?" said the Dasht.

"You'll kindly not interrupt your sovereign. It is a serious matter, Master Kavir, to level such a charge against an anointed Dasht. But despite that, your charge is as well-attested

as his, which is to say not at all. Now, hear my judgment, both of you: You, Kavir bad-Ma'lum, shall remain inviolate at Her-shid until the work is done. After that you may remain in this city, taking the hazard that Jám will return with evidence that would force me to give you to him; or you may leave, and in that case he may have you if he can catch you. You, Jám bad-Koné, abide by these conditions, and no sending of one of your ruffians to extinguish Master Kavir by stealth while he's in my territory. Should anything of that nature befall him, I shall know where to look. Doesn't that seem fair?"

"Then," roared Jám, "there remains but one course. Kavir bad-Matlum or whatever your name is, I declare you maculate knave, thwart pervert, irregular scoundrel, mangy spy, abject coward, slat liar, and miching thief, and challenge you to disprove these assertions with weapons of war upon my person." With which the Dasht pulled off his glove and threw it at Hasselborg.

The king sighed. "I thought I had everything arranged and you do *that*. It is true there are some questions as to whether a person in Master Kavir's station may be compelled to accept a challenge from a gentleman, especially one of your not inconsiderable rank . . ."

"See the case of Yezdan versus Qishtasp only last year," retorted Jám. "A professional artist is considered constructively a gentleman, and so may be challenged."

"Here, here," said Hasselborg. "We do things a little differently in Malayer. Somebody explain. Jám wants to fight me, is that right?"

"And how I do!"

"What happens if I don't feel like fighting?"

"Ha hah!" said Jám. "A thin-livered wretch—didn't I say that? Already he seeks to crawl out. Well sir, in that case we inflict upon you, as stigmata of your cowardice, the five mutilations, beginning with your ears—"

"Never mind the rest. Do I get a choice of weapons?"

"Surely. Any weapon in the approved list: lance, pike, sword, dagger, battle-ax, mace, halberd, gisarme, flail, javelin, longbow, crossbow, sling, or throwing-knife; with or without shield, armored or bare, afoot or mounted. I'll take you on with any combination you care to mention, for you'll be the twelfth to try to stand against me. Twelve's my luck number, you know."

Hasselborg, not thinking it necessary to ask what had be-

come of the other eleven, got out his knuckle-duster and showed it to the king. "Would this be allowed?"

"No, no, no!" said the latter. "Do you think that we're savages from the Koloft Swamps, to pummel each other with fists?"

"Then make it crossbows, unarmored, and afoot," said Hasselborg, who as an expert rifle-shot figured that this weapon would give him the best chance. "You'll have to give me a couple of days to practice up."

"Accepted," said Jám. "A fine brabble it will be, with me the best crossbow hunter in Ruz. Did you see my collection of heads?"

"You mean the ones on spikes over the city gate? Vulgar ostentation, I thought."

"No, fool, the heads of the beasts I've slain. Your Supremacy, let me urge that you set a guard over this scum, lest he steal away in the night."

"Fair enough," said the king. "Master Kavar, bear my royal command: that you move your gear forthwith to this the royal palace. I'll send men to help you move."

Hasselborg mentally added a row of figures to keep himself from making a break for liberty.

Fouri's eyes widened with horror when told what was up, and Hasté seemed mildly distressed.

"A foolish business, dueling," said the priest. "The Council of Mishé condemned it in unequivocal terms. Though we of the cloth have long striven to convince the nobility of its sinful folly, they throw our own astrology back in our teeth, saying: won't the stars grant victory to him whose triumph is foreordained? Discouraging."

When Hasselborg went to his room to pack, Fouri followed him, imperiously telling his pair of guards: "Stand outside the door, churls! I command!"

Either the guards thought better of picking an argument with so domineering a young lady, or they knew her as a privileged character. At any rate, they disappeared. She then threw herself on Hasselborg's neck, crying:

"My hero! My love! Can I do anything to save you?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact you can," he said. "Could you sew a pair of pads into the elbows of the jacket of my old suit?"

"Pads? Sew? What mean you?"

Hasselborg patiently turned the coat inside out and explained what he wanted.

"Oh, I understand now," she said. "I'm a wretched seamstress, but still I'll let no one else do it, for then when you wear this jacket, the occult force of my love will flow through your veins and nerve you to deeds of might."

"That'll be nice," he said, folding his clothes on the bed.

"Oh, it will. And then at last shall I be avenged upon this filthy lown." She stitched away clumsily for a while, then said: "Kavir, why hold you yourself aloof from me? You're colder than the great statue of Qarar in Mishé!"

"Really?"

"Yes, really. Have I not given you all the encouragement a decent maiden can, and more? Look you, Uncle Hasté could join us tonight in a few words, and the king wouldn't ooggle at my accompanying you to your new chamber in his palace. Then whatever ensued, we'd have a sweet memory to carry with us to our graves, be they early or late."

Hasselborg began to worry lest he say "yes" against his better judgment simply to end the argument. When he looked at her it took all his will power not to take her up on her offers; he'd have done so had he been willing to discard his disguise. Of course there was Alexandra, but she was light-years away. And anyway, didn't practice make for proficiency, in this as in other matters? *Tamates!* It wasn't as if he were a kid . . .

He pulled himself together. "I'm grateful for your regard, Fouri, but I don't anticipate an early grave; not this time anyway. Marriage is a serious matter, not to be entered into as a preliminary to a duel . . ."

"Then finish your sewing yourself, and I hope you prick your finger!" She threw the coat, needle and all, at his head, and stamped out, slamming the door.

Smiling wryly with a mixture of amusement, pity, and annoyance at the position in which circumstances had placed him, Victor Hasselborg picked up the jacket, donned his glasses, and began complying with her order. Between Hasté's mercurial and amorous niece and the Lord of Ruz, he knew just how Odysseus felt in trying to steer between Scylla and Charybdis.

She opened the door again and thrust her head back in long enough to say: "When these great stupid spearmen are snoring on either side of you tonight, think on what you're missing!"

Slam!

His move completed, Hasselborg spent a rather dismal evening. The guards whom the king had assigned to him had evidently received orders to stick like leeches. Although he would like to have mingled with the court and found out more about

Zamba and its new rulers, the people proved unexpectedly impervious to the charm he turned on. He wondered if the presence of the guards at his elbow might not dampen conversation, until one of his victims set him right:

"Not that we do not esteem you, Master Kavir, but should you succumb in the forthcoming contest, we'd have likely contracted some of your ill luck by fraternizing with a doomed man."

He retired morosely to his new room. Hasté and Fouri, who had become the courteous hostess again, kept him company for a while, the former seeming distressed in his long-winded and ineffectual way.

"Officially, you understand," said Hasté, "the Established Church discountenances magic. Still, in such a case I might get in touch with one of the local witches, who'll put a spell on the Dasht's bow . . ."

"Go right ahead," said Hasselborg.

"Not that I really believe in witchcraft," continued Hasté, "but one can't deny that strange things do happen, not to be explained by ordinary philosophy, as the prince says in Harian's play . . ."

Finally Hasté had to leave to check some astronomical observations, and took Fouri none too willingly along.

Left alone except for his ubiquitous guards, Hasselborg tried to read a Gozashtando book, but soon gave it up. The curleycues were just too hard to puzzle out, especially since he did not want to betray his ignorance of the written language in front of the guards by using his dictionary. Moreover the work itself, *The Tale of Abbeq and Dángi*, seemed to be an interminable metrical romance, perhaps best comparable to the Earthly epics of Aristo and Vega Carpio.

He tried engaging the guards in conversation, finding them agreeable enough. But he discovered that he had to do most of the talking. He dropped a few broad hints about his escape from the Rosid clink:

". . . you know, I've been lucky in making friends in fixes like that, and happily I've been able to pay them back handsomely. The friend who helped me in Rosid will never want for anything again . . ."

One of the guards said: "Very interesting, sir, but that could never happen here."

"No?"

"No. Our Dour is a shrewd judge of men, most careful to

pick those for his personal guard who can't be bribed or corrupted."

Hell, thought Hasselborg, why did he have to draw a sea-green incorruptible for his watchdog? He asked the other guard:

"Would you agree with that, Chum?"

"Absolutely, sir."

Either he's equally honest, thought Hasselborg, or he's afraid to admit otherwise in front of his pal. If one could get him alone, then maybe . . .

But as time wore on, Hasselborg realized that he could not get either one of them alone, for they were under orders to watch each other as closely as they watched him.

Disgustedly he went to bed, revolving impractical schemes for seducing Fouri, on a promise of marriage, into ordering these guards to look the other way while he bolted. He was still thinking of this matter when he fell asleep.

The next morning Hasselborg went down to the royal armory to borrow a crossbow. He chose one that fitted his length of arm, and whose steel bow was as strong as he could cock with a quick heave of both hands on the string. Then he went out to the exercise ground, where he understood the duel would be held the following morning.

The minute he appeared, an official-looking person rushed up. "Master Kavir, you may not bring that weapon here now!"

"Huh? Why not?" A crowd with their backs to Hasselborg was watching something. Being taller than most of them he soon made out that they were looking at Jám bad-Koné at target-practice.

"Why, the rule! Ever since Sir Gvasten 'accidentally' skewered the Pandr of Lusht with a longbow shaft while they were at friendly practice for their duel, the Dour has forbidden that two gentlemen under challenge should practice here at the same time."

"Okay, suppose you hold the bow until he's finished," said Hasselborg, handing over the weapon.

"Yes, yes, but I dare not let *you* promenade around here while *he's* armed. Don't you comprehend?"

"Oh, I'll be careful not to get close to him." Followed by his guards, Hasselborg strolled over to the crowd and watched quietly for some time before the other spectators became aware of his presence. Thereupon they turned to look at him, and the Dasht, seeing him also, flashed him a rousing sneer over his shoulder and addressed himself again to the target.

The system appeared to be that the duelist had to stand with an uncocked crossbow in his hands and his back to the target. On a signal given by a whistle he snatched a bolt from his belt, cocked his weapon, whirled, and shot. The Dasht's next bolt pierced the man-shaped target in the heart region (that is, the Krishnan heart region, which was more centered than that of Earthmen) adding one more to a sinister constellation of holes in the cloth. Jám was obviously no tyro.

Hasselborg watched the Dasht closely for hints on how to beat this game. He remembered reading a case years before at Harvard Law School on the subject of obsolete laws: about a nineteenth-century Englishman who, losing a lawsuit, challenged his opponent to trial by battle and appeared in the lists on the appointed day with lance and sword, armed cap-a-pie, and then claimed to have won his suit because the other litigant hadn't shown up. The lawyers scurried about frantically and found that the man *had* won his suit, and the Prime Minister had to call a special session of Parliament to abolish trial by battle . . .

After an hour or so the Dasht quit and marched off, followed by the men-at-arms he had brought from Rosid. Several of the local gentry hung around, waiting to see Hasselborg perform.

Hasselborg, however, had no intention of making a fool of himself in front of company. He sat lazily on a bench and engaged his guards in conversation on the technical points of crossbowmanship, on the pretext that:

"We do things differently in Malayer, but perhaps you local guys have better ideas . . ."

Since the incorruptible whom he had approached without success the previous night proved an enthusiast, Hasselborg had merely to feed him occasional questions until the spectators, becoming bored, drifted off.

"Now I'll try a few," said Hasselborg to the man who was now holding his bow. "Remember that they use a different kind of bow in my country, so I shall make a few misses at first."

And a few clean misses he did make. The trouble with this damned thing was that it had no sights, but perhaps that could be remedied.

