

6 STORIES
*from the
brightest star
in*
**American
Science
Fiction**



Calories

The Colourful
Character

Juice

Proposal

The Saxon
Pretender

The Space
Clause



Edited by
H. J. CAMPBELL
who writes:

"Sprague de Camp
shows the pertness
of Parker . . . the
whimsy of Wode-
house . . . the warm
murmur of human
kindness that is
O. Henry . . ."

1/6
NET

SPRAGUE de CAMP's *New* ANTHOLOGY



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A young girl wrote and informed me that she had had scores of boy friends, but it was not until she had visited Cornwall and taken Joan back with her that she met the boy of her dreams, and as they got better acquainted she discovered he also has "Joan the Wad."

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Sprague de Camp's

New Anthology of
SCIENCE FICTION

Edited by H. J. Campbell



PANTHER
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*All characters in these stories are fictitious and imaginary
and bear no relation to any living person.*

introduction

The main difficulty in editing an anthology like this one is that it is never long enough. All the time there is the necessity to select, to reject, to differentiate between stories according to some standard of value. With the work of Sprague de Camp there is so much material from which to choose that I feel I must give reasons for this particular selection. But there is no difficulty about that. I chose these stories because I think that they entertain.

Some stories make you think. They make you think so much that you begin to forget they are stories and start to believe their messages. Which may be a good thing. Or a bad thing.

And there have been so very many collections of "serious" stories—I edited one myself—that I feel something in a lighter vein will be welcome. It is so easy for people to think that science fiction deals only with death and destruction and doom. It does not.

This book proves it. For here we have some of the cream of science fiction humour. Sprague de Camp can, when he wishes, exhibit the pertness of Parker, the whimsy of Wodehouse, the baloney of Benchley and the nuttiness of Nash; and when it comes to jabberwocky he can stand without shame beside Lewis Carroll. Yet through it all runs a warm murmur of human kindness reminding us of the stories of O. Henry—a criterion of true humour.

And this is fitting, for our author's Christian name, Sprague, is an old English name from Upwey, Dorset, meaning "lively"; while his surname, de Camp, is Norman-French

—a spritely lot. Perhaps there is, after all, something in a name!

Jabberwocky will be found in **Calories**, one of Sprague's famous Krishna stories. Nuttiness, of a quiet kind, appears in **The Saxon Pretender**, where the British throne is threatened by an American descendant of the king who got an arrow in his eye. Baloney, wild and wonderful, sweeps through the pages of **Space Clause**, and gives us a small hint at our pomposity. Whimsy is the keynote of **Colourful Character**—so colourful, such a character! Pertness peeps out in every line of **Juice**, one of the most probable impossible stories of our age. And in **Proposal** the basic kindness wells up at the end into something like a tear—and then you laugh!

Science fiction is an adult form of literature, and the humour in these stories is adult, too. It does not take you back to the eggs-in-the-bed days of childhood, or make you split your sides—which, after all, would be uncomely. But it stirs up a sort of rumble in the nether regions of the thorax; it brings a gleam to the eye, a twitch to the lips and seems to make life a little more worth while.

In a word, these stories—entertain.

I hope you like them.

H. J. Campbell,
London, 1953.

Calories

SINGER took a quick look up and down the street. Few were abroad in the long spring twilight, especially since a light snow had begun and the wind whipped a thin surface-drift over the cobbles. Nothing to hold a footprint yet, so he'd be sweet for a while before the Johns mooched along.

Hoping the stories of Syechas's hospitality to fugitives were true, he darted through the door with more agility than one would expect of a man of his bulk. Inside, the sweet smell of nyomnigë met his nose. Luckily he didn't have to worry about letting that drug get him. A difference between the superficially human-looking Krishnans and Earthmen was that instead of giving the latter visions of love, wealth, and other fine things, nyomnigë simply made them sick.

Syechas loomed in the gloom, his shaven skull reflecting feeble yellow lamplight. "Yes?"

Singer swept off his heavy fur cap, baring his own polished pate. Since coming to Nichnyamadze he had taken up this local custom, because it saved an Earthman a picnic in the form of messing around with green hair-dye.

"My name is Dinki," said Singer in stumbling Nichnyami. "They say that you—that you shelter people who wish to be left—uh—severely alone."

"They say many things," said Syechas, bulking immovably before him.

"I can pay," said Singer with a smile.

Syechas raised his antennae. "How much?"

Singer felt into his surcoat and brought out one of the two platinum candlesticks.

"Hm," said Syechas, narrowing heavy-lidded eyes as he held the bauble up to the lamp in the wall-bracket. "This is from the high priest's palace." He turned the object so that the jewels threw little sharp beams of light here and there. "It would be risky to sell."

"Still," said Singer, "it should be worth—let us say—sixty days' lodging at—at a minimum? In strict—uh—privacy?"

"Have you another?" said Syechas, looking at Singer's big gold ring.

"No," replied Singer, feeling the other hard against his chest.

"Then make it forty days' minimum and I will take you."

"Done."

"Come then." Syechas led down the dark corridor. From the rooms on either side came silence or various sounds: song here, mutterings there. Singer would have liked to have dropped an eave, since Syechas was said to have a finger in every conspiratorial pie in the city of Vyutr. However, he dared not annoy his new landlord by lagging.

Up a flight of dingy stairs they went; up another; into a room containing an unmade bed and a few crude movables. Syechas took a step-ladder out of the closet and set it up directly under a trapdoor in the ceiling, climbed,

and rapped. Then he pushed up the trapdoor, came down, and said : " Up there."

Singer climbed. When he put his head through the opening he found it not quite so dark as an attic should be. He climbed the rest of the way and saw why : a table against a partition on which stood a lamp shaded by a piece of board.

Somebody was breathing.

Singer whirled, hand on his knife, and hit his head on a rafter. As the stars cleared he saw a man crouching in the gloom with a thing in his hand.

" Who are you?" said Singer.

" I might ask the same question."

" *Stsa!*" came Syechas's heavy voice. " Carve each other not; you're in like condition. Dinki, I'll fetch you a pallet. Have you supped?"

" No," said Singer.

" Very well." Sounds indicated that Syechas was securing the ladder. " Close the trap, and open not save on my knock : two, and again three."

" All right now," said Singer. " As I'm a—a fugitive like yourself, you can put up that thing. What is it, a pistol?" He picked the board off the table, so that the little oil-lamp shone unimpeded.

He saw a short man with a flat oriental-looking face and shaven head—typical Nichnyami. The man looked younger than Singer. However, you couldn't tell with Krishnans, who, lacking the benefits of Earthly science, seldom surpassed a century and a half, Earth time. The man held what he now saw to be a cocked crossbow-pistol. He shook out the bolt, let down the string, and said :

" As you see, no. Where should I get the magic

weapons of the Earthmen?" Then after a pause :
 "Syechas played me foul, putting another in my suite
 ——" (he indicated the attic with a faint smile) "——
 when I'd paid him for exclusive use. But he has us
 by the antennae. Whence hail you, stranger? From your
 accent I'd say not from Nichnyamadze."

"You're right. I——"

Singer paused, watching the other twirl one finger
 round his right antenna, and then take that organ of
 smell between thumb and finger and tug it gently, thrice.

Singer casually did likewise. This was a high-sign
 among Earthmen travelling in disguise on the planet
 Krishna, implying their feelers were false and glued on.

"Do you speak Portuguese?" said the stranger in that
 tongue.

"*Sim, senhor,*" replied Singer in the language of the
 spaceways. "Enough to get by."

"Was your original language by any chance English?"

Singer's plump face took on a broad grin as he thrust
 out a beefy hand. "Good-o! Shike on it, cobber!"

The other man shook with a steely grip, saying : "Are
 you English?"

"D'you tike me for a bleeding Pommy? Hell no, I'm
 an Austyrian! But ain't it a hang of a thing to yarn
 in the good old English language agine?"

"Sure is," said the man with a faintly ironical grin
 for which Singer could see no reason. "What's your
 name?"

"Born Cuthwin Singer, but me pals calls me 'Dinky.'
 Yours?"

"I'm Earl Okagamut."

"The Earl of *what*?"

"No; that's my name. Okagamut. Earl Okagamut."

"Oh. How'd you land in this hell-hole?"

"Studying for a Ph. D.," said Okagamut.

"That don't sound reasonable, now. Explain."

"Sure. I'm studying for a degree in xenanthropology, and for my thesis I took Krishnan religious customs. By a little bribery and a lot of damn foolishness I got into the purity ceremony in the Fprochan Temple, disguised as a Kangandite priest."

"You are a doer! And they caught you digging the jewel out of the idol's eye, I suppose?"