He asked: "Where can I get a couple of—" he groped for the words "—a couple of pins about so long, with round heads like so?" He indicated something on the order of a corsage pin.

"I can get you such," said the enthusiast, "for my sweetheart is maid to the Lady Mandai. Since I may not leave you, it will take some little time. . ."

Half an hour later Hasselborg had his pins. He firmly pressed one into the wooden stock of the crossbow near the muzzle end, to one side of the bolt-groove. The other he placed into a corresponding position to the rear. Then he made a few more shots, adjusting the pins until, from the official distance, he could make a clean hit by shooting with the heads of the two pins in line with the target.

"By all the gods," said the enthusiast, "what's this our good Master Kavir has done? By the organs of Tyazan, it is surely a new and deadly idea!"

"Oh, that's old stuff where I come from," said Hasselborg.

He was now confident that he could hit the target all right; the problem remained to keep the target from hitting him. Jámb had done all his shooting from an erect position. "Do the rules require you to shoot standing?"

"What other position is there?" said the enthusiast.

The other guard said: "I've seen men shoot kneeling. In truth, the drill master the Dour had before the present one taught his men to sink to one knee to shoot from behind a wall or other obstacle. That was before your time, Ardebil."

Hasselborg asked: "How about the rules?"

"I know of nothing to prevent one from shooting from any position he likes," said the enthusiast. "For all I know, it is legal to charge your foe and smite him on the head with the stock of the bow."

Hasselborg cocked the bow and lay down prone, thankful for the pads in his jacket but also wishing the flagstones of the exercise court were cleaner. His shooting, however, became so good that the guards whistled their appreciation.

The enthusiast said: "It would be a chivalrous thing to warn the Dasht of that which he faces."

"You wouldn't want to spoil his surprise, would you?" said Hasselborg.

Next morning Hasselborg stood on the same flagstones listening to the marshal intone the rules of the contest: "... and at the ends of the court your bows will be handed unto you. You shall stand facing the wall and making no move until the whistle. Then may you fight howsoever you will, and may the stars grant victory to the right."

The marshal was standing in back of a little wooden wall about a meter long and breast high, behind which he could duck if things got too hot. He and the duelists were the only people in the court, though the palace windows which sur-

rounded the court on three sides were full of faces: King Eqrar, High Priest Hasté, Fouri. . .

"Stand back to back," said the marshal. "Now walk to the ends of the court: one . . . two . . . one . . . two . . ."

"Are you ready?"

Hasselborg stood facing the stone wall, gooseflesh on his back. Into this same back he more than half expected Jám to send an iron bolt any second. He was finding a formal duel harder on his iron nerve than he expected. A fight was one thing; he'd been in several on Earth that had been fatal for his antagonist. The first time it had given him the bleeps, but after that he'd taken it as a matter of course. Now the shivery feeling of his first lethal fight had come back. This standing up like a fool and deliberately risking. . .

The whistle blew piercingly. Hasselborg, tensed for action, dropped the nose of his crossbow to the ground, stuck his toe into the stirrup on the end, and heaved on the string. It came back with a faint sound into the notch. He snatched a bolt from his belt, whirled, and threw himself prone on his elbow pads, placed the bolt in its groove, and sighted on his target.

Jám bad-Koné was just sighting along his cocked crossbow as Hasselborg brought the heads of the pins into line with the shiniest of the medals on the chest of the Dasht. Jám seemed to hesitate; raised his head for a second to look at the antagonist who had fallen down without waiting to be hit, then squinted down the stock of his weapon again.

Hasselborg squeezed the trigger. The stock kicked sharply and the bolt flashed away with a hum, rising and falling a few centimeters in its flat trajectory.

Then something exploded in Hasselborg's head, and the light went out.

X

AWARE THAT hands were trying to turn him over, Victor Hasselborg opened his eyes. His head ached frightfully.

"He lives," said one.

"Which can't be said for the other," said somebody else. Their general chatter made a dull roar in Hasselborg's head.

With great effort he pulled himself into a sitting position and felt his head. At least there did not seem to be any fragments of skull grinding together like ice floes in an Arctic storm, though his hand came away bloody. The Dasht's bolt

must have grazed his scalp and carried away his hat, which lay on the stones between him and the wall.

"I'm okay," he said. "Just let me alone a minute." He wanted no Krishnan fingers exploring around the roots of his dyed hair or his glued-on antennae.

"Look!" said a voice, "a new method of sighting a bow, by the stars! Had we such at the battle of Meozid. . ."

". . . by Qondyor, that was not knightly; he should have warned Jám, so that. . ."

". . . has the new Dasht reached his majority?"

Hasselborg realized that the king was looking down at him. He got up, staggered a little, and finally found his balance.

"Yes, sire?" he said.

The king replied: "Damn, damn, master painter, you've riven me of a good vassal, a good stout fellow. Though since it had to be one or the other of you I'm not altogether displeased it was he. While a strong and loyal right arm, there's no denying he was difficult. Yes, difficult. Kidnaping gentlewomen. . . Get you to the surgeon and have your crown patched, and then let's get to the painting again. It had better be good, now. Damn, damn, now I suppose I shall have to attend his funeral; barbaric things, funerals."

"I thank Your Awesomeness, but with my head feeling the way it does I'm afraid the picture would look pretty gruesome. Can't we put off the next sitting for a day at least?"

"No, varlet! When I say I wish it today— but then, perhaps you're right. I shouldn't wish my nose in the picture to wander over my face like the Pichidé River over the Gozash-tando Plain merely because my artist can't see straight. You get patched and rested, and resume your work as soon as you can thereafter. Do not stray from the city, however."

"I don't suppose I need these guards any more, do I?"

"No, no, they're dismissed."

"And d'you mind if—"

"If what? If what?"

"Nothing, Your Supremacy. You've done enough favors already."

He managed a wobbly bow, and the king minced off. Hasselborg had been about to ask to be allowed to move back to Hasté's palace, where the service was better organized, when it occurred to him that he'd be encouraging Fouri to think up some scheme to lure or coerce him into marrying her.

Fouri was gushing over his survival and Hasté was congratulating him in more restrained style when a rough-looking

individual said: "Master Kavir, may I have a word? I'm Ferzao bad-Qé, captain of the late Dasht's personal guard."

When he got Hasselborg aside, the man continued: "Now that the death of the Dasht has canceled our oaths to him, the lads and I wonder what next, d'ye see? The late Dasht was a good fellow, despite being careless with his coin, so that our pay came somewhat irregularly. Now he's gone, his eldest inherits, but he is not yet of age, wherefore his widow's regent. She's a sour wench, as thrifty as the Dasht was liberal, and will no doubt start by letting half of us go and cutting the pay of the rest.

"So we wondered if in accordance with the old custom ye'd like to take us on as your men. We're stout fighters, none fiercer, and if ye but give us the word we'll seize an isle in the Sadabao Sea and make ye a sea king like that fellow on Zamba. What say ye?"

This was a new problem. "How much did the Dasht pay you?" asked Hasselborg.

"Oh, as to that, the amount varied with rank, length of service, and the like. The total came to mayhap forty karda a ten-night."

Not bad for an armed gang, thought Hasselborg, though no doubt he'd find he'd let himself in for a lot of extras as well. Maybe these birds would come in handy, and the money Hasté had given him would pay them for some time even without his sending to Novorecife.

"I'll do it," he said.

As things turned out, not all of Jám's men wanted service under Hasselborg. Only twenty-nine of them when all were counted. Some of the others said they might consider it after they'd returned to Rosid for their former master's funeral. All the better; the money would last even longer.

Hasselborg shut himself up in his room, applied his pills to his headache, and tried to examine his wound. Unfortunately, the latter was on the extreme top of his head where he could not see it with a single mirror. After half an hour's experimenting he rigged up a second mirror so that he could look down on himself.

The gash had stopped bleeding, and the hair around it was thick with dried blood. He washed some of the blood out, cut off some of the hair next to the scalp with the little scissors from his sewing-kit, applied disinfectant, and closed the wound with a small piece of adhesive tape. Not a professional job, but it would have to do.

In the process he noticed that his hair was beginning to show brown at the roots. Therefore, with a small brush, he applied the dye that the barber at Novorecife had sold him, around the edges where the brown showed. The antennae seemed still secure; however, one of the pointed tips of his ears was coming adrift and had to be reglued.

He spent most of the day napping. Then he set out for dinner at Hasté's palace. With some misgivings he had promised the high priest that he would eat with them that night to celebrate his survival. This time, however, he had a legitimate excuse to turn down Hasté's cocktails, saying his head still ached; he'd noticed with alarm that he was actually getting to like these drinks.

"Tell me about Zamba and its new Dour," he asked Hasté.

The priest raised his antennae. "Why are you interested, my son? I should think that having received your fee for Antané's portrait, your curiosity would be satisfied."

"Oh, well. . . I just wondered how Antané got so far in such a short time. He never impressed me that much when I knew him. And what's he going to do next, now that he has his kingdom?"

"As to that, that's as the stars— Yes?"

A younger priest, the one Hasselborg had seen on previous occasions, had just come in to whisper in Hasté's ear. The high priest said: "It is as bad as being a physician. I must go to check the heliacal setting of Ruayord. Tell the cook to hold dinner a few moments, will you Fouri?"

When her uncle had gone, Fouri leaned towards Hasselborg and looked at him out of her fathomless green slanting eyes. "I could tell you news of Zamba. My gossips at the Dour's palace fill my ears with it."

"What is it?"

She smiled. "I but said I could tell, not that I would."

"What d'you mean?" Of course he knew well enough. Oh, boy, here we go again!

"This: that I could be a valuable helpmeet to one like yourself, but see no point in throwing away my favor to one who'll merely say 'thank you' and ride off and think no more of Fouri."

"How do I know your gossip's as valuable as all that?" he said.

"Trust my word. I have news of import about King Antané."

Hasselborg shook his head. "I'm afraid I can't trade my beautiful alabaster body for any secret sight unseen." Seeing

her look of pain, he added: "Of course I am fond of you in a way, and if your news were important it might help me to make up my mind about other things."

"*Chá!* Let's not spar with wooden swords any longer. Will you promise, if it does in truth prove important, to wed me instantly, by the rites of the Established Church?"

"No."

"Oh, you wretched man! So I'm to give you all I know and mayhap you'll consider what to do next, as if that were a great kindness! Am I so ugly? Am I so cold? Do I come of such base antecedents? What is it you wish, a trial night? If so you shall have it!"

"No."

"And why not?"

"Matter of principle."

"Principle! Curse your principles! What be you, a priest of the Kangandite cult, sworn to celibacy?" She strode up and down in agitation, storming: "I should hire a bravo to put steel through your gullet, to see if you'd bleed or merely run ink from the wound! Never have I known such a man! One would think you maimed and so disqualified—hold, there's an idea! Are you?"

"No." Hasselborg found himself disliking this scene more and more. He fought down a temptation either to break off their equivocal relationship finally, or else to accept her offer. He was too humane to enjoy torturing a beautiful high-spirited creature like this to extract information.

"What then?" she said.

"What I've told you. I'd love to hear your news, and the more you help me the more grateful I'll be. But I absolutely won't promise to marry you. Not at this stage, anyway."

She stood breathing hard. "Look you. I'll tell you what I hear. Then do as you like: go where you will, cast me aside, revile and beat me if you will. I'll ask nothing of you, save that you believe that I truly love you and wish you well."

"Okay, I'll believe that. And I won't say I mightn't feel the same—some day. But what's the news?"

"This: King Antané and his queen sail from Zamba for Majbur any day."

Hasselborg sat up sharply. "What for?"

"That I know not, nor my informant. Antané comes sometimes to Majbur to buy, both for himself and for his kingdom, or to talk trade with the syndics of the Free City. For all I

know his present visit's of that kind. But don't you see the true weight of what I've told you?"

"How?"

"Why, if you'd accost this sea king with whatever mysterious business you have with him, and him unwilling, you'd have to pick a time when he's ashore. On his island you could never draw near without his leave, for his galleys command the seas thereabouts. Now do you see?"

"I do, and thanks a lot. The next problem is, how am I to get away from Hershid without having King Eqrar get sore and send his army after me?"

Fouri thought an instant and said: "Perhaps I could persuade him. The old *baghan* likes me well, though he cares not overmuch for my uncle. I don't know if he would or wouldn't listen. Were he younger I might try the lure of the flesh, but he's past responding to that. Moreover his wife rules him with as heavy a thumb as that with which he rules Gozash-tand. Could I prevail upon him, would you change your mind?"

Hasselborg grinned. "No, darling. You're a most persistent young person, aren't you?"

"No joking matter! Don't you see that you're tearing my liver in shreds? Oh, Kavir, I always dreamed of a man like you. . ." And she began to weep.

Hasselborg comforted her as best he could, then said: "Pull yourself together. I think I hear your uncle coming back."

In an instant she was the solemnly courteous hostess again. Hasselborg thought, whatever Krishnan finally joins his lot with hers will certainly never have a dull moment.

Next morning Hasselborg went to the king saying: "May it please Your Awesomeness, my headache's gone."

"So? Good! Excellent! Then we'll resume the sittings at once. I have an hour this afternoon—"

"Just a minute, Sire! I was about to say that, while my, headache's gone, I find that my artistic temperament has been so shaken by this duel that I couldn't possibly do good work until my nerves quiet down."

"And when will that be?"

"I don't know for sure; it was my first duel, you know."

"You are fooling? You handled yourself well."

"Thanks. But as I was saying, I'd guess I shall be ready to paint again in less than a ten-night."

"Hmp. Well, well, if that's the way of it, I suppose I shall

have to let you hang around ogling the ladies until Your Altitude makes up your mind, or whatever an artist has in lieu of a mind. Most unsatisfactory people, artists. Most unsatisfactory. Can't depend on them. You're like old Hasté, ever promising but never delivering."

"Ahem. I'm sorry if I make Your Awesomeness impatient, but we're dealing with one of those divine gifts that can't be forced. Anyway, aren't you leaving soon for Jám's funeral?"

"That is true; I shall be out of Hershid for some days."

"All right then. In the meantime I'd like permission to take a little vacation away from Hershid too."

"Where away from Hershid?" said Eqrar with a suspicious look.

"Well—I was thinking of running down to Majbur for a day or two. Change of scene, you know."

"No, I do not know. You painters are really intolerable! Here I give you a good fat commission, and anybody would agree that I am a good subject, and the prestige of having painted me alone would be worth your time. I don't even bring a charge of homicide against you when you slay one of my retainers in a fight. And what do you? Excuses, procrastinations, evasion. I'll not have it! Sir, consider yourself—no, wait. Why don't you come to Rosid with me? We might get some painting done on the route."

"Oh, Sire! In the first place Jám's funeral would shatter my nerves utterly; and in the second I hardly think his people would consider me a welcome guest."

"True, true. Well, if I let you go to Majbur, how do I know it is not an excuse to get out of my jurisdiction and flee, leaving me with nothing but a charcoal sketch for my trouble?"

"That's easy, sir. I'm leaving a good-sized sum of money here, and also that gang of Jám's men who signed up to work for me. There's also the little matter of my bill for this painting I'm working on now. You don't think I'd abandon valuable assets like that, do you?"

"I suppose not. Go on your silly trip, then, and may the gods help you if you don't come back as promised!"

"Could you give me an introduction to somebody there? Your ambassador, say?"

"I have a resident commissioner in the Free City. Naen, write this worthless artist a note to Gorbovast, will you? I'll sign it here and now."

This time Hasselborg took pains to stand in front of the secretary's desk as the latter wrote, and to try to read the

letter upside down. If written Gozashtandou was hard to read right side up, it was worse inverted. Still, the message seemed straightforward enough, with no deadly words like "spy."

The Krishnan noon found Victor Hasselborg trotting his buggy briskly down the road towards the Free City of Majbur. He hadn't even said good-bye to Fouri. He had sent one of his men to Hasté's palace with a message instead, not wanting another scene or a demand that he take her along. Let sleeping eshuna lie.

He had also been strongly tempted to take one of these burly ruffians with him, but had given up the idea. Traveling with a Krishnan would almost certainly result in his learning that Hasselborg was an Earthman.

He passed the usual road traffic; overtook and passed the daily train from Hershid to Qadr. It comprised five little cars, three passenger and two freight, pulled along by a bishtar shuffling between the rails. A couple of young Krishnans in one of the passenger cars waved at him, just as children did on Earth. He waved back, feeling, for the first time since his arrival, homesick. Dearest Alexandra. . . He got out her handkerchief and looked forlornly at it.

He arrived at the village of Qadr the evening of his second day on the road. As the last ferry boat for Majbur had already left, he spent the night without incident in Qadr, and took the first boat across next morning. It was a big barge, rowed by a dozen oarsmen manning long sweeps, and helped along by two triangular lateen sails bellying in the westerly breeze. The low shores of the mouth of the Pichidé fell away to nothing, leaving the Sadabao Sea sparkling in the rising sun.

A war galley, with catapults in its bows, went past, oars thumping in their oarlocks; off to port a fat merchantman was trying to beat into the harbor against the wind. The latter vessel was having a hard time. At the end of each reach, the ship wore round like a square-rigger instead of tacking. Meanwhile it dipped the high ends of the lateen yards and raising the low ends to reverse the set of the yellow sails. During this complicated process the ship lost almost as much distance drifting down-wind as she had previously gained by running close-hauled.

Hasselborg thought: Why doesn't one of our people show them how to rig a proper fore-and-aft sail? Then he remembered the Interplanetary Council rule. His attention, however, was demanded elsewhere. A Krishnan objected loudly

when Hasselborg's aya snaffled one of the fruits he was bringing into Majbur. Hasselborg had to buy a whole basketful to pacify the man.

Gorbovast, the resident commissioner, was helpful in such essentials as recommending places for Hasselborg to stay and to amuse himself. While the commissioner did not actually say so, Hasselborg got the impression that some of the amusements of this famous seaport were distinctly on the rugged side, like those of Shanghai and Marseilles on Earth. The commissioner's description of the city's bathing beach tempted him until he remembered the little matter of species. He was, therefore, compelled to display a nineteenth century modesty in the presence of Krishnans.

Unfortunately, Hasselborg could not very well ask the fellow outright about the expected visit of the King of Zamba. He was no longer supposed to be interested in such matters, and the commissioner would report any unseemly curiosity back to his boss.

Since the Krishnans, unlike most intelligent extra-terrestrials, had a highly developed system of public eating and drinking houses, there was nothing for him to do but brace himself for the ordeal of a waterfront pub-crawl. He'd done it before; you go into the first grog shop, order one, strike up a conversation with the first fellow customer who looks as if he had one braincell to rub against another, and get him talking. If he proves an empty sack, you go on to the next. Hasselborg had nearly always, at least in the smaller cities, been able to get a line on what he wanted to know by this method, though it sometimes took days and was hard on his delicately conditioned stomach. Furthermore, it always filled him with morbid fears of picking up an infection.

Thus evening found him down Majbur's waterfront. He had already toured half the area and was feeling poorly both in the head and in the digestive system. He was about to pump his twenty-second sucker. Some of the tougher characters had looked at him speculatively, but so far the combination of his powerful build and conspicuous sword had discouraged hostilities.

His present victim, a sailor from the far island of Sotaspé with the quaint name of Morbid, bid fair to prove an empty sack. The man was one who could take but little liquor, and he had already had that and wanted to sing the songs of his childhood. He sang in a dialect that Hasselborg could follow

only half the time. Hasselborg began to cast about for means of escape.

The other end of the bench had another pair in close conversation. One, facing Hasselborg, was a rustic-looking character who was talking slowly and with great emphasis to a bulky fellow with his back to Hasselborg.

The bulky fellow looked around, and Hasselborg spilled a drop of his kvad with surprise. It was K. Yano.

XI

"EXCUSE ME, CHUM," said Hasselborg to his companion. "I see an old friend."

He walked down the length of the bench and placed a hand gently on Yano's shoulder, saying: "How are you?"

Yano turned his head with a slight smile and no sign of surprise. "I'm fine," he replied in English, then switched back to Gozashtandou: "Fancy meeting you here! Sanándaj, this is my old friend—ah—my old friend—"

"Kavir bad-Ma'lum," said Hasselborg.

"Of course. Sanándaj has been telling me about almanacs. Most fascinating business." He tipped a wink at Hasselborg. "I wondered how long it would take you to notice me. How about your friend, the sailor?"

"He sings."

"Indeed? Then we must introduce them. Master Sanándaj can tell the mariner about almanacs while the latter sings. Most jolly arrangement."

"Okay, Ohoy there, Morbid!" Hasselborg dragged the more or less unwilling sailor down and set him to singing to Yano's friend, who kept right on talking almanacs, trying to shout down his new acquaintance. Under cover of the resulting racket Hasselborg asked Yano:

"What name are you going by?"

"Just Yano; it is close enough to one of theirs. Now, tell me of your adventures."

"Not just yet. Suppose you tell me of yours. This is a hell of a funny way to investigate economic conditions with a view to arranging high-grade imports and exports, isn't it?"

"A little unusual, perhaps."

"Damned right, chum. You're no more an economic official than I am; you're a cop."

Yano smiled. "*Sô desu?*"

"*Perfeitamente*. Now, I think we can do each other more good by working together than separately."

"So? What do you propose?"

"A general laying of cards on the table. Do you follow me?"

"Very interesting idea."

"Oh, I know, you're wondering how you can be sure I'm honest, and how can I be sure you are, and so on. Do you know my mission?"

"No. You never told me."

"Well then, I'll tell you, and you can decide whether it's worth your while to be equally frank. I don't think you'll have any motive for putting a spoke in my wheel, and I trust I'll feel the same way about you." Hasselborg went on to tell of the pursuit of the truant Julnar Batruni.

Yano looked really surprised when he had finished, saying: "You mean this man sends you off on this great expensive dangerous trip merely for petty personal motives?"

"If you call wanting to get his daughter back a petty personal motive, yes."

"But—but that is sheer romanticism! And I thought all the time you were involved in some profound matter of interplanetary intrigue; something to do with government policies and interstellar relations! Now turns out nothing but pursuit of runaway young woman!" He shook his head. "I think you have converted me to socialism, Master Kavar."

"Okay, but how about your opening up with me? I may need help on my project and I can't hire a local yokel for reasons you can guess. Maybe you're in the same fix. How about it, huh?"

Yano thought a while, then said: "I—ah—I think maybe you have reason, so here goes. I'm an agent for SNER with special commission from World Federation. I started out to try trace a shipment of fifty machine guns consigned from a factory in Detroit to my government for their security police. These guns start out all right but don't arrive.

"Now, economically speaking fifty machine guns are nothing at all to big government, but still nobody likes to have stolen guns floating around in hands of the criminal class. So, they put Yano on job. Trail leads first to gangsters in Seoul, who keep only twenty-six guns and pass the other twenty-four on to an official of *Viagens Interplanetarias*.

"Things are obviously getting beyond national scope, so my government gets me a special commission from W F to run down missing guns. I find they've been brought to Krishna,

to be smuggled out of Novorecife for delivery to some local potentate. The local potentate will use them to conquer the planet, or at least as much of it as can manage."