"No; they only worship geometrical abstractions."

"I know; I was Yadjye's butler. Maybe that's what makes 'em such wowsers. What happened?"

"You were Yadjye's butler? It was old Yadjye himself who caught me. I must have turned right when I should have turned left, or gotten up when I should have prostrated myself, for the first thing I knew the high priest was yelling 'sacrilege!' and a hundred minor Kangandites, not being supposed to shed blood, were trying to strangle me with the belt-cords of their robes."

"How d'you get out?" cried Singer excitedly.

"This." Okagamut whisked out his blade: slightly curved, too long for a knife though rather short for a sword, with a fancy knuckle-guard. "I had to prick a couple, for which my next incarnation will no doubt be in the body of an unha. Luckily I got out before the temple guards were alerted, and came here. How about you?"

"Oh, nothing much about me," said Singer with an air of false modesty. "But since you insist, I had a good pozzer at Novorecife and married a bonzer sheila, when who blows in from Earth but another wife I'd forgot about, complete with documents to prove it. Well, you

know how it is there—for a Brazzy, Abreu's the worst wowser I ever seen . . ."

"I know," said Okagamut. "Being scared of his own wife, he won't stand for liberties on the part of anyone else."

"That's the dinkum oil. I thought it wise to up stick before he put his Johns on me, and ever since then I've been a sundowner wandering the face of Krishna and living by what wits I've got. By devious methods I wormed my way into the household of His Sacredness High-Priest Yadjye, Archbishop or Chief Rabbi or whatever you call him of the Church of the Divine Space, otherwise the Kangandite Cult, for the Diocese of Nichnyamadze."

"As his butler?" asked Okagamut.

"Well, yes and no. Having once been an undertaker I knew something of forms and ceremonies. Therefore he employed me as a master of protocol, to tell the temple virgins when to bring on the roast and such. Only poor Yadjye can't eat roast, being head of a religion that disbelieves in meat-eating and any other kind of fun you might mention."

"How about the temple virgins? Are they?"

"They are; or at least they were before I came along. They serve him at table in rotation, you see. Well, there was a tonky little sort starting her training, named Lüdey, and we will not bandy a woman's name except to say that everything was as jolly as could be until she got the idea that I should take her away from it all to see the world. Several worlds, in fact, for in the course of the proceedings she had naturally got on to the fact that I was an Earthman. I explained how I couldn't get off Krishna unless they changed the law about bigamy, for

Novorecife was the only spaceport and Abreu's troopers would catch me dinkum die if I tried it.

"But the situation deteriorated, as that bloke Shakespeare said, until she departed with a toss of her lovely head and a threat to tell Uncle Yadjye about the viper in his bosom. Not waiting to argue the toss I shook the dust of the Archepiscopal palace from my boots and—here I am! Now what'll we do?"

"Don't know. How are you fixed for money?"

"Oh," said Singer cautiously, "I copped one of Yadjye's candlesticks and gave it Syechas for board and keep."

"Is that all?"

"It's all I'm telling about. I didn't have time to pack me luggage. How about you?"

"Somewhat the same, except that I had some cash on me. I can't stay here much longer or I won't have enough for the kind of escape I'm planning."

"What's your idea?" said Singer eagerly.

"Well, I don't know. I'd planned it for *one* man, and it'll cost more than I've got with two."

Singer looked hard at Okagamut. While this man seemed fair dinkum, Singer was not free from prejudices. Finally he made up his mind.

"Look, cobber, let's take a chance," he said, bringing out the other candlestick and his small change and laying them on the floor. "We can trust each other farther than we can Syechas, anyhow. Part up your oscar and we shall see what we can do."

Okagamut brought out a money-belt. They counted coins and estimated the value of the candlestick, and were just securing their wealth when five raps on the trapdoor told them Syechas was bringing supper.

After they had closed the trap again Singer beamed at the tray with honest pleasure. "Meat, by God! After a month of greens I thought I'd never see real tucker again. How does he do it?"

Okagamut shrugged. "If he can get nyomnigë I guess he can bootleg a little meat. Contraband is his business."

"Including us," said Singer. "Look, what's this escape plan?"

"Had any polar experience?"

"Having been a professional tourist guide, I've done a little mountaineering. Why?"

"I thought we might buy a sled and cut across the Psheshuva. I know the President of Olñega."

"Hm," said Singer, not sure he liked the plan. The Psheshuva was a spur to the South Polar Plateau, which extended north a thousand hoda or so, separating the Kingdom of Nichjmyamadze from the Republic of Olñega. Singer had never driven a fsyok-sled, and his mountaineering was confined to a few slides down an easy slope on skis. "How will you make arrangements?"

"Syechas can take care of most of it. Claims he can get us out of Vyutr—for a consideration, of course."

"What's he going to use, a glider? With these winds a big kite could lift us over the wall."

"I suspect a tunnel. How much trail can you take?"

Singer said: "I've had a bit of graft in my day, though I've lived an easy life lately." He patted his paunch. "That'll work off, I dare say."

"How about arms?"

Singer shook his head. "Nothing but me eating-dirk. I never could get the knack of these silly swords. Why, one bomb or gun——"

CALORIES

"I know, but we're on Krishna, where they don't have such things. Maybe it's just as well, because we'll have to watch our weight to the last gram."

Syechas said: "Myosl will take you through the tunnel. Then you have a three-days' walk into the mountains. When you reach Dyenük's house, you can get your needfuls from there on."

Myosl led them, muffled in furs, out Syechas's back door into the cold night; along a winding path among rubbish-heaps and through fences, and down steps to another door. A lock squealed, and they were in complete darkness.

Myosl snapped one of those flint-and-steel contraptions and lit a small candle-lamp. The reflector threw a weak beam into a tunnel walled with rough stone down which water dripped from whiskers of mould and moss. Singer had to bend, and the mud sucked at his boots. Every few paces their shabby-looking guide looked back at them.

Okagamut said softly: "This must run for kilometres."

"Right-o. I should think we'd be outside the walls now. I don't——" Singer paused as Myosl bent another of those looks on him.

"Go on. I'm sure he can't understand English."

"I was about to say, I don't trust that joker. Wouldn't it be a go, now, if after our host back there had got all the brass he could wring out of us, we was to be smeared by a push in these here catacombs and robbed of the rest?"

They plodded on, their breaths making plumes of vapour in the cold air. The silence was broken only by

the drip of water and the squelching of their boots in the mud. The place stank.

"It's rising," said Okagamut.

The tunnel not only rose, but also made a couple of right-angled turns and ended with a door. Myosl took another look behind him and opened the door.

Beyond the room was a small space like a closet and another door. Through this door they found themselves in a kind of underground meeting-room, far gone in ruin. At the far end a broken door hung askew on one hinge. Through the triangular opening Singer could see steps going up and moonlight coming down.

Okagamut said: "See that helmet in stone carved on the altar? This must be a secret chapel of Qondyorr, the old Gozashtando god of war. After the Kangandites got control of the kingdom, they drove the other cults underground, in both senses. Wish I could get access to the records of——"

Myosl whistled sharply.

"Watch it, bod!" cried Singer, reaching for the clasp of his cloak.

Two men stepped out of the shadows. Each ran at one of the Earthmen with a sword. Myosl laid down his lantern, drew a dagger, and danced after them.

Skipping back to stay out of reach of the point, Singer tripped and fell on his back. His assailant lunged. Singer knocked the blade aside with his forearm and shot his heel out against the man's belly. The man reeled back and crashed into Myosl. By the time they had recovered, Singer was up again, the clasp finally undone.

"Come on, ringtails!" said Singer, whipping the cloak into a roll and swinging it with both hands. The heavy fur-lined garment made a fine club. Whang! The

nearest attacker's sword went flying across the room. Whang! Myosl was knocked sideways.

Somebody screamed. Beyond his assailants Singer saw Okagamut's man thrashing on the floor. Okagamut turned towards them. Myosl lunged with his dagger; Singer caught his wrist and they grappled, Myosl trying to cut through Singer's glove. The other attacker squared off with his fists at Okagamut, who led with his left. The Krishnan countered with a straight right which the Earthman dodged, and the latter came back with a right, almost at the same instant, to the side of the Krishnan's jaw. Crack! The Krishnan sat down.

Singer brought his leg into play and sent Myosl staggering back. Then he got out his own knife, a special number with a knobby guard that made a fine knuckle-duster. As Myosl recovered from the kick, Singer punched his face with the guard and then let him have the point.

"You're late," Singer told Okagamut as Myosl collapsed. "No, wait, the other's getting up!"