"Who was to do the smuggling out of Novorecife?" asked Hasselborg.

"Don't know. Somebody on the inside, no doubt."

Hasselborg nodded. "But who gets the guns? Don't tell me, let me guess. Anthony Fallon, right?"

"Right again."

Hasselborg lit a cigar. "Have one? No wonder I ran into you here. It seemed too good for a coincidence, but with you on the track of Tony's guns, and me after his girl, our paths were bound to cross. Where are the guns now?"

Yano shrugged. "Wish I knew. I heard a story that a mysterious crate been hidden in the Koloft Swamp by one of gangs of robbers that live there, but was no way for me to find them. Swamp not only big, but full of unpleasant monsters too. However, since I felt sure they'd be delivered to Majbur for Fallon to pick them up, I came here to try intercept them. Been here days, checking boats and rafts that come down the river and trying to pick up a lead in bars and restaurants."

Hasselborg said: "I may be able to help you there," and told the rumor of Fallon's impending arrival in Majbur. "I imagine whoever's in charge of the guns will arrange to have them here when Fallon arrives."

"I imagine too. What connections you got in Majbur?"

"King Eqrar gave me a letter to his envoy, Gorbovast."

"Good. Can you ask Gorbovast when Fallon is expected?"

"Not very well; I'm supposed to be here on a short vacation and not to be interested in Fallon, and I suppose old Eqrar will check up on me through Gorbovast. Could you?"

"Maybe. I am friend of chief of syndic, who know Gorbovast; maybe the syndic knows. We see."

The following afternoon Yano came upon Hasselborg sitting on the biggest pier and giving a convincing imitation of a congenital loafer. Yano said:

"The syndic say Fallon due to arrive tomorrow night or early next day. Guns *must* arrive soon. Are you sure nothing's come in this morning?"

"Not a thing except a towboat with two passengers and no freight at all, and a timber raft from way up-river with nothing on it except a stove and a tent for the raftman. *Tamates*,

haven't we forgotten about Qadr? Aren't there piers over there?"

"Yes, but they're only used for fishing boats and such. All big commercial traffic uses this side."

"Well, mightn't our mysterious friends be landing in Qadr for just that reason?"

"Maybe, now that you mention it. What shall we do about it?"

"Suppose you take over here, and I'll go across the river and look around."

"All right."

It transpired that the ferry was across the river and would not return for another hour. Hasselborg killed time by strolling about the piers and through nearby streets to orient himself, and by pumping another sucker in a bar. Another empty sack. Fortunately, impatience was not prominent among Hasselborg's vices.

When he returned to the ferry pier, it was to find a crowd watching the efforts of a crew, in the uniform of railroad employees, trying to keep a bishtar calm. The ferry was unloading. The spectators watched with a mixture of curiosity and apprehension, holding themselves poised for flight in case the huge animal got out of control.

When the last wagon had rumbled off and the sails had been furled and re-set, the ferry master signaled that the ship was ready to be boarded. Some of those who had been intending to do so, seeing that they were to share the craft with the bishtar, changed their minds. Others got on, but huddled in the corners of the vessel, leaving as large a clear space as possible for the monster.

The bishtar, under the urging of its keepers, put out a foot and gingerly tried the deck of the ferry. Apparently not liking the yielding sensation, it shied back. The men yelled and whacked it with sticks and pulled on goads which they hooked into its thick hide. The bishtar squealed angrily and rolled ugly little eyes this way and that, but finally let itself be driven aboard, one foot after another. The ferry settled visibly as it took the weight.

Then the sailors cast off the lines and pushed off the poles. The oarsmen ran out their sweeps and set to their task, backing out from the pier and turning the scow-like vessel towards Qadr, and grunting with every heave. As they came about, the sailors shook out the sails, and the flapping startled the bishtar. The animal set up an ominous squealing, swinging its

head from side to side, shifting its feet, and lashing the air with its trunks.

Hasselborg had stood on the wales, holding a stay, where he could leap ashore at the last minute if the animal ran amok. While wondering what all this confusion portended, he noticed a bulge in one of his pockets and remembered that he still had one of the fruits he had bought on the ferry the day before. Some he had eaten, some he had fed to Avvau, and the rest he had stowed in his pockets this morning for lunch. Now one was left, a thing that looked like a tangerine but tasted quite different.

Hasselborg stepped near the bishtar's head and called up to the mahout on its neck: *Ohé*, there, will he eat this if I give it to him?

"Yes, sir, that she will," the man said.

Hasselborg extended the fruit in gingerly fashion, fatalistically half expecting the beast to grab his arm in a trunk and beat him to bits against the nearest mast, like a permissively-reared child venting its temper on a doll. However the bishtar, after a wary look, put out a trunk and delicately took the fruit. Chomp. Then it stood quietly wagging its ears, since the sails, having filled, were no longer flapping.

"Thank ye, sir," said the mahout.

"No trouble. What's she being taken over for?"

"That I don't know. They do say we're to run a double-header to Hershid tomorrow, or perhaps the next day."

"A big load?"

"So I suppose. If ye'd really like to know, ask the station agent in Qadr."

Hm, thought Hasselborg, this might bear looking into. So far he and Yano had assumed that Fallon would simply come into Majbur in one of his ships, take delivery on his guns, and sail away again to Zamba unless stopped. Could it be that he was planning a lightning descent on Hershid to seize the whole Empire of Gozashtand? It was a little odd for an invading army to come in on the daily train. Come to think of it, however, Fallon's men would be sailors. They would, therefore, be as out of place on an aya or shomal as a horse on the top of a house. Moreover such a sudden move by Fallon, outpacing even the rumor of his coming, would catch the Dour entirely unprepared.

A fishy smell announced that they were drawing near to Qadr. When they docked at the ferry-pier, Fallon watched the railroad men get the bishtar in motion again. The animal got

off with much more alacrity than it had shown on the other side and lumbered up the main street, while small tame eshuna ran out of the sagging shacks that lined the street to yowl at it.

Hasselborg, after pleasantly greeting the Dour's frontier guards who loafed on the pier, followed the bishtar, his boots sinking in the mud, to the railroad yard. Here he loafed around the station, smoking, until nobody would take him for an importunate inquirer. Finally he got into conversation with the station agent and said:

"That bishtar you fellows brought over on the ferry this afternoon nearly scared the daylight out of the passengers. She doesn't like boats."

"No, that's the truth, they don't," said the agent. "But with the river so wide here we can't build a bridge, so we must use the ferry to move bishtars and rolling-stock between Majbur and Qadr."

"Are you planning to run some big train soon?"

"So they tell us. Somebody's coming in with a whole great crew of men to take to Hershid. Yesterday a man comes up to buy twenty-six tickets in advance. Who he is I don't know; however, since he had the gold, we've no choice but to get ready."

They were still engaged in small talk when Hasselborg heard the warning bell from the ferry. Knowing that this was the last trip that day, he had to run to be on time, arriving just as the lines were being cast off.

He leaped the two-meter space between the barge and the pier and sat down to puff. Damn, he hadn't had time to snoop around for the guns, though this news about twenty-six tickets for Hershid was probably more urgent.

Yano seemed to think so too. "Nothing has come, sir. One large towboat with some baggage aboard, but nothing that could hold machine guns."

"There's no other way from the Koloft Swamp to Majbur?"

"Are roads from the swamp to Mishé. One runs straight south from Novorecife and the other from village of Qou at edge of the swamp. So you could take these guns to Mishé and then by big highway from there to Majbur. I think that unlikely, because it's more roundabout, and also the Order of Qarar polices Republic of Mikardand very thorough. So chances of getting them through would be less."

"It'll be dinner time soon," said Hasselborg, looking at another stunning Krishnan sunset.

"Do you want to go eat while I watch river, and then take my place?"

"Okay—say, what's that?"

Up-river, its one lateen sail black against the sunset, a boat was approaching. Yano following Hasselborg's gaze, reached out and gave his companion's wrist a quick squeeze of warning. "It's a type of boat I saw used around Qou," he murmured.

As the boat came closer, it resolved into a kind of wherry with a single mast stepped in the bow and eight or ten oars on a side.

"Better get back a little from the end of the pier," muttered Hasselborg.

"Yes, you take base of this pier; I take base of second pier up," said Yano. "You got a cigar? I'm all out."

Hasselborg yawned, stretched, and sauntered back towards shore, to resume his loafing against a warehouse wall. Yano departed up-river.

Hasselborg watched the boat with ostentatious lack of interest. Between the current, the breeze, and the efforts of the oarsmen the boat soon arrived off their section of the waterfront. Down came the sail with a rattle of blocks, and the boat crawled toward shore under oar power alone. The crew were tough-looking types, and in front of the tillerman in the stern sheets lay a large packing case.

The boat was pulling into the dock that Yano had chosen to watch. Hasselborg strolled in that direction as the boat tied up and the crew manhandled the case ashore. Nobody paid them any heed as they rigged a sling with two carrying-poles through the loops. Two of the men got under each end of each pole, put pads on their shoulders, and hoisted the case into the air with a simultaneous grunt. The eight carriers set off briskly towards the base of the pier, the case bobbing slightly and the ropes creaking with every step. Two others of the crew went with them, while the rest sat on the pier, smoked, and waited.

Yano followed the shore party, and Hasselborg followed a little behind Yano. After a couple of turns in the narrow streets, the bearers stopped at the door of a large building with windows that were set high up. Yano kept right on walking past the men, while Hasselborg became interested in the creatures displayed in the window of a wholesale seafood establishment. Through the wobbly Krishnan glass, the things seemed even odder than they were.

The man who had held the tiller plied the big iron knocker

on the door of the house. Presently the door opened. There was a conversation, inaudible from where Hasselborg stood, and the bearers took up their burden and marched into the house. Slam!

After a while they came out again; or rather, nine of the ten came out. Hasselborg kept his eyes glued to the sea food. He appeared to be fascinated by a thing that seemed to combine the less attractive features of a lobster, an octopus, and a centipede, as the men walked past behind him. He drew a long breath of relief when they went by without trying to stab him in the back.

Yano popped out of the alley into which he had slipped and came towards Hasselborg, saying: "I looked around back of building. No windows on ground floor."

"Then how do we get in?"

"There's one window a little way up. Maybe two and a half meters. If we had something to stand on, could get in."

"If we had a ladder—and a crow."

"A crow? Bird?"

"No, a pry-bar—you know, a jimmy."

"Oh, you mean one of those iron things with hook on the end?"

"Uh-huh. I don't know what they call it in Gozashtandou."

"Neither do I, but can do lots with sign language. One of us must go buy while other one watches."

"Hm," said Hasselborg. "I suppose whatever they have in the way of hardware stores are closed up by now."

"Maybe some open. Majbur keeps very late hours."

"Okay, d'you want me to hunt while you watch? My legs are longer than yours."

"Thanks, but better you watch while I hunt. You got sword and know how to use. I don't."

Hasselborg, forbearing to argue, took up his post while Yano toddled off on his short legs. The polychrome lights faded from the sky and all three of the moons cast pyramidal shadows into the narrow smelly streets. People passed occasionally, sometimes leading beasts of burden. A man whom Hasselborg did not recognize—not one of the boatmen, surely—came out of the building and pushed off on a scooter. Hasselborg was just wondering whether to give his second cigar one more puff or put it out when Yano reappeared lugging a short ladder.

"Here," said Yano, thrusting a pry-bar with a hooked end into Hasselborg's hand.

They glanced about. As nobody seemed to be in sight at the moment, they slipped into the alley that led to the rear of the warehouse.