Both rushed at the remaining Krishnan, who, however, was now on his feet and using them. He leaped through the doorway and up the stairs. The Earthmen tripped and stumbled after him. The stairs, half buried in moss and stones, led up to what must have once been a hidden entrance on the surface, long since fallen to pieces. Though all three moons bathed the snow-spotted landscape, the Krishnan could not be seen. A half-hoda away rose the wall of Vyutr.

Okagamut said: "Maybe he's behind one of these boulders or bushes, but even if we flushed him the racket would bring the guard out."

"Good-o," said Singer. "Let's see what we've got below."

The two Krishnans in the chapel were dead, one with the hilt of Okagamut's short sword sticking out of his ribs. The blade must have stuck in a bone, for Okagamut had to take the hilt in both hands and set his foot on the corpse to jerk the blade out.

"That's the trouble with Krishnans," said Singer. "They looks human except for details like the ears and feelers, but you never can tell where their bones and vital organs are." He picked up the sword of the man who had run away. "You know, Earl, maybe swords ain't so silly here after all. I think I'll keep this half-pie article. Of course if I had me lady from Bristol . . ." He examined the cheap sword, whose scabbard had fled with its owner. On the other hand the attacker whom Okagamut had killed had broken his sword.

"His lunge went over my shoulder and hit the wall," Okagamut explained. "What do you make of this attack?"

Singer fitted the odd sword into the dead man's scabbard. A little tight, but it would have to do.

"Simple robbery, near as I can see," he said. "I don't know this smear here. Still, we'd best push off. I say, there ought to be a fortune in smuggling modern arms to these bushmen!"

"Been tried. The Interplanetary Council goes to any length to stop it. There was the King of Zamba's crate of machine-guns—but that's a long story."

"What's the idea of that crook I.C. regulation?"

"To keep Krishnans from exterminating each other, I suppose. Still, a smart Earthman can use his brains without actually breaking the rule."

"Like the way you stoushed that skite? If I'm not mistaken, the pugilistic manœuvre you employed was a right cross, which takes practice and is only for experts. How about it?"

"I was in the ring once," said Okagamut. "Before I went to college. When I was a freshman the coach found out and had me in the gym showing the boys how to do rights over lefts. Funny thing, nobody ever tried to haze me."

"I can see why," said Singer.

Singer said: "We ought to come to this cocky's hut sarvo."

They had stopped to rest where the road crossed a spur of the range leading up to the Psheshuva. The clear air allowed a view over many miles of hills covered with bushy growths, rolling away to the snowy plain beyond. Vyutr was a smudge on the horizon.

"We'd better, before we run out of grub," said Okagamut. "I'll ask the next smitrot-herder."

The herder gripped his club suspiciously, while his fsyok rose to its six legs and yowled threateningly. When assured that they had no designs on his herd he told them: "A little farther, my masters; see yon hill? Just out of sight over it, take a trail to the right . . ."

They took up the weary walk again. At last they found the hut. Their knock was answered by a short gnome of a Krishnan with frayed antennae and white hair. "Who be ye?"

"Are you Dyenük?" said Okagamut.

"Answer not one question with another, if ye'd do business with me."

"We are the men from Syechas."

"Prove it," said the gnome.

"Here's a letter from him. Uh, you're holding it upside down."

"So I be, heh heh. Come in, come in. Mayey!" he shouted.

He led them into the house, rudely furnished but comfortable, solidly built, and too big to be called a hut. A flat-faced Nichnyamadze girl, clad only in the smitrot-skin pants worn by the country folk of both sexes in this cold region, looked up from her housecleaning to giggle. A second one appeared. "My daughters, Mayey and Pyesatül. Good girls ever since they were hatched. Ye'd like rest and food ere we take up the business?"

"You are right, sir," said Okagamut, sinking into a chair and tugging at a boot.

"So your name's Mayey?" said Singer to the first girl, grinning. "Now that is a nice name. I think not that I ever heard it before."

"Oh, great lord, you mock a poor mountain maid. 'Tis common."

"Well, that could be, as I have never—uh—been hereabouts before. A pretty name goes with a pretty face and other things . . ."

Okagamut said: "Drink your kvad, Dinky, and leave Mayey alone. Have you got all the stuff for us, Dyenük?"

The gnome counted on fingers. "The overboots, mittens, and other items of clothing, aye. The sled, skis and poles, tent, stove, and such-like items of gear, aye. The horashevë, not yet ready, but with your help, good sirs——"

"What is *horashevë*?" said Singer.

"What we'd call pemmican on Earth," said Okagamut.

"Well, what's *that*?"

"It's what we'll be eating. Go on, Dyenük."

"But now, sirs, I come to the sad part of the tale, as it says in the story of the princess with two heads. For a disease has afflicted the fsyok-kennels of this-land within the last two ten-nights, so that I can spare you but five fsyokn to pull your sled."

"Five!" said Okagamut.

"Aye, but big and strong. They'll manage everywhere save on steep slopes, and as for that, such lusty youths as yourselves should make no obstacle thereof."

"We're in a fix," said Okagamut to Singer. "I was counting on nine. We'll have to push the damned sled halfway to Olñega."

"Slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, as that chap Napoleon said," replied Singer cheerfully. "Oh well, they says exercise is good for one." And he left the technicalities to his companion while he turned his charm on Mayey.

Pyesatül announced dinner, during which Okagamut and the oldster chattered about weather, weight of equipment, food required per man per day, and other factors in polar travel. As they talked in local units of measurement, Singer could make nothing of it. Dyenük also inveighed against the tyranny of the Kangandite cult, who by their tabus on meat had impoverished honest herders:

"The revenue from the hides, sirs, barely pays my taxes; wherefore for tobacco and such simples I must sell through folk like Syechas—I, always hitherto a veritable pillar of legality . . ."

Afterwards Okagamut said: "With your kind permission we'll retire, omitting supper to be up early on the morrow."

Singer murmured to Mayey: "See you later, little one," before his companion hauled him away to their room.

When Okagamut seemed to be breathing regularly, Singer got up, slipped on his shirt and pants, and tip-toed to the door.

"What are you up to, Dinky?" came a sharp whisper.

"Nothing to fret about. Just a date with the dinkum sheila."

"Damn you! Move and I'll put a bolt through you!"

The lamp came on, and Singer saw that his friend did indeed have his crossbow-pistol in hand, loaded and cocked.

"What the flopping hell's bothering you, pal?" said Singer. "Don't get off your bike over this!"

"You leave those girls alone, see?"

"And what business is it of yours, may I inquah?"

"Anything you do while you're with me's my business. If you make a pass at those girls, I'll kill you. We've got enough troubles without leaving some broken-hearted Jane to put Yadjye's cops on your track."

"But I was only going to give her a bit of a smoodge—good clean fun."

"You heard me. If you don't like it you can stay here while I take the team. I can get across the Psheshuva alone, and you can't. Get me?"

"Oh, hell!" Singer pulled off his shirt, wadded it up, and threw it in a corner.

Next morning, his feelings still hurt, Singer ate in glowering silence, speaking to Okagamut only when he had to and then in curt monosyllables. He cast furtive glances at the girls and thought of what might have been. He did not, however, plan to circumvent Okagamut's tabu; the damned little Chow might smear him, and in any case, he'd never get to Olñega.

When Singer would have relaxed over his pipe after breakfast, Okagamut said briskly: "Turn to, chum; we've got work."

Dyenük led them outside to a shed wherein a mess of gear was piled on and around a big sled. The herder proffered mittens and overboots until he had fitted both of them. Then he brought forth two pairs of short skis shod on the bottom with tvortsevë-hide, the bristles pointing aft.

"Be sure your bindings are tight, my lords," he said. "I once rented skis to a man of Vyutr who insisted on going out on the glacier with loose bindings. Naturally he floundered in the snow, without control, and when a pudamef crept out of a crevasse the poor lad could do nought."

"What's a pudamef?" said Singer.

"A kind of snow-dragon they have around the edges of the plateau," said Okagamut. "Dyenük, how about poles?"

"We use these," said their host, getting down a spear with a ski-pole disc near its butt-end.

Okagamut swung the object. "Too heavy for one hand, but if we're likely to meet pudamefn it will be useful. W'll just have to learn to ski with one pole."

Dyenük explained the operation of the tent and other

pieces of equipment, then took them out to a lean-to built against the side of the shed. "The horashevë for the fsyokn is finished," he said, "but not yours. 'Twould have been, save that one of the beasts slipped his tether two nights gone and feasted on the man-food. You, Dinky, shall dice this haunch of unha while your friend stirs the fat-cauldron and I weigh out ingredients. Girls! Girls! How are your biscuits coming?"

Singer looked in dismay at the pile of bricks of composition food already stacked against the shed. "Good gods, have we got to haul all that?"

"Absolutely," said Okagamut. "For the work that's ahead of us, you need at least 5,000 calories a day."

Singer chopped at slabs of meat and heaps of dried vegetables with a knife until his fingers ached, then stirred the fat in the rendering-pot until his arm ached and the stench nearly suffocated him, then mixed ingredients until he could hardly stand for weariness. They took but a few minutes out for lunch. Dyenük's daughters brought out a huge pile of biscuits and smaller amounts of other Krishnan foods, which they began packing into leather bags, together with the bricks of frozen horashevë. Then they packed the smaller bags into two large canvas containers.

Okagamut indicated one of these, saying: "Okay, Dinky, that's your grub for the trip."

"Mine?" said Singer, hefting the container. "Gad, she must weigh five stone. That's a year's tucker!"

"Remember that when you're tempted to eat over your daily ration . . . What is it, Pyesatül?"

"Lord," said the younger girl, "I know not if I should disturb you, but yonder come a party of men towards our steadng."

Sure enough, far off, where the plain first began to break up into the rolling foothills that led up to their present height, a little group of black specks was creeping over the landscape.

"Have you got a telescope?" Okagamut asked Dyenük.

"Aye. I'll fetch it."

They took turns looking through the glass. The black specks were undoubtedly men on ayas.

"What'll we do?" said Singer. "Run for it?"

"We've got to pack the sled first," said Okagamut. "It'll take them some hours to reach here, won't it, Dyenük?"

"Aye." They hauled the sled out of the shed and began stowing and lashing their gear to it.

"What can I do?" said Singer, feeling useless.

"Keep out of our way," snapped Okagamut. Singer's anger at his companion, which had died down during the day's work, flared up again. He stamped off.

It seemed to Singer that they took an interminable time checking and re-arranging their gear. Finally they lashed a tarpaulin over the whole, and manhandled the sled around to the front of the house.

"Bear a hand!" barked Okagamut. Although offended, Singer complied. The weight of the loaded sled amazed him.

"It'll lighten as we go," said Okagamut.

"Huh," said Singer. "It's fair cow that it should be heaviest at the start, when we're going uphill."

They went around to the kennels, where Dyenük handed Singer the leash of one of the fsyokn and told him to lead the animal back to the sled. Singer did

not like the wide mouth and fangs of the creature, a big long-haired cousin of the eshun, which in more equatorial nations performed the office of tame dog. The beast, however, seemed eager to be hitched up and with its six powerful legs almost pulled Singer off his feet. It scudded through the thin slushy snow, Singer bounding behind.

Dyenük said : " Keep those two apart, lest they fight ! "

While the animals yowled, Okagamut paid off Dyenük, practically exhausting his and Singer's resources. Singer impulsively tossed his ring to Dyenük. " Give it to whichever girl marries first, " he said. " Cheerio ! "

They looked towards the plains. The black specks were nearer.

Okagamut cracked his whip and shouted : " *Kshay!* " The five fsyokn dug in their paws and pulled.

" *Dzat!* " They did a column-right at the road. Lumps of slush flew back over the sled; the Earthmen had to run. Singer found he could climb hills faster with his fur-shod skis than with the ordinary kind, since one could advance by simply sliding them parallel without herring-boning.

He was beginning to puff when the fsyokn settled down to a more normal pace. It was late in the long Krishnan day. In these latitudes it never got really dark, save for a short time around midnight in winter; the rest of the time there was either a low sun or twilight. The seasons differed but little because of the slight inclination of the planet's axis.

The layer of pearly cloud that covered the sky made it hard to tell direction, and soon the light became too dim to see those black specks far behind.

"By the gods," said Singer after a couple of hours, "I'm softer than I thought."

"Getting tired?"

"I can go as far as you, Mr. Okagamut."

"Okay. We want to do all we can before stopping."

They did halt for an evening meal. Okagamut said : "Watch it, there. One biscuit's all you get."

"But I'm jolly starved!"

"I know, but you'll be hungrier yet if you don't stick to your ration. I warned you."

"Wowser!" muttered Singer. While he thought he was coming to dislike this reserved and competent young man, he didn't want to provoke him into leaving him flat in this white wilderness.

They went on again and reached the foot of Shtojë Glacier. Okagamut said : "We can wait here till morning, or start up the glacier and put a little more distance between us and Yadjye's boys before it gets dark. It'll be hard going, with crevasses, but if you'll take a chance I will."

"I'm with you," said Singer, and they started up.

On the steeper slopes both had to push on the rear of the sled while the animals heaved and panted in front. At times they even slid backwards. They passed crevasses : great ice-chasms dropping off into blue darkness. Singer shuddered as they threaded their way around them.

When Singer thought he would drop from exhaustion, Okagamut said : "We'll camp here; it's beginning to blow."

A breeze was raising an ankle-high drift. They found a level spot, staked out the animals, and set up the tent slowly and with much fumbling, for they were unused

to their gear. The wind rose, making it hard to stake the tent and filling the air with a whirling, blinding, stinging cloud of snowflakes. They hastily fed the animals, pushed the sled so that one of its runners rested on the windward flap of the tent, and crawled through the tent-sleeve just as the wind began to blow in earnest. The tent-walls flapped with a deafening drum-like sound. Okagamut pulled off his footgear and pants and slid into his sleeping-bag. Singer did likewise, looking apprehensively at the snapping cloth over his head.

"I wonder," he said, "when this thing's going to take off."

A snore answered him.

For hours, it seemed, the racket kept him awake despite his fatigue. Then he slept, woke, and slept again. He woke again to find Okagamut preparing a meal. The wind still shrieked and shook the tent.

"How long does a blow like this keep up?" asked Singer.

"A ten-night, maybe."

"Don't poke borax at me!"

"No, I mean it."

"Won't that give the Johns a chance to catch us?"

Okagamut shook his head. "They can't travel in it either."

They dozed the day away, except to crawl out into the drift to feed the fsyokn. The next night was the same; then the wind dropped.

Okagamut crept out through the sleeve and whistled. The fsyokn, looking unhappy with their fur full of icicles, howled a greeting. Singer came out too. The cloud-

curtain was rolling back. The wind had in some places scoured off the snow, leaving glare ice, while in others it had packed the snow into wave-like ridges.

"Sastrugi," said Okagamut. "Hard going."

"Look!" cried Singer, pointing.

Far down the slope they saw two brown oblongs against the white: tents. There were many fsyokn pegged out, though at the distance they couldn't count them.

"Let's go," said Okagamut.

"How do you know they're after us? Might be a skiing party."

"I'm not taking a chance."

Although they worked fast, the cold numbed their fingers and the unfamiliar gear resisted their efforts to pack it back into the sled. A couple of specks had detached themselves from the other encampment and moved closer, growing to men. A faint hail came up the glacier: "You there! Stay where you are!"

"It's them," said Singer, collapsing the tent.

Something whistled and struck the ice with a sharp sound.

"They've got a crossbow," said Okagamut.

"Why not fort up and shoot back with your little bow?"

"Nuts. They'd have us hopelessly out-ranged. Once we get going they'll never catch us. Here, catch this line and tie it to your belt."

Another missile whistled overhead. Okagamut cracked his whip, and off they went. The sastrugi made their sled pitch like a tugboat in a gale. Singer fell over the ridges and picked himself up until he was sure he was black and blue all over. He looked back and said:

"Those blokes with the bow have stopped, anyhow. The others seem to be breaking camp."

They struggled on. The party behind drew closer, until through his goggles Singer made out two nine-fsyok teams, each pulling a heavily-loaded sled, and five men. Sometimes the two Earthmen hit a patch of smooth, hard snow and drew ahead; then they'd meet a steep slope or a stretch of sastrugi or a crevassed area and the pursuers would gain.

"Hi!" said Singer. "They've stopped and are running about like a pack of flopping ants!"

Okagamut paused for a look. "Ha! One of their sleds has fallen down a crevasse, and they're trying to haul it out."

"There wasn't no crevasse there when we went over it—or was there?"

"Sure; we've been crossing snow-bridges all morning. With this warmer weather they're melting thin, and they're apt to drop out from under you. That's why we wear skis and go roped together. I suppose we'd weakened one, so that when their heavier teams crossed, it went."

"Ugh," said Singer with a shiver that was not entirely due to the cold.

The pursuers receded to a stippling on the landscape, and then were hidden by the contour of the glacier. The Earthmen slogged away until the low sun slanted towards the horizon again. Singer asked: "How d'you know your way?"

"Sun partly; I hope we don't have another overcast until we reach the plateau. Once we're there, there are mountains we can sight on."