Yano had neglected to state that the medium-low window opened on a little court or backyard isolated by a substantial wall with spikes along the top. That, however, represented only a momentary check. They set the ladder against the wall, swarmed up it, and balanced themselves on top. While hauling the ladder up after them, they planted it on the ground on the opposite side. Then down again; then to put the ladder against the wall of the warehouse itself.

Hasselborg mounted the ladder first. He attacked the window—a casement-type affair with many little diamond-shaped panes—with the bar. Since he was an old hand at breaking and entering, the window presently opened with a slight crunching of splintered wood. He stuck his head inside.

Narrow beams of moonlight slanted in through the high windows, and faint light reflected from a candle somewhere on the other side of the structure. He could see the tops of what looked like acres of bales, crates, and boxes. There was no movement; no sound.

Hasselborg whispered to Yano: "I think we can get down to the floor level from here without hauling the ladder in. I'm going to drop down inside and scout around. If I find it's okay, I'll tell you to come down after me. If not, I'll ask you to hand me down the ladder, so we'll have a way out. Got my sword? Okay, here goes."

And Victor Hasselborg slid off the window sill into the darkness inside.

XII

AS HASSELBORG'S TOES struck the wooden top of the nearest packing case, he thanked the local gods for the soft-leather Krishnan boots that let him alight silently. The window sill was about the height of his chin, and he was sure he would be able to get out without much trouble. He stalked cat-like around the top of the case, looking carefully around. Da'vi was still with him, for he spied an easy route that led down past a series of crates and piles of sacks of diminishing heights.

"Yanol!" he whispered. "It's okay. We can leave the ladder where it is. Hand me my sword."

Yano's bulk blocked the dim light through the window as he heaved himself over the sill with surprising quietness for

one of his build. Together they stole down the piles of merchandise to the floor and walked stealthily towards the candle-light. Twice they got lost in the maze of aisles between the rows of crates. Finally, they came to the corner of the building where the candle was located.

Looking around the corner of a pile of bags, Hasselborg saw a little cleared space, with a desk and a chair, and the candle burning in a holder on a shelf. Just outside the cleared space stood the packing case they were after. And, in the angle between the case and the wall, a man sat with legs asprawl, sleeping. He was one of the boat-crew.

As Hasselborg moved to get a better view, his scabbard struck against the merchandise and gave forth a faint *tink*. Instantly the man's eyes opened. For two seconds those eyes wavered before coming to rest on Hasselborg and his companion.

The man bounded to his feet, holding a scimitar that had lain on the floor beside him, and sprang toward the intruders. Hasselborg jumped away from the crates to get elbowroom and drew his sword. The man, however, went toward Yano. The curved blade swished through the air and met the pry-bar with a clank.

Hasselborg stepped towards them and cut at the man, who saw him coming and skipped away before the blow arrived. Then he came back again, light and fast, cutting right and left. Hasselborg parried as best he could, wishing he were an experienced swordsman so that he could skewer this slasher . . . *Clong, dzing, thump!* Yano had stepped behind the man and conked him with the crow. The man's saber clanged to the floor and the man followed it, falling to hands and knees.

He shook his head, then reached for his sword.

"No you don't!" said Hasselborg. In his excitement he spoke English. But nevertheless he got his meaning across by whacking the outstretched hand with the flat of his blade.

"*Ao!*" cried the man, nursing his knuckles.

"Shut up and back up," said Hasselborg, remembering his Gozashtandou.

The man started to comply, but Yano landed heavily on his back, flattening him out, and twisted his arms behind him.

"*Amigo,*" said the Asiatic, "cut length of rope off one of these bales and give it to me."

Hasselborg did so, wondering if there weren't some easier way of making a living. While during hot action he never had time to be afraid, it gave him a queasy feeling when he came

to reckon up the odds afterwards. When the man's wrists and ankles had been secured, they rolled him over and shoved him roughly back against the wall.

"Like to live?" asked Hasselborg, holding his point under the man's chin.

"Of course. Who are you—thieves? I only guard the goods while—"

"Pipe down. Answer our questions, and in a low voice, or else. You're one of those who came down in the boat from Koloft, aren't you?"

"Aye."

"Wait," said Yano. "What's become of the regular watchman?"

"Gone harloting. There's a place near here he's long craved to visit, but can't because their working hours are the same as his. Since I was to stay the night anyway, I told him to take himself off while I watched."

Yano looked at Hasselborg, who nodded confirmation, saying: "I saw the man leave this building while I was waiting for you." Hasselborg then asked the riverman: "Where's the rest of your boatload?"

"Out on the town, even as the watchman, may Dupulán rot his soul!"

"When do they shove off?"

"Tomorrow, as soon after sunrise as their night's joys'll let 'em."

"D'you know whom this box is for?"

"The Dour of Zamba, so they say."

"Do you know this Dour? Have you ever seen him?"

"No, not I."

"When's he due in Majbur?"

"Tomorrow before sunset."

Yano interposed: "Whom did you get this box from in the first place?"

"Earthman at Novorecife."

"What Earthman?"

"I—up—do know not his name; some unpronounceable Ter-ran—"

"You'd better remember," said Hasselborg, pricking the man's skin with his point. "I'm going to shove—"

"I know! I remember! It was Master Julio Góis! Take away your sticker!"

Hasselborg whistled. "No wonder he tried to have me bumped off!"

"What's this?" asked Yano.

Hasselborg told of his experiences with the Dasht of Ruz.

"Of course!" said Yano. "Think I know. He didn't believe your story about Miss Batruni and took you for a man after the guns. I wouldn't have believed it myself."

"But why should Góis go in for a smuggling scheme of this kind? What would he stand to gain from it?"

"No need for material gain. He's—ah—fanatic about progress."

"So that's why he said that no matter what happened, always to remember that he esteemed me! The twerp liked me well enough as a man, but since I threatened his world-changing scheme, as he thought, I'd have to be liquidated."

"Undoubtedly." Yano turned back to the prisoner and began to speak Gozashtandou. He asked for more details. The few he got, however, were not such as to change the general outlines of what they already knew.

"I think you've pumped our friend dry," said Hasselborg at last. "Let's have a look at the crate."

With the pry-bar they soon ripped the crate open. Inside, ranged in a double row in a rack, were twenty-four well-greased Colt-Thomps on 6.5-millimeter light machine rifles. A compartment at the bottom of the crate held thousands of rounds of ammunition.

Hasselborg took one gun out and hefted its four kilos of weight. "Just look at these little beauties! You can adjust them for any reasonable rate of automatic or semi-automatic fire; you can set this doohickus to fire in bursts of two to ten shots . . . with one of these and plenty of ammunition I'd take on a whole Krishnan army."

"No doubt what friend Fallon has in mind," said Yano. "Now that we got them, what shall we do with?"

"I was wondering myself. I suppose we could tote them an armful at a time down to the river and dump them in."

"That would fix Fallon's plans, all right, but then where would evidence be?"

"What evidence?"

"Evidence against smuggling ring. I don't care much about King Antané. Lots of disguised Earthmen adventuring around Krishna, and if we get rid of him there will just be another soon. Main thing is to bust up gang inside *Viagens Interplanetarias*."

"Let me think," said Hasselborg. "By the way, now that we've drained this gloop, what'll we do with him? While we

can't very well let him go, I don't like to kill the guy in cold blood."

"Why not? Oh, excuse, I forget you're an Anglo-Saxon. If not kill him, then what?"

Hasselborg felt in his pockets. "I think I've got it. Where's a pitcher and a glass?" He rummaged until he found a brass carafe and mug.

"What are you doing?" asked Yano.

"See this? It's a trance pill that'll lay him out cold for a couple of weeks."

"I don't see how Novorecife authorities let you take that out."

Hasselborg grinned. "This is one they didn't know about. Or rather they thought it was an ordinary longevity pill. You might say it is, in a way, since I'll have a better chance of a long life on account of it."

"What are you going to do?"

"Knock him out, move the crates around to make a hiding place, and leave him there with enough air to keep him alive till he wakes up. In this mare's nest we can hide him so it'll take a month to find him."

"All very well, but what when watchman come back? And what about the guns?"

Hasselborg had set down his water and was toying with the machine gun, working the bolt and squinting along the sights. He was careful to keep the muzzle pointed away from the others.

"Let's see . . ." he said. "I used to be able to strip and assemble these blindfolded." He unscrewed a wing-nut and took out the bolt mechanism. "As I recall, one of the tricks they played on us in the Division of Investigation was to wait till we had the parts all laid out, then steal the firing-pin while we were sitting there blind, and hope we'd put the gun back together without it. Maybe we could—"

"Take out firing-pins—" said Yano.

"And reassemble the guns—"

"—and let Fallon pick up guns—"

"—while I tear back to Hershid and get my private army!"

Hasselborg and Yano slapped each other's backs in sudden enthusiasm. Then the former said:

"But still we haven't disposed of the janitor. When he comes back and finds nobody—"

"He'll think his companion went off for fun too, yes?"

"Maybe . . ."

"I know," said Yano. "We put this man to sleep, disarm the guns, nail crate back together. Then I disguise myself with this man's hat and sword like member of the boat crew. I look more like Krishnan than you. I tell watchman I'm member of the boat crew who relieved this man during night so he can have fun too. Then I leave in morning, saying I got to catch boat back to Koloft. Really I hang around to make sure Fallon get the guns. Meantime you take your buggy and ride back to Hershid like you said, catch Fallon, and turn him over to me."

"Yeah, but when the boat crew find a man missing . . ."

Yano shrugged. "We hope they think he got lost in a bordello and go off without. I'll be ready to duck if they come around looking for him anyway."

Hasselborg looked at his machine gun with narrowed eyes. "Yano, how badly do you want Fallon?"

"Ah—so-so. Don't care much so long as I get Góis and other *Viagens* conspirators. I suppose since Fallon conspired to break regulations I should bring him in too. Why?"

"I was thinking that my need may be greater than yours."

"How so?"

"I'm supposed to bring Miss Batruni back to Earth. Now, I can't drag her aboard a spaceship; the minute I get her inside the wall at Novorecife she'll be under Earthly law."

"Yes?"

"If you did bring Fallon in to Novorecife, what would happen then?"

"I'd present evidence at preliminary hearing before Judge Keshavachandra, who would order a trial. If he's convicted, go to jail. That's all."

"He'd be tried on Krishna?" said Hasselborg.

"Yes."

"How about appeals?"

"Interstellar Circuit Court of Appeals take care of that. Visit Krishna every couple years to hear appeals. What are you getting at?"

"I wondered if there were any way of having him tried on Earth. You see, if he were dragged back to Earth, Julnar Batruni would probably come back to Earth without urging. Follow me?"

"No chance. Fallon's offenses were all committed on Krishna."

"In that case, chum, I think I do need him more than you do. You see I'll need some hold on Miss Batruni, and at the

moment I can't think of a better one than to leave Fallon under duress here."

"Oh. Wouldn't that get you in trouble with Earthly law, being accessory to false imprisonment or something?"

"No, it wouldn't, since the imprisonment would be on Krishna outside of Novorecife. If this were a planet with extradition it might make me liable to trouble, but it isn't, since they haven't yet got *habeas corpus* and things like that."

"I see. But look, maybe if Fallon is in jail at Novorecife, Miss Batruni would go back to Earth for not knowing what else to do, don't you think?"

"Might or might not. Maybe she loves him enough to stick around Novorecife to be near him; or maybe she'd go back to her island and tell the Zambans: 'Your king's in the clink, so as queen I'm running the joint for him until he gets out.' Women rulers are fairly common on this part of Krishna. No, I think my scheme is the only one I can count on."