They camped that evening when exhausted, and spent

the night taking turns sleeping and watching. Next morning the snow turned slushy and stuck to skis and sled-runners. They had to push the sled, grunting. Singer once thought he saw moving specks on the horizon. The next day was much the same, though the slope became easier. Then another blizzard pinned them for a night, a day, and another night.

Singer stuck his head out the following morning and said: "Looks like clearing." He dressed, remarking: "At this rate I shan't have any potbelly left when we get to Olñega. Look at these trousers!"

His pants were indeed inches too large around the waist. He looked at himself in his little hand-mirror: his thin hair and abundant beard, once auburn but now greying, were sprouting fast. Okagamut's hair was coming out glossy black, and the man seemed to have no beard to speak of.

"See what they're yelling about, will you, Dinky?" said Okagamut, pottering with the stove. The animals' morning howls had risen to a hysterical pitch.

Singer crawled out to look. He stopped and drew in his breath.

Crawling over the snow came a snaky creature fifteen or twenty metres long, belonging to the six-legged division of Krishnan land vertebrates. Each leg ended in a large webbed foot with long curved talons. Its reptilian appearance was confused by the fact that it was covered with dense white fur.

Singer yelled: "Earl!" snatched his ski-spear from where it stuck upright in the snow, and ran towards the pudamef, which was nearing the sledge-beasts.

The snow-dragon arched its neck and hissed.

Singer threw the spear. It missed and sailed over the creature's back.

He tugged at his sword-hilt. The sword stuck fast. Singer remembered that the scabbard didn't fit. Another tug, harder, did no good.

The snaky white head shot out. Singer leaped back, tripped over a sastruga, and fell, hitting his head on a patch of bare ice. Stars danced in front of his eyes.

The jaws gaped nearer.

A yell, and Okagamut leaped past and lunged with the other spear. Singer saw blood on the white-furred muzzle. Another thrust, into the gaping maw. More blood, and then the creature was backing, hissing like a boiler safety-valve. It turned and crawled off with a clockworky motion. Okagamut chased it with shouts and menaces until it disappeared among the pressure-ridges.

"Are you all right, Dinky?" said Okagamut.

Singer felt the back of his head and winced. "Outside of a cracked skull or two I'm fine. Threw my spear and missed——"

"I'll get your spear . . ." Okagamut walked towards where the ski-spear stood with its head buried in the snow.

Then, quick as a flash, he vanished.

"Hey, Earl!" cried Singer, getting up. "Don't do that! I say, where the flopping hell are you?"

He started towards the site of the disappearance, then, remembering Okagamut's cautions about crevasses, went back to the tent, put on his skis, and set out again.

He found a hole in the snow going down to darkness, just big enough for Okagamut's body. He began enlarging the hole with his hands, calling : "Earl!"

"Pass down a knife!" came a voice from the depths.

Singer went back and got the climbing-rope, tied his knife to the end, and lowered it down the hole. After he had dangled it at various depths, the call came up : "Can't get hold of it. My arms are pinned."

Singer hauled back the knife and stood up, non-plussed. As his eyes swept the horizon they stopped at a group of black specks. He peered for several seconds. No doubt this time.

He fought down the urge to hitch up the team, which he could now drive after a fashion, and race off by himself. Why should he get caught . . . ?

He shook his head to clear away such thoughts and shouted down : "What'll I do now, come down and get you?"

The faint voice came back : "Can you climb a rope?"

"Yes, I've been a ship's painter."

"Okay. First, take off your skis and put on your crampons. Then tie all the skis and poles together to make a deadman, and dig a trench at least a metre deep. Tie the line around the middle of your bundle and bury it . . ."

Singer raced to carry out instructions. He got the shovel, tied up the bundle, and in less than half an hour was lowering himself down the crevasse by the climbing-rope, whose other end was belayed by the deadman.

As the crevasse averaged only a metre wide, he found that by bracing his back against one side and digging the spikes of the crampons on his feet into the other, he hardly needed the rope. The inside of a glacier was the strangest place he had ever been in.

Sunlight came through the ice as a diffused blue glow.

Water dripped somewhere, plink-plink, and from deep in the ice same cracking and groaning sounds.

Fifteen metres from the surface he found Okagamut, wedged head downward where the walls shelved together. Bracing his feet, Singer began chipping away with his knife.

"Watch out," said Okagamut. "You don't want to drop me down the rest of the way."

Singer kept on, expecting any minute to hear the whoops of the pursuers. Finally he worked the end of the rope around his companion's torso, tied it securely, and inched his way back up to the surface. Despite the cold, he was soaked with sweat.

The specks on the horizon were bigger.

He heaved on the rope. No good. Heave. No good.

He looked around frantically. The *fsyokn*! While they obeyed him none too well, beggars couldn't be choosers, as that bloke Cicero said. He tied the end of the rope to the sledge-trace and, with difficulty, hitched up the team.

"*Kshay!*" The animals strained at their traces, with no result.

Again, with a crack of the whip. No good. The specks were visibly growing, weren't they?

Again. And again. He used the whip, and with his other hand hauled on the rope himself.

The tension suddenly lessened. Up came Okagamut, until he flopped over the lip of the hole and scrambled to his feet. The *fsyokn*, not having been told to stop pulling, jerked him flat on his face and began dragging him at a run until Singer's shrieks stopped them.

Okagamut felt his right arm, saying: "No bones broken, I think, but my arm's asleep from having the

circulation cut off. Serves me right for running around a glacier without skis—hey, aren't those our friends from Vyutr?"

"Right-o."

"Why didn't you tell me? Get the gear stowed, quick!"

"I thought you had enough to worry about, battler," said Singer, pulling up tent-stakes.

The approaching party could now be made out. The howls of their *fsyokn* came across the snow. The two men, the smaller hampered by his paralysed arm, rushed about stowing their gear.

"They've got us this time, that's no *furphy*," said Singer.

"Not necessarily. Here, catch this. Put that there. Tie down this corner. Get your skis back on."

"Still think we can escape?"

"Once we get going, I know it. Got everything? *Kshay!*"

Off they went. Okagamut's arm had come to life again. They jogged beside the sled at a dog-trot. Yells, whip-cracks, and howls came from the pursuers.

On the Earthmen went, neither gaining nor losing, all morning and part of the afternoon. When they got too exhausted with trotting, they hopped on the sled long enough to catch their breath.

"What's happened back there?" said Singer.

"One of their *fsyokn* has dropped dead, and they're cutting him loose."

"We'd better slow up a bit, lest ours do the same."

After a few minutes at an easier pace, Singer's head stopped spinning and the pounding of his heart abated. Then he said: "Oh!"

"What?"

"Look at that slope!"

"That leads to the plateau. If we can make it we'll have fairly easy going the rest of the way."

As the exhausted animals could not drag the sled up the grade, the men put their shoulders to the rear of the load. Up they went, a step at a time.

The noise neared. Something went *fwht!* "Shooting at us again," panted Okagamut.

The next, thought Singer, would hit right between his shoulder-blades.

Fwh-tunk! The arrow struck the load on the sled. Singer hoped it hadn't punctured their kettle.

Fwht!

"One more heave," gritted Okagamut, "and we'll be out of—uh! They got me!"

Singer, heedless of the archers, seized his companion. "Where?"

"Here!" Okagamut showed the feathered tail of the bolt sticking out of his coat. "Hey, wait!" He pulled the missile out. No blood. "They didn't get me after all; that fur-lined vest Dyenük sold me must have stopped it!"

They struggled to the top of the slope, missiles scattering more and more widely as the bowmen, in a last effort, shot at higher and higher angles.

At the top they paused for breath, out of range. Singer cried: "They're turning back!"

"I thought they would," said Okagamut.

After a moment of silence, Singer said: "Let's take a spell for a pot of billy and a smoke-o."

"Okay."

CALORIES

"You know, cobber, I had a derry on you back there at the hut on account of what happened. But now I sees it was my fault. You're a dinkum bloke and a credit to your jolly species, and I'm sorry for the way I acted. Will you shike on it?"

"I'll shike," said Okagamut with a grin.

"By the way, how'd you know they'd turn back if you kept ahead of 'em long enough?"

"Hadn't you guessed? It's a matter of logic. For one thing I'm an Eskimo, brought up on conditions like this. I was born in Kotzebue Sound, and I teach at the University of Alaska.

"I knew that to keep up your strength on the trail you need a high-calorie diet which means a high meat-content. Being vegetarians the Kangandites couldn't do that. They either had to pack such a load of plant foods to get the necessary calories and oil to cook it that their beasts couldn't haul it, or else they'd find themselves running out of grub before they even reached the plateau. Which——" (he jerked his thumb towards the Kangandites, now small specks again) "——is just what happened!"

The Colourful Character

GREGORY LAWRENCE put away his notes about food-chains among the fresh-water organisms of the Pichidé River on the planet Krishna. He yawned, stretched, lit a cigarette, and said : “ I hear we’re supposed to be swept off our feet, beginning to-night.”

Reginald Schmidt, at the next desk, raised his eyebrows, though the pale eyes remained as non-committal as ever behind their glasses. “ Uh—what’s that?”

“ The celebrity arrives to take the Institute by storm.”

“ What celebrity?”

“ Hadn’t you heard? Jeepers, you must lead a sheltered life, boss. I refer to the great explorer of the far planets, Sir Erik Koskelainen.”

“ Erik Kos—here on Earth?” Schmidt, caught in the act of lighting his pipe, stared open-mouthed at his assistant until the match burned his fingers. He dropped it, swore mildly, and lit another.

Lawrence, watching the big, light-haired man, tried to make out the expression on the flat face. It was certainly more animated than he had ever seen Reggie look before, but he couldn’t be sure of the meaning of the expression. It might betoken a mixture of astonish-

THE COLOURFUL CHARACTER

ment, curiosity, indignation, and amusement, all struggling for supremacy.

"You know him?" said Lawrence.

"I know *of* him," mumbled Schmidt through the bush of his moustache and around the stem of his pipe. He drew heavily on the pipe between words. "Uh—what's this visit all about?"

Lawrence shrugged. "He'll be after a grant from the Institute, I suppose. He's a guest of the Ferreiras, who are throwing a big party for him at the Princeton Saturday. Going?"

Schmidt frowned at his pipe-bowl, looking a little cross-eyed as he did so. "Dunno. I usually duck those things."

"Better come. This guy is said to be a very colourful character. By the way, since you know about him, do you know if he's married?"

Up went the eyebrows again. "Not that I know of. Afraid he'll—uh—make time with Lícia?"

"He might. You know how women are. He worries me. You see, I'm no colourful character."

Schmidt nodded. "You're right there, Greg. You may make a good ecologist some day, but nobody would call you picturesque. How's the *affaire Lícia Ferreira* coming?"

"So-so. I'm going over to spend the evening sitting in the Ferreiras' parlour again."

"Smatter, can't you afford to take the doe out?"

"You don't date Brazzy girls that way. It would be what they call an intrigue, and—well, anyway, they have their own code in those matters."

"Don't think that even if you marry the dame, as you

seem determined to do, it'll get you any professional advancement or special grants. Ferreira's incorruptible, and even if he weren't, the other members of the Finance Committee——"

"I never had anything of the sort in mind!" cried Lawrence loudly. "She's just a swell wren!"

He dropped his voice as their colleague Louis Prevost stuck his long, sad face around the door-jamb and said: "You geniuses through for the day?" Prevost was an old-timer at the Institute by comparison with both Schmidt and Lawrence.

"Yep," said Lawrence. "How's the study of that misbegotten centaur of yours coming?"

Prevost sighed. "Magramen's losing friends and alienating people as usual. I think he ought to be called half man and half mule instead of half man and half horse."

"Mind if I look in on him again?" asked Lawrence.

"Not at all," said Prevost. "Maybe you can figure out a way to sweeten his disposition."

Lawrence asked Schmidt: "Want to see him, too?"

Schmidt shook his head. "For some reason I've never had much interest in the Dzlieri. If I ever get around to working on the xenology of Vishnu, then maybe I'll take a squint."

Lawrence followed Prevost down to the ground floor of the laboratory building, saying: "Maybe you could feed him an undergraduate every week. The way the guy in the myth did to his pet critter—you know, the half-bull, half-man."

Prevost shook his head. "I've been tempted, but Magramen's a pure vegetarian."

THE COLOURFUL CHARACTER

Lawrence's nose told him they were approaching Magramen's stall. The Dzlieri was not really half man and half horse. The front or upright part of him was not entirely human, with its long, pointed ears, prognathous face, four-fingered hands, and solid coat of short, glossy reddish hair. Nor was the rest of the extra-terrestrial strictly horse, with its three-toed feet and tufted tail. Still, the resemblance to a centaur was close enough to warrant the use of the term by those who found the native Vishnuvan name hard.

Magramen paused in his eternal munching long enough to say: "What you two want, huh?"

"Just thought I'd say hello," said Lawrence. "How's the Earth treating you?"

"Your Earth treat me rotten," roared Magramen, waving his salad fork. "This morning I read newspaper about horse-race. I ask Dr. Prevost simple thing—to go to race, enter myself, win a lot of money. No harm, huh? No, stupid Mushroom Prevost say no. Horse-race people no let me in, he say."

"Well?" said Lawrence.

"What he know? Never attended race in him life. Talk about science, how we must not never jump to conclusions. But won't let me go to race, see if *os fiscais* won't let me in. This *estúpido* think I can *shoris agheara gakhda* all day telling legends of Dzlieri; what think *idzelubuli* do?"

"Hey!" cried Lawrence. "I can't follow you when you talk three languages at once. I'm afraid Louie's right about the race, though. They'd disqualify you. But if you want some exercise, when are you going to let me ride you again?"

"Never! All those saddles and things, they itch.

Tell you what you do, Gregoryen. Get real horse and we have race, you on horse, me all by self, huh?"

"Jeepers, that would be a sight! I'll think about it. Have a cigarette?"

"*Obrigado*. Too much red tape on Earth. I think I go back to Vishnu."

"When your contract is up," reminded Prevost.

Magramen told Prevost what to do with his contract, and they left him glowering and puffing furiously.

Gregory Lawrence showed up on the Ferreira doorstep at the usual time, shook hands with the lovely brunette, and settled down to an evening of chaff under the watchful eye of Senhora Ferreira. His willingness to put up with this treatment had so far given him an edge over the undergraduates from the University who would otherwise have swarmed about Lícia Ferreira.

This time Lawrence had not gotten very far in his campaign, however, when the doorbell rang again. Lícia bounced out of her chair to answer it. Lawrence heard:

"But surely, come in, Mr. Koskelainen; we've been expecting you. Oh, *Pai!*"

Ferreira's goatee swam into view to meet the new arrival, and the voice of the chairman of the Finance Committee said: "A great pleasure, Sir Erik. This is my wife, and my youngest daughter Lícia. And this is Dr. Lawrence, who works with Dr. Schmidt on his ecological survey project at the Institute."

The conquerer of far planets shot out a hand of long fingers taut with latent strength to seize Lawrence's hand and wring it—not quite hard enough to hurt, but

hard enough to suggest that they could crush if they wanted to.

He was really a most impressive figure, Lawrence admitted to himself with a pang of envy; tall, broad-shouldered and slim-waisted, with light hair combined with wide cheek-bones and flattish features that gave him a slightly Mongoloid look, but still handsome by conventional standards. The man seemed to be at that delightfully indeterminate age when one is old enough to have had a past and still young enough to have a future. His clothes were the height of something or other, beginning with a red-lined Hollywood cape thrown back over one shoulder.

Jeepers, thought Lawrence, my worst fears are realised.

Here Lawrence was, a perfectly ordinary-looking young man, forced to compete with this exhibitionistic hero. Maybe he ought to cultivate some deliberate eccentricity of appearance or behaviour, such as growing a beard or keeping a pet ostrich, to lift the curse of his commonplaceness.

Piercing eyes bored into his, and Koskelainen boomed: "Why, I know you by reputation, Dr. Lawrence!"

"Me?" Greg Lawrence had hardly thought of himself as yet having a reputation he could be known by.

"Certainly. Didn't you do that excellent report on the balance between earthworms and soil bacteria in the Philippine Islands?"

"Y-yes, I suppose so."

"Well, then?" Koskelainen clapped Lawrence lightly on the shoulder. "Of course I know all you fellows are

geniuses or you couldn't get in here in the first place. Don't look cross; I'm not being sarcastic. I know a sound grasp of a subject when I see it, and why shouldn't you recognise your own worth? I envy you, you know; I'm no genius. I've just had a run of luck and the knack of handling men in tight places. How'd you like to go with me some time?" The visitor emphasised his points with graceful movements of his finger-tips.

A little overwhelmed by this flow of talk, Lawrence could only say: "Huh?"

"Sure. You know that project of mine? The thing I'm really here about? It's to persuade Dr. Ferreira and his colleagues to set up a complete biological survey of Ganesha. Never been done. We'd go in three or four teams, each of which would need at least one good ecologist. Sounds to me as if you'd be the kind I'd want; young, healthy, good reflexes, devoted to the job, and with a solid grasp of his speciality. The pay would be right, too. Of course, there'd be some risk in a wild world like Ganesha, but I know a man of your type wouldn't let that deter him."