"How will you manage it?"

"I haven't worked it all out yet, but I've got an idea. With your help I'm sure we can put it across."

For a full minute, they sat silently looking at each other by candlelight. Hasselborg hoped Yano would accede without making an issue of the case. Yano was a good man to work with, but by the same token would be a dangerous antagonist. He hoped he wouldn't have to resort to threats to elicit further cooperation.

Yano finally said: "I'll—ah—make deal. I help you catch Fallon the way you said. Then if I can get deposition from him against Góis, to help my case there, I'll let him stew in own soup. If authorities at Novorecife want him, I'll try dissuade them; tell them they'd need an army to catch him, and anyway he's turned state's evidence, and things like that. If they insist I bring him in, I'll have to try. You understand?"

Hasselborg thought a while in his turn. He finally replied: "Okay. Let's go to work."

While Hasselborg forced his trance pill on the unwilling riverman, Yano picked up the curved sword. "Thought I'd never use one of these, but since I stopped that cut with the pry-bar I begin think I'd make swordsman too." He swished the blade through the air.

XIII

THE KEEPERS of the city gate at Hershid, knowing Victor Hasselborg as the savior of the Lady Fouri, waved him through without formal identification. It had rained almost continuously since he had left Majbur, and a few sneezes had filled him with more acute fear than all the fighters in Krishna could. Although he wanted nothing so much as to curl up in bed with his pills until the threat of a cold disappeared, he drove straight to Hasté's palace and dashed in.

"Your Reverence," he told the high priest, "you told me when I first arrived here that you'd do anything I asked in return for my small services to your niece. Is that right?"

"Yes, my son?"

"Well then, here's where I request." He smiled disarmingly. "It won't be too terrible and it won't cost the True Faith anything. First, I'd like you to send one of your flunkys over to the royal palace and tell Ferzao bad-Qé, the leader of my men-at-arms, that I want them all to report over here on the double, with their ayas and a couple of spares."

"Master Kavir, the king has been asking after you. Hadn't you better pay your respects to him? He's impatient—"

"That's just the point! I don't want the king to know I'm in town, because he'll want me to paint his damned picture, and I've got more urgent things to do. Second, will you have somebody go out and buy me some fireworks? The kind you light and hold out, while they discharge colored fireballs."

"It shall be done, my son."

"Thanks. And finally, will you prepare one of those cells in your basement for an unwilling guest?"

"Master Kavir! What are you about? I trust that you seek not to lure me into sinful acts under the guise of gratitude."

The guy's beginning to waver, thought Hasselborg, remembering King Eqrar's remark about the priest's habit of promising anything and fulfilling nothing. He decided that the only way to deal with Hasté was to be brisk and domineering. He said:

"You'll see. Nothing against the best interests of Gozashtand. And it's absolutely necessary; I have your promise, you know."

Fouri came out and greeted him formally. When Hasté was occupied in giving orders, she murmured: "When can I see my hero alone? I'm aflame with longing for him! I cannot sleep . . ."

This is where I came in, thought Hasselborg. He managed to be brightly conversational and completely uninformative

during the next half-hour while his preparations were being made.

He said: "If the king asks, tell him I've gone hunting with my men. It's no lie, either." And he strode out to his carriage.

Back on the road to Majbur they sped. Hasselborg observing that the sun was lowering, hoped they'd catch the invaders before sunset. He was driving one of the spare ayas he'd bought for his little army, since he had nearly killed poor Avvau in his haste to reach Hershid ahead of Fallon. They might meet the train any time, since, while the aya could outspurt the bishtar, the larger beast could keep up a higher average speed for long distances than any other domesticated animal.

Presently Ferzao bad-Qé cantered up beside him and pulled down to a trot. "Master Kavir," he said, "I think I see something far ahead on yonder track!"

Hasselborg looked. Sure enough the track, which stretched away across the plain on their left, parallel to the road, ended in a little spot. As they approached, the spot grew and grew until it became two bishtars in tandem, pulling a dozen little cars.

"You've got your orders," said Hasselborg. "Go to it."

Ferzao halted and deployed his men. One of them handed him a Roman candle, which he lit with flint and steel. As the fuse fizzed, the sergeant galloped across the moss towards the leading bishtar, holding the firework in front of him like a lance. At the same time the other twenty-eight men set up a yell, banging on their brass bucklers with their mailed hands to augment the din.

The Roman candle spat fireballs at the bishtar. A couple bounced off its slaty hide, while its mahout yelled in terror and amazement. The animal screamed and lumbered off across the plain away from its tormentors, dragging its fellow after it. Behind the second bishtar, the first of the little cars left the rails; the next teetered and fell over on its side.

A mighty chorus of yells arose from the train, and two dozen men in sailors' dress tumbled out of the remaining cars with Colt-Thompson machine guns. With a disciplined movement the sailors dashed out and flung themselves down on the moss in a line of skirmishers.

Hasselborg's men galloped towards them with lances couched and arrows nocked. Up came the guns.

"Pazzo!" shouted a voice from the train. A multiple click came from the twenty-four guns.

"Surrender!" shouted Ferzao. "Those things won't work!"

He pulled up a few feet in front of them. A couple of sailors worked their bolts and tried again with no better success, while the rest, in the face of the lances and drawn bows, threw down their guns and rose to their knees, arms extended in token of surrender.

"What's all this?" yelled a voice, as a tall gaudily-dressed person walked across the moss from the train.

Hasselborg recognized the handsome heartbreaker of the photographs under the Krishnan make-up. With him came a splendid-looking dark girl, and behind them appeared the stocky form of K. Yano.

"What sort of reception—"

"Hello there, Fallon," said Hasselborg, who had secured his reins and, like Fallon, had followed his army on foot to the scene of the battle.

"Who's speaking English? You? Are you—"

"Careful, chum; if you don't give me away I'll do the same for you. Officially I'm Kavir bad-Ma'lum, portrait painter by appointment to His Awesomeness, King Eqrar of Gozashtand. Unofficially I'm Victor Hasselborg of London."

"Oh, really? Well, what the hell do you think you're doing—"

"You'll learn. Meanwhile keep calm, because I've got the advantage. This is Miss Julnar Batruni, isn't it?"

"Our wife!" growled Fallon. "Her Resplendency Queen Julnar of Zamba, if you please!"

"Seems to me you already had one wife in London, didn't you? She sent her regards."

"You didn't come clear from Earth to tell us that! Anyway it's not exactly true. We fixed things up."

"How?"

"Why, we divorced her and married Julnar under Zamban law."

"How convenient! I'll be judge, I'll be jury, said cunning old Fury. Delighted to know you, Queen. Mr. Batruni sent me to find out what had become of you."

"Oh, is that so?" said the girl. "Well, now that you know, why don't you go back to Earth and tell the old dear, and take your nose out of our affairs?"

"Uh—well, the fact is he commissioned me to bring you back, if possible."

"You—" shouted Fallon, and tugged at his sword.

"Grab him!" said Hasselborg. Two of his men pounced on

Fallon, twisted his arms behind him, and took his sword away.

"Naughty, naughty," said Hasselborg. "Now let's continue more calmly. As I was saying, Miss Batruni—pardon me, Mrs. Fallon—or Queen Julnar—your father's lonesome and would like to see you again."

"Well I—I do love the old fellow, you know, but one can't leave one's husband and run home four or five light-years for a week end. Won't you please let us be? I'll write Father, or send a message, or anything like that . . ."

Hasselborg shook his head. "We'll have to go into this further. King Anthony, will you please mount this aya? One of my men will lead it for you, and don't try any breaks. Yano, here's one for you."

"Oh," said Yano, looking apprehensive. "Is no other way to go?"

"No; I'm taking Miss Ba— Oh, hell, the young lady—with me."

"You know this fella?" said Fallon to Hasselborg. "Who is he?"

"He's Master Yano, who's looking into the disappearance of certain machine guns from—uh—from the mails, if you follow me. How did you get on the train with the rest, Yano?"

"Bought ticket, told some lies about how my old uncle was dying in Hershid, so they let me ride in Fallon's special. What you doing with the Zambava?"

"Sending 'em back. Hey, you there!" Hasselborg called to the mahouts, who were just getting their beasts calmed. "Special's cancelled. Break the train and hitch one of those bishtars to the Qadr end of the passenger coaches. Now, you!" He addressed the sailors, collected in a glum and muttering group. "You know you were caught invading Gozashtand with arms, don't you?"

They nodded.

"And it would go pretty hard with you if I turned you over to the Dour?"

A sailor asked: "Don't ye work for him, master?"

"As it happens I don't, though he and I are good friends. Wouldn't you like to be carried back to Qadr, and nothing said about this?"

"Aye, sir!" cried several of the Zambava with a sudden access of interest in life.

"Okay. Ferzao, detail a couple of men to see these boys off to Qadr in the train. Have somebody help get those derailed cars back on the track. Assign somebody to lead King Antané's

aya, and a couple more to shoot him if he tires a break. We'll tell the guards at the gate that we're just back from the hunt, and hope they won't count us. You there, pick up those guns and load 'em into the carriage."

"I say," said Fallon, "what happened that those guns didn't shoot? We were told they were all right when they arrived on Krishnan."

"Trade secret; tell you some day," said Hasselborg. "Queen Julnar, will you do me the honor? Don't look so scared, Yano!"

"Is long way to the ground," said Yano, peering down from his uneasy saddle.

"Not so far as it looks. And weren't you kidding me about being scared of germs?"

"Where are you taking us?" demanded Fallon. "To King Eqrar?"

"Not yet. Keep quiet and behave yourself and perhaps you won't have to meet him at all. *Hao!*"

Hasselborg cracked his whip, and, moving toward the sunset, his buggy headed back for Hershida at a canter.

Hasté stroked the arm of his chair with long fingers. "No, I'll not see the fellow until this matter's settled. Till then I've no official knowledge of his presence."

"Well," said Hasselborg, trying without complete success to conceal his exasperation, "will Your Reverence do what I ask, or won't you?"

"I know not, Master Kavir. I know not. It is true I promised, but things have changed since then. I would help you, yet you ask a thing bigger than the Six Labors of Qarar. For look you, these sailors will arrive back in Majbur, and nothing on Krishnan will stop them from talking. The talk will come to the ears of Gorbovast, who'll report back to the king, who will naturally wonder what befell him who led this strange invasion. He'll know you carried King Antané off, and the people of the city saw you drive up to my palace with your retinue. Therefore, he'll come snooping around here with armed men at his back, and if he finds Antané locked in that old cell there'll be awkward queries to answer."

Hasselborg said: "I think we can divert him. Tell him I took Antané with me to Novorecife. He won't be able to catch me to find out, I hope."

"Surely, you put a fair face on things. Still, I know not . . ."

"Well, there it is. If you want to carry out your promise . . ."

Privately Hasselborg was more and more sharing the king's opinion of this vacillating high priest.

"I'll tell you. I'll do it on one condition."

"What's that?" Hasselborg thought uneasily that the condition would probably prove a bastard.

It did. "It has not escaped your attention that my niece Fouri entertains for you feelings warmer than mere esteem?"

"Uh-huh."

"Well then, let you wed her by the rites of our most holy Church, and I'll undertake to keep your prisoner till you send me instructions for his disposal, as you demand."

A hell of a note! Of course, neither Hasté nor Fouri yet knew he was an Earthman, and moreover that he intended to return to Earth as soon as he perfected arrangements here. Legally, it wouldn't much matter. Once he got away from Gozashtand he could nullify the marriage or ignore it, as Fallon had done with his. Interplanetary law had not yet rationalized rules regarding sexual and familial relationships on different worlds.