"Well—uh—I——" Lawrence felt himself torn several ways. Prepared to loathe this overpowering stranger, he felt himself succumbing to the man's extraordinary charm. The offer was most flattering, and just what he'd long dreamed of—though on the other hand it would take him away from Lícia for several years at a stretch.

Koskelainen, as if reading his thoughts, said: "You can't answer now, of course, since nothing's settled yet. But bear it in mind; we'll talk about it some more." He turned to his host. "You know, Dr. Ferreira, you really have no business introducing me to such ravishingly

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beautiful daughters. First thing you know I'll be chucking the project in order to gaggle after them. Don't mind me, Senhorita; I just rattle on this way to hide my inferiority complex. Now, tell me about yourselves. Must get oriented, you know. What does Miss Ferreira do? College?"



"What's—uh—what hit you?" asked Schmidt when Lawrence showed up at the laboratory next morning.

"You mean this vacant, lost look on my face?" said that young man. "I've just been given the double-whammy by Sir Erik Koskelainen, and the effect hasn't yet worn off."

"How d'you mean?"

Lawrence told of the explorer's arrival. "When I shoved off at twenty-two he was still at it. Boy, if I had that personality and those looks I wouldn't need any brains. He did most of the talking, but he was so danged amusing and flattering about it that nobody minded. When I got home I wrote down some of the funny stories he told so I can use 'em myself some time."

"A formidable type, huh?"

"I should say so. In theory I hate his viscera, but if he walked in here now, he could talk me into anything. I'd be putty in his hands."

Schmidt was digging at the bowl of his pipe. "Did he say what brought him to the Institute of Advanced Study?"

"Yeah, I was going to tell you." Lawrence described the explorer's project for a complete biological survey of the planet Ganesha.

"Hm," said Schmidt. "That would cost a bit. Let

me think . . . ! Off-hand, I should say that it would absorb every nickel of the appropriation for new projects, and probably soak up some of the funds for old ones as well."

"You mean it might cut into ours, too?"

"Don't know yet, but it might. Think I'll look in on this shindy Saturday after all. Meanwhile, keep your eye on Sir Erik."

Next day, Lawrence told his superior: "Something's up all right. When I called up to arrange my usual session at the Ferreiras' last night, it turned out Koskelainen was taking the whole lot out to dinner; some fancy place in the city. And then when I asked about to-night, Lícia told me she had a date with him. A *date*, mind you! This guy must have hypnotised Papa Ferreira or something, because he wouldn't violate his old Brazilian customs for anything less. Where does that leave me?"

"Uh—up a well-known tributary without adequate means of propulsion," said Schmidt. "It won't comfort you any, but you ought to know that nobody can get near this Sir Erik during the day, either. He's closeted with the Finance Committee from morning to night. It's what, in the military schools on Krishna, they call a lightning offensive."

"You been there?" Lawrence asked, for Schmidt, during the few months they had worked together, had been close-mouthed about his background.

Schmidt nodded briefly. "Once. A war-like lot, and crazy to get modern Earthly weapons. Good thing the Interplanetary Council made the *Viagens Interplanetarias* exclude all gadgets from the planet. By the way, where can I borrow a dinner-jacket with the fixings?"

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"I've got an old one I outgrew some years ago."

"Not big enough for my purposes."

"Why, haven't you one of your own?"

"Yes, but this is for another guest."

"Who?"

"You'll see."

Schmidt had promised to drive Lawrence to the Princeton for the Institute dinner in honour of Sir Erik. Lawrence, however, was not prepared for having his boss drive up in a truck.

"What the devil, Reggie?" he cried. "That tux sure looks out of place in that van."

Schmidt puffed unperturbed on his pipe and jerked a thumb towards the rear. Got another guest with us."

"Who?"

"Uh—Magramen."

"*What?*"

"Yeah. He's eligible, since he's doing professional work on a project. And his table-manners can really be quite good when he takes the trouble."

"My gosh! You don't know what you're getting us into! If he thinks somebody's crossing him, he's apt to get mad and start slinging soup-bowls around the room, with the soup in them. Why did you ever ask him? I thought you had no particular use for Dzlieri."

"I had a particular use for him this time. And he'll behave."

At the hotel they got out and let down the tailgate. There was a scrambling sound from within, and the Dzlieri leaped lightly to the ground and brushed the sleeves of his dinner-jacket with his hands. Lawrence

jerked in his breath when he saw the extra-terrestrial, who had his face shaved and the quasi-human part of his body clad in a dress shirt and a dinner-coat.

Schmidt said : " I thought of trying to get some sort of special pants with four legs to go over his horse part, but there wasn't time. I guess they'll consider him—ah—decent."

"Jeepers," said Lawrence, " I think he'll be spectacular enough as he is."

"Got plenty salad? Plenty cocktail?" said Magramen. " I are hungry."

"You're always hungry, old horse," said Schmidt.

"Gotta have plenty cocktail to stand a sight of Earthmen eating meat," continued the Vishnuvan. "Disgusting species."

"That'll be taken care of," said Schmidt. "I'll even treat you, since I know you're the Galaxy's leading tightwad. Come on."

The big xenologist led the way into the hotel. He and Lawrence had to hold the folding front doors open to let Magramen pass through, since the extraterrestrial could not manage them himself because of his length of body. He went, grumbling about the stupidity of Earthly architects.

The people in the lobby showed only a mild interest in Magramen. After all, they knew about Dzlieri and other extraterrestrial species. Many of them had seen Magramen himself cantering about the town with Lawrence on his back, and finally they were hardened to the outlandish creatures that sometimes frequented the Institute of Advanced Study.

The three marched into the cocktail lounge, which

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was swarming with savants, who made respectful way for the Dzlieri, as though impressed by his size if not by his intellect. Schmidt ordered four double martinis, one each for Lawrence and himself and two for Magramen, whose capacity was in proportion to his bulk.

The talk and smoke were thick, and the three stood quietly drinking and batting back the greetings tossed at them while the press of great minds eddied around them.

Lawrence jerked a discreet thumb towards the densest knot at the end of the bar, from the midst of which boomed the ringing voice of Sir Erik Koskelainen.

Schmidt exchanged glances with the Vishnuvan.

Magramen said : "Now?"

"No. Wait till after dinner."

"They're going to dance, you know," said Lawrence.

Schmidt nodded. "Finish up, everybody. They're beginning to go in."

Under Schmidt's leadership they took places fairly well down towards the end of one leg of the horseshoe into which the tables had been arranged. One of the Institute's other two extraterrestrials, the reptilian fellow with the unpronounceable name, from Osiris, took a place next to them. The e.t.'s always had a tendency to huddle together from lonesomeness at these functions. The other one, the tailed man from Koloft on Krishna, sat across the way.

Magramen pulled out two chairs to make room to curl his equine bulk against the table. Koskelainen, resplendent in the red-and-blue full-dress of a major in the World Federation armed force, sat at the head of the horseshoe, at the right of the director. (He must

have a reserve commission, thought Lawrence; was this the proper occasion to wear it? He thought not.)

Lawrence reflected that on the whole the greatest minds in the Galaxy, as the Institute was intended to comprise, were not much to look at. They ran to baldness, thick glasses, and a dodderly manner which made Koskelainen stand out amongst them like a sunflower in a coal-scuttle. As for their women, with a few exceptions, the less said the better. He gulped when he saw that Lícia sat on the other side of Koskelainen and was looking at him with every appearance of devotion. Beyond her sat Papa Ferreira and his Senhora.

As Institute dinners went, it wasn't so bad, especially when you considered that most of the members were notoriously indifferent to fine food, and therefore the management had no motive for laying itself out to provide a feast for gourmets. Lawrence hardly tasted his, however, what with the distractions of looking towards Lícia and wondering what Schmidt was going to do.

When it was over, the director made a little speech introducing "the man who needs no introduction, our own Dr. João Ferreira, who will tell you about certain matters."

And Ferreira did: "—the Finance Committee has been so impressed by the proposal put forward by Sir Erik Koskelainen that we have accepted it in principle, leaving only details to be worked out. I now introduce our guest of the evening, Sir Erik Koskelainen!"

Lawrence exchanged glances with Schmidt, meaning: "So it's all decided already!" As he did so he observed that among his colleagues others likewise seemed astonished, even while they applauded politely. Lawrence thought: Like us, they're wondering if their own appro-

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priations will be cut into. Of course, if this gloop hires a lot of the Institute personnel to run his survey, it won't make so much difference.