Still, he disliked doing such a serious thing—serious to Fouri at least—under false pretences.

"Well?" said Hasté.

Hasselborg squirmed on the horns of the dilemma. Should he balk at this point, throw up the game, turn his captives over to King Eqrar, or to Yano, and report failure back to Batruni? It would simplify matters with Alexandra . . .

No, having come this close to success, he was damned if he'd let himself be finessed out of it.

"Okay," he said. "How about as soon as I get back from where I'm going with the queen?"

"No, before you leave. This night."

Away went that chance of escape. "All right. Whenever you say."

Hasté broke into a weary smile. "I had long hoped that the wedding of my niece would be a splendid affair. I should, for example, have consulted the ancient astrological archives to calculate the most auspicious date. However, Fouri insists upon an immediate ceremony. Therefore it will not even be necessary to compute your horoscopes." Hasté looked at the time-candle. "It is the hour for supper. What say you we perform it now, as soon as we and our friends can make ourselves presentable? Then to sup."

This was going to put Hasselborg in still more of a spot. He couldn't very well deny Fouri her wedding night unless he found a reason for setting off into the darkness right after

supper. Well, why the hell need he deny Fouri anything? It would be an interesting experience, and nobody could accuse him of forcing himself upon her. Furthermore, at this stage of the game it wouldn't much matter if she found out that he was an Earthman.

"Very well," he said amiably, "I'm afraid she'll have to marry me the way I am, since all the rest of my clothes are over in Eqrar's shack."

He went to the room that Hasté assigned him, shaved, washed up, took a short nap, and then came out to prowl the palace. He knocked on Julnar's door.

"Yes?"

"Queen Julnar? This is the *soi-disant* Kavir bad-Ma'lum."

"What is it, fiend?" She opened the door.

"I thought you might like to attend the wedding."

"A wedding? Who? Where? When? How divine! I'd love to!"

"It seems that Hasté's niece Fouri and I are getting hitched in about fifteen minutes in His Reverence's private chapel."

"You are? But how can you if you're an Earth—"

"Sh! That can't be helped, and I don't want it spread around. Just say, would you like to come?"

"I'd adore it! But—but—"

"But what?" asked Hasselborg.

"I couldn't very well accept while you're holding my husband in that wretched little cell, could I? That wouldn't be loyal."

"I'm sorry, but—"

"My idea was, why not let him out long enough to attend? Tony's a good sport, and I'm sure he'll behave."

"I'll see."

He went downstairs to Fallon's cell, finding the erstwhile king comfortably settled and playing Krishnan checkers with Ferzao. He said to the captive:

"Tony, I'm getting married to Hasté's niece in a few minutes, and your—uh—wife said she'd like to attend if I'd let you come too. Would you like to?"

"We most certainly should!" said Fallon with such emphasis that Hasselborg looked at him in alarm.

Hasselborg warned: "Don't nourish ideas of making a break, chum; I'll have you well guarded."

"Oh, we won't bother *you*. Word of honor and all that."

"Okay. Ferzao, you and Ghum let King Antané out and take him up to the high priest's private chapel in a few minutes. Stick close to him and watch him."

Hasselborg then went to the chapel itself, finding Hasté, Fouri, Yano, Fouri's maid, and Julnar. Fouri looked at him with a hungry expression that reminded him of those Earthly female spiders that ate their mates. Julnar, Hasselborg had decided, was just a healthy normal girl, impressionable perhaps, but with a wonderful shape that the topless Krishnan evening dress made the most of.

Hasté said: "I will run through the forms once, to forewarn you of the responses you must make. You stand there and Fouri there. You take her hand in yours . . . so—I say . . . Who's this? Take that man away!"

Hasselborg turned to see Fallon and his two guards. "Which man?" he asked.

Fallon cut loose with a shout: "Hasté, you double-crossing—"

"Silence! I forbid you to speak!" cried Hasté.

Fallon paid no attention. "You double-crossing *zeft*, we'll see that you get—*ohé*, watch him!"

Hasselborg turned to see the high priest cock a little one-hand pistol crossbow and aim it in the general direction of Fallon. Fallon and his two guards ducked frantically. So did everybody else in the room except Hasselborg and Yano.

While Yano looked around for something to throw, Hasselborg, who was standing closer to Hasté brought his right foot up in a terrific kick at Hasté's hand. The twang of the string mingled with the smack of Hasselborg's boot, the little crossbow flew high into the air. The bow struck the ceiling with a sharp sound and buried itself in the plaster.

Hasselborg threw himself upon Hasté in a tackle. Down went the priest, gorgeous robes and all. Hasselborg heard one of his men gasp at the sacrilege.

"Really, my son," said Hasté when he got his breath back, "be not so rough with one who is no longer young!"

"Sorry," said Hasselborg, "I thought you were reaching for a knife. Anyway, who told you you could plug Antané? He's my prisoner, see?" He got up with a grunt, feeling as if he had dislocated a hip joint. You are old, Father Victor, he thought, at least for football practice. "Say!"

"What?" Hasté sat up.

"This!" Hasselborg reached out and yanked off one of Hasté's antennae, which had become partly detached in the scuffle. "An Earthman, huh?"

Hasté felt his forehead. "Yes, now that you make mention thereof." Then as the significance of the event sank in, Hasté

did a double-take; the rather stupid expression on his face changed to one of horror. "Speak it not, my s-s-son! I p-pray you! The results will be dire! I will be slain; the Established Church will be overthrown; the bases of morality and justice surely destroyed! Anything shall be yours, so that you betray not this dread s-s-secret!"

"Oho, so that's it? You were in on this smuggling deal too, eh? And you tried to murder Fallon just now because he was going to give you away?"

"That were a harsh interpretation, my boy. I—I c-can explain, though it is a lengthy tale—"

"Huh. No wonder you wouldn't see him when I brought him in! Well, that simplifies things. Sorry, Fouri, wedding's off."

"No! No! I love only you!"

He ignored her cries, not without a small internal pang. But then, he hoped to see Alexandra soon. He continued:

"Hasté, I'm pulling out tonight with Queen Julnar. You'll put Fallon back in his cell and hold him on pain of exposure. Moreover you'll carry out any instructions I send you with regard to him. Meanwhile, you'll make him as comfortable as possible. You'd also better pension Ferzao and Ghum to keep their mouths shut. Follow me?"

"I understand. But tell me one thing, my son: I've long suspected that you, too, are of the race of Earthmen. Be that the truth, or—"

"That's my business, chum." Hasselborg turned to Julnar, "You understand? You'll do just as I say, or I'll get word to Hasté to put your boy friend out of his misery?"

"I understand, you fiend."

"Oi!" said Fallon. "I say here! If you think you're going to take advantage of her—"

"Don't worry about that, Tony; I've got more females now than I can handle efficiently. Yano, you'll want to stick around, won't you?"

"Yes," said Yano. "I got to collect depositions and other evidence."

"Okay, then—"

"But!" cried Julnar. "If I go back with you, it'll be years by Krishnan time before I can see Tony again, even though it seems only weeks to me!"

"I'll fix that," said Hasselborg, fishing out his precious pills. "Here, Tony. Trance pills. Know the formula?"

"Certainly we do," said Fallon sullenly.

"Fine. Hasté, before I go, I want to borrow the amount I

left in my rooms in the royal palace. I'll give you a note, and after I've left you can take it around to the palace. If King Eqrar's feeling honest maybe he'll let you have the stuff. Ferzao, put King Antané back in his cell; then choose half the men to come with me to Novorecife. The other half I'm turning over to Master Yano, to do as he commands, together with the money to pay them. Then get my carriage ready, with food for a long fast journey. And cups of hot shurab for Queen Julnar and me before we start . . ."

Hasselborg was well away from Hershid, trotting briskly through the multiple moonlight, when Julnar asked: "Isn't this the road back to Majbúr?"

"Uh-huh."

"Well, isn't that a roundabout way of getting to Novorecife?"

"Yes; we're going up to Pichidé by boat. The only other route lies via Rosid, and I'm afraid I'm not popular in Ruz just now."

She relapsed into gloom. The escort clop-clopped behind them. Hasselborg suddenly clapped a hand to his forehead.

"*Tamates!* It just occurred to me: if Hasté's an Earthman, Fouri can't be his niece, unless she's human too—say, d'you know anything about their background?"

"No," said Julnar, "and if I did I wouldn't tell you, you home-wrecker!"

Hasselborg subsided. As far as he was concerned, the many loose ends in this case would have to be left adrift. And he must remember to send Yeshram bad-Yeshram the jailer the other half of his bribe. He grinned as he thought how much easier it was to be ultra-scrupulous with Batruni's money than with his own.

XIV

HASSELBORG walked down the ramp from the side of his ship at the Barcelona spaceport, followed by Julnar Batruni. Her suitcase had already gone down the chute; he insisted on carrying his own by hand rather than risk his professional equipment and medicines. In the other hand he twirled a carved Gozash-tando umbrella, an incongruous sight in this sunny city.

"What now?" she asked as they stood in line at the passport desk.

"First, I'm going to wire your old man in Aleppo, and a— a friend of mine in London. Then I'll hunt up a doctor for a physical checkup."

"Why, are you sick? I thought the *Viagens* doctor checked you."

"So he did," he said seriously, "but you can't be too careful. Then I thought we'd take in some of the high life. While most of it's *estincamente*, I know some good places over on the Montjuich."

"How simply divine! You're an extraordinary man, Victor," she said.

"How?"

"I don't seem to be able to loathe you as much as I should for breaking into my life."

"That's my insidious charm. Watch out for it." He handed over his passport.

He had just finished sending his telegrams when somebody at his elbow said in Spanish: "Excuse me, but are you *Senhor Hasselborg*?"

"*Si, soy Hasselborg.*" The fellow was dressed in the uniform of an Iberian Federation cop. He was flanked by two *Viagens* men.

"*Lo siento mucho,*" said the Spaniard with an apologetic bow, "But I must place you under arrest."

"Huh? What for?"

"These gentlemen have a warrant. Will you explain, *Señor Ndombu*?"

One of the *Viagens* men, a Negro, said: "Violation of Regulation 368 of the Interplanetary Council rules, Section Four, Sub-section 26, fifteenth paragraph."

"Whew! Which is that?"

"The one relating to the introduction of mechanical devices or inventions on the planet Krishna."

"Damn it, I never—"

"*Queira, senhor*, don't savage me about it! All I know is what's in this warrant. Something about putting a sight on a crossbow."

"Oh." Hasselborg turned to Julnar. "Here's some money. Take a cab to the Cristóbal Hotel. Call up the firm of Montejo and Durruti and tell 'em to bail me out of the *calabozo*, will you like a good kid?"

Then he went with the men.

Whether Julnar took the chance of getting even with him, or whether his Catalan colleagues were having an attack of *mañana*, nothing happened to get Hasselborg out of his cell as evening came on. This could be serious. They had the goods on him with respect to those damned sights, even if they were

only a pair of corsage pins. The spectators had taken note at the time, and the imitative Krishnans were no doubt spreading the device all over their planet. Not that it was really important; a man's as dead when beaten to death with a club as when blown up with a lithium bomb . . .

There'd be a hearing, whenever the local magistrate got around to it, at which said magistrate would either dismiss the case or bind Hasselborg over and assign him to the court of first instance for trial. For an offense by an Earthman on Krishna against an Interplanetary Council regulation enforced by the *Viagens Interplanetarias* security force, and arrested in Iberia on Earth, that would be—let's see—Lower Division, Earthly World Court for the Third International Judicial District, which sat in—hmm—Paris, didn't it? With appeal to—hell, he'd have to dig out his old law texts when he got back to London. The damned maze of jurisdictions was so complicated that sometimes interplanetary cases simply got lost in the shuffle and never were tried at all, while the principals lived out their long lives on bail.

No, *if* he got back to London. This mess could result in a stiff sentence, especially if Yano broke a big scandal inside the *Viagens* rank about now, and the word was passed down to tighten up and make an example. And it would do no good to have a trance pill smuggled in to knock himself out with; Earthly penal systems were wise to that one, and simply added the time you spent in trance to your sentence.

Hasselborg reflected that he who acts as his own lawyer has a fool for a client. He'd better round up some high-powered advice *muy pronto*. Lawyer though he was by training, he was too rusty to cope with this problem himself. Maybe he should have stuck to law in the first place, instead of getting involved in investigation. The glamor of detecting soon wore off . . .

Obviously Montejo and Durruti weren't going to call, whatever the reason. Although the jail people let him telephone, their office didn't answer (naturally). He didn't know their home numbers, and the directory listed so many Montejos and Durrutis that he decided that it would take all night to go through them.

Next he tried the Cristóbal Hotel. No, they had no Miss Batruni. Nor any *Senhora* Fallon either. Did they have the Queen of Zamba? Come, *senhor*, you are joking with us and we do not appreciate—oh, wait a minute! We have a Hoolnar de Thamba; would that be the one?

But Julnar's room did not answer. Hasselborg disgustedly

went to bed. At least the Barcelona municipal clink, unlike many in the Peninsula, was a reasonably sanitary one, though Hasselborg doubted whether any Iberians could be trusted to display sufficient vigilance towards germs.

Hasselborg was at the telephone again next morning when a warden said: "A *Senhorita* Garshin to see you."

He hung up unsteadily, missing the cradle with the handset twice, and followed the man to the visitors' room. There she was, looking just as he'd imagined her, only prettier if anything.

"Alexandra!" he said. "I—you—you're *Miss* Garshin now?"

"Yes. Why Victor, your *hair!*"

"It's green, isn't it?"

"You mean you see it too? I thought I was having hallucinations."

"It's just the ends; it'll be gone the next haircut I get. You don't look different—not a day older . . ."

"I've been in a trance most of the time; that's why."

"You were?"

"Yes," she said.

"But—I'm afraid—I didn't bring back Tony after all."

"Oh, I didn't do it on Tony's account. I don't care anything about him any more."

"Then—uh—whose?"

"Can't you guess?"

"You mean you—uh—you—"

She nodded. He held out his arms, and the warden, who thought of Anglo-Saxons as cold fish, received a surprising enlightenment.

He brought out the little Krishnan god, which he had been carrying in his pocket for this moment, and gave it to her. Then they sat down holding hands. Hasselborg found that the paralysis of his vocal organs had vanished. He and Alexandra talked at a terrific pace of their past, present, and future until Hasselborg looked at his watch.

"Say," he cried, "I forgot I haven't even got a lawyer yet! Wait a minute, will you, chum?"

He dashed back to the telephone, this time getting Montejó and Durruti, who promised to send him a lawyer forthwith. The lawyer was arranging bail when the warden announced more visitors: a *Senhor* Batruni and a lady.

Batruni practically slobbered over Hasselborg in gratitude. When the investigator finally wormed out of the emotional

Levantine's embrace, he introduced Alexandra simply as "my fiancée, Miss Garshin." Then he asked Julnar:

"I thought I asked you to call Montejo and Durruti for me yesterday?"

"I would have, Victor, only—"

"Only what?"

"Well, you see, the stupid taxi driver must have misunderstood me and took me to the wrong place, so we got into an argument. What with me not speaking any Spanish or Catalan and he not speaking any English or French or Arabic, it was simply ghastly. And what with one thing and another, by the time I did get to the Cristóbal I'd forgotten the name!"

"Then why didn't you call me at the jail and find out?"

"I didn't think of that."

"Where were you during the evening, and again this morning when I called you?"

"In the evening I went to a movie, and when I got back to my room Daddy called me by telephone from Aleppo to say he was chartering a special fast 'plane. So this morning I was so excited I left early to wait for him at the airport."

Hasselborg sighed. Nice girl, but too scatterbrained for his taste.

"Has Daddy told you the news?" she continued. "Of course not; he just arrived. Tell him, Daddy."

"I am going back to Krishna with Julnar," said Batruni.

"Why?" said Hasselborg.

"It is this way. While you were gone the government socialized my factories. They paid me for them, so I need not starve. But there is no more fun in life. I even offered to act as manager; but they turned it down. They do not trust a wicked capitalist to run them without sabotaging them. There is no pleasure on Earth any more. Everything is too orderly, planned, regulated. You cannot move a meter without tripping over red tape.

"Therefore, if you will give me a letter directing that person who has Anthony in custody to let him go, I will go to Krishna and live with this wild son-in-law of mine in his island kingdom. I shall be a genuine prince, which you cannot be on Earth any more unless you are a Swede or an Ethiopian."

"Isn't it just too divine?" squealed Julnar. "Now I'm really grateful to you for kidnapping me!"

"Swell," said Hasselborg. "I hope you're satisfied with the way I carried out the assignment, Mr. Batruni."

"Certainly, more than satisfied. In fact I am so pleased that I have an offer to make to you."

"Another job?" said Hasselborg in slight alarm.

"Yes, but not the kind you think. In addition to my regular fee I am offering you a lectureship at the University of Beyrût, of which I am a trustee."

"Good Lord!" Hasselborg paused to let this sink in. "A lectureship in what?"

"Anglo-Saxon law."

"My word! I'd have to think about it if I beat this rap. But my sincerest thanks. I'd have to brush up on my law and my Arabic . . . Say, how about seeing the sights of Barcelona? I promised Julnar, but got pinched before I could deliver. Come on; 'tis a privilege high to have dinner and tea, along with the Red Queen, the White Queen, and me!"

The hearing took place the following morning. In the front row, like Alice between the two queens, sat Papa Batruni, showing signs of a hangover, with his daughter on one side and Alexandra on the other. The magistrate had just called the case when a bulky Oriental walked down the aisle.

"Yano!" cried Hasselborg, then to his lawyer: "*Senhor Agüesar*, there's the man we want!"

Yano shook hands warmly. "I just arrived and learned you were in pokey. I left several days after you, but in faster ship."

"I always get the scows," said Hasselborg, and explained his plight.

After the *Viagens* officer, Ndombu, had explained the warrant, Agüesar called Yano to the stand. Yano, using an interpreter, told what had happened on Krishna, emphasizing the fact that only by a slight infraction of the anti-invention regulation had Hasselborg been able to survive to forestall another and much graver violation.

"Case dismissed," said the magistrate.

Hasselborg asked Yano: "Could you stay over two days and act as my best man?" At Yano's quizzical look he added: "Miss Garshin and I are getting married. We got our license yesterday, but they've got a three-day law in Iberia."

"I'm so sorry! I have my ticket for airplane to my home in Okinawa; leave this afternoon. If I miss, won't be another seat for a week. Wish I knew sooner."

"Oh. Too bad. When are you going?"

Yano looked at his watch. "Should start in a few minutes."

"I'll go with you. Can you dear sweet people excuse me for an hour?"

In the taxi Yano said: "Glad to get back to civilization?"

"Damn right! The first thing I did when I got to Novorecife was to flush a toilet ten times in a row to hear the water run. What did you do after I left?"

"Collected evidence for several days. I got those letters from Góis to Dasht of Ruz, for instance. Took doing."

"What happened to Góis?"

"Oh, Keshavachandra gave him ten years; couple of others who were in with him got shorter terms."

"Was Abreu in on it?"

"No; he's all right. He wouldn't believe Góis was crook at first, but when I convinced him he helped me very much. But while I was still in Hershid the most awful thing happened to me!"

"What?"

"Fouri made me marry her on threat of exposing me as Earthman spy! Embarrassing, especially since I already got wife and eight children in Nafa."

"I'll be damned! How was it?"

Yano took his handkerchief out, passed it across his forehead, and replaced it. "Interesting, might say."

"What's the dope on Hasté and Fouri? She can't be his niece—"

"No."

"What then, his mistress?"

"Think not. Hasté real ascetic, and are limits to what even modern science can do with old men."

"Then how—"

"Hasté was a deserter from one of earliest ships to land on Krishna. Pretty old then, over two hundred. Set himself up as holy hermit, lived in cave, became a power in their church in Gozashtand. Then when there was deadlock in election a few years ago, they picked him for high priest as compromise. Not bad man really, but too small for his job. Was owing to his weak leadership the Church was failing, I think, which is after all good thing if you don't believe that astrological nonsense."

"But Fouri?"

"She was young girl from caravan of Gavehona—you know, a wandering tribe, like our Gypsies. Went live with him while he was still hermit; don't know how much for religion, how much for regular meals. When he became high priest, she moved in with him. Now Hasté getting really old, Fouri start

looking for another berth. Fall in love with you; genuine, I think. Made Hasté cooperate by threatening to expose him as Earthman.

"Meanwhile Hasté is looking for another berth too, since his Established Church is failing, so he entered plot with Fallon. He was going to hail Fallon as Messiah or something like that when Fallon took Hershid. We fixed that. But when you escaped, idea of getting married had become an obsession with Fouri. Hasté couldn't marry her because of church rules, so she picked me; better than nothing, I suppose. Maybe thought I'd fall in love with her and stay. Hard enough to tell what goes on in Earthly woman's mind."

Hasselborg brought his friend up to date on the Batruni affairs, adding: "I didn't mention that Alexandra was Fallon's ex. The Batrunis don't know it and it would only embarrass everybody. How's Fallon doing?"

"All right. Was planning to put himself in trance when I left: wanted to make sure you took off with Julnar first."

Hasselborg said: "It'll be years by objective time before they get back to Krishna, and anything might have happened by then. However, that's their lookout. You know, I'm sometimes bothered by the feeling that Góis and his gang were right and we and the Interplanetary Council wrong."

"I know, but not our business. We do our jobs. Speaking of jobs: You taking up this teaching offer?"

"I think so."

"Sounds dull."

"D'you like manhunting?"

"Of course. Why you think I work as a cop?"

"Well, I've had my fill. While I've usually taken things pretty much as they came, I pushed my luck on Krishna as far as anybody could, what with being shot at with crossbows and slashed at with swords and stabbed with knives and almost eaten by yekis." Hasselborg, feeling expansive, drew on his cigar. "I remember in Plato's *Republic* where a character named Er gets knocked cold in a fight. His soul goes to Hades and later returns to his body, and Er comes to and tells how in Hades he saw the souls of other dead people picking their next incarnations. Ajax is choosing the life of a lion and so on. But Odysseus is smart. He figures he's had enough excitement in his last life, so he's selecting the life of an obscure private citizen leading a peaceful existence. And that's how I feel. Any time you're in Beyrût, come see Professor and Mrs.

Hasselborg and all the little Hasselborgs. We'll bore you to death with placid domesticity."

As Yano waddled up the companionway into the fuselage, he turned to wave at Hasselborg, who waved back. A good guy, thought Hasselborg, but I hope I never have anything to do with the detective business again. That's that.

A young man brushed by Hasselborg, flashed him a quick glance, and ran up the companionway into the fuselage just before the door shut and the tractor towed the 'plane away to the catapult strip. Though Hasselborg had only a glimpse of a man's face, it was enough.

The man was the young Gozashtando priest, Ghaddal, who used to come in and murmur in Hasté's ear. He was disguised as an Earthman by a wig that came down over his forehead to hide the antennae. Fouri must have sent him to Earth to track down her fugitive and bigamous husband!

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