Koskelainen himself was speaking, forcefully, eloquently, with flashes of humour and sly self-deprecation. And he made it plain at the start that his project would make the maximum use of scholars and scientists already affiliated with the Institute. You couldn't help warming to the bird, thought Lawrence. He even had the grace to end his speech before anybody became bored.

Schmidt said: "Come on, Greg, follow him into the ballroom. Maybe we'd better let him have one dance, so there won't be such a crowd around him."

"Yeah, but he'll dance with my girl!"

"Well, whom d'you expect him to dance with? Ah—Magramen? Come along, old horse! You've eaten enough salads for one evening."

"Ain't that many salads," growled the Dzlieri, scooping up another fistful.

They straggled into the ballroom. Sure enough, Koskelainen was spinning away down the floor with Lícia Ferreira, dodging through the Institute couples like a speedboat cutting through a lot of barge tows. The tailed man was trying awkwardly to dance with the director's wife, and Louis Prevost, dancing with Professor Saito's wife, was looking over her shoulder apprehensively at Magramen, as if wondering how long the Dzlieri would continue to behave himself.

Lawrence saw Schmidt timing the revolutions of the dancers about the floor. As the number ended, the xenologist said: "Come on!" and pushed towards Koskelainen, conspicuous in his finery. Schmidt said to Lawrence: "Introduce us."

"Hello, Sir Erik," said Lawrence. "I'd like you to meet a couple of friends of mine : Dr. Schmidt and Mr. Magramen.

Schmidt, shaking hands, said : "I don't think you remember me, do you?"

Koskelainen, all smiles, said : "Not off-hand, unless I ran into you at some meeting. I——" His voice trailed off as Schmidt removed his glasses.

Schmidt said : "I don't think you ever met Magramen, though you knew a lot of the Dzlieri on Vishnu, and he's known about you for a long time. Haven't you, Magramen?"

"Is sure thing," said Magramen, extending a hairy-backed hand. "*Chrdul karu uqe dres, tsameskhmilma usuni otsnet djor?*"

"I beg your pardon?" beamed Koskelainen. "I'm afraid you've got me on that dialect, old man."

"Funny how soon you've forgotten it, isn't it?" said Schmdit. "Listen again."

Magramen repeated his sentence. An interested circle of spectators had formed. Koskelainen frowned. "What sort of gag is this?"

"No gag at all. A few years ago you were fluent in Magramen's dialect, as you call it."

"Oh, well, a man can forget!"

"That is, Koskelainen was fluent in it when he was on Vishnu. Suppose you tell us about your work on that stay? Especially since Magramen was there at the time, when the real Koskelainen visited the planet, so he can—uh—corroborate——"

"Say, are you calling me a fake?"

"Precisely."

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"Why you—you Venerian mud-worm! I thought the members of the Institute were gentlemen as well as scholars. It seems I was mistaken. Good-night, everybody." Koskelainen shouldered through the circle of spectators.

Ferreira appeared with a stricken expression. "My heavens, Reggie, what have you done? Sir Erik, wait, wait! There must be some mistake!"

"Stop that guy," said Schmidt. "He's no more Erik Koskelainen than I'm Napoleon."

Lawrence pushed after the departing guest of honour. Magramen, clenching and unclenching fists with a gleeful expression, clattered behind him. By the time they reached the front door, pursued and pursuers were both running.

Magramen said in a disappointed tone: "If he get outside, I no can catch. Can't see in dark."

"I'll fix that," said Lawrence. "Hold still a sec." The young ecologist vaulted onto the Dzlieri's back. "Now, giddap, and I'll guide you. Hey, you!" This was to a startled bellboy. "Hold that front door open for us, will you?" He ducked through the door, thinking how lucky it was not of the revolving kind.

"Hang it!" said Lawrence. "The guy's got away—no, there he is! On your right!" He had glimpsed the gaudy uniform trying to slip out of sight behind some of the ornamental shrubbery ranged along the front of the Princeton.

As they neared the shrub, Koskelainen broke into a run and Magramen into a gallop. The savants were streaming out of the hotel now, and they gave chase, too. However, their age soon left them far in the rear, though the tailed man from Koloft did not do too badly.

Koskelainen ran like the wind, but the Dzlieri like the hurricane.

As Magramen overtook him, Koskelainen dodged. Lawrence, gripping the slack of Magramen's coat to steady himself with left hand, leaned far to the right and caught Koskelainen's hair.

Koskelainen jerked frantically and the hair came off with a ripping sound. Lawrence found himself holding a well-made wig, and Koskelainen's natural hair was seen in the light of the street-lamp to be the bright green of a Krishnan. Furthermore, it transpired that the wig had included a peak of artificial skin coming down low over the forehead to hide the feathery antennæ that sprang from between the Krishnan's eyebrows.

Magramen had skidded to a stop and whirled. Before the Krishnan could dodge again, the Dzlieri seized him and hoisted him high in the air.

"What you want me do with he?" said Magramen. "Can have much fun busting skull against an lamp-post, I think, yeah, huh?"

"No, just carry him back. Oh, here's a cop. Officer, will you pinch this guy?"

"Which one? The inhuman monster or the felly he's holding?"

"The felly he's holding."

"What for?"

"Well, for impersonating a military officer will do to begin with. Here's Dr. Schmidt, from the Institute, who'll tell you all you need to know about it."

Schmidt said, after getting his breath: "Guess I'll have to—uh—go to the station-house to comply with formalities. Where's the nearest one?"

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The policeman gave the address of the Third Precinct headquarters. Schmidt said : "Greg, get the truck and drive Magramen down there to pick me up. See you in a few minutes."

On his way back to the hotel, Lawrence encountered Lícia Ferreira, streaming along with the general rout of members and guests of the Institute. Expecting appreciation for the athletic part he had played in unmasking the impostor, he said : "Lícia, I——"

"I don't care to talk to you, Mr. Lawrence!" And off she went, leaving Lawrence standing on the sidewalk with his mouth open.

He pulled himself together and led Magramen to the truck. Half an hour later they picked up Schmidt. The xenologist exuded self-satisfaction, but Lawrence had his own troubles. "She wouldn't speak to me!" he moaned. "Wouldn't even let me explain!"

"Well, what d'you expect?" said Schmidt, lighting his pipe. "I suppose she'd fallen for this bleep, and you busted her illusion. You don't—uh—expect people to thank you for that, do you?"

Lawrence sighed. "I suppose not."

"Cheer up. Either she'll get over it, in which case everything'll be okay, or she won't, in which case you're lucky to escape such a dumb jane."

"Who was Koskelainen really?"

"Oh, that. Just a Krishnan named Chabarian bad-Seraz, a suitor for the hand of the only daughter of the King of Balhíb. All very romantic. The king wants to industrialise and arm his country and make a great power of it, regardless of Interplanetary Council policies. So he told this bird he could have his daughter and be

his successor to the throne if he'd go to Earth and bring back certain things, like that fellow in the myths who had to get the golden apples and things. Herakles, wasn't it?"

"Yes, but what were the things?"

"Oh, first, a fund of technical information adequate to effect an industrial revolution. Second, a group of technicians to teach the Balhíbuma what they needed to know about science and engineering. Third, enough money to bribe any I.C. or *Viagens* people who might try to stop them.

"I think Chabarian under-estimated the honesty of the I.C. and the *Viagens*, but you'll admit he was ingenious in carrying out the plan. For one thing he looked like Koskelainen, and for another he mastered the part of an Earthman almost perfectly. The real Koskelainen was never such a flamboyant character, though. If we take the heels of his shoes apart we'll probably find a whole technical encyclopædia on micro-film stuffed into them. And by getting this grant from the Institute and enlisting a flock of scientists for service on a far planet he hoped to accomplish his other tasks."

Lawrence said: "How did he expect to get past the physical examinations for *Viagens* passengers without being found out?"

"The same way he did on the trip in, I suppose. Money."

"You seem to know an awful lot about this, Reggie. How did you find it out?"

Schmidt grinned. "You seem discreet enough. Can you keep something under your hat?"

"I guess so."

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"Well, I'm really Erik Koskelainen."

"*What?*"

"Sure. Chabarian didn't know me at first with my glasses and whiskers."

"Tell me about it?"

"Oh, it's nothing much. When I visited Balhíb the king first tried to get me to help him with his scheme. When I wouldn't he threw me in the jug. Then when I pretended to fall in with it in order to get out, he wouldn't trust me. Instead, he sent Chabarian to socialise with me. It wasn't for some time that I got wise to the fact that he was studying me in order to take my place. Don't know how he got to Earth—he must have taken a job at Novorecife in order to study human beings some more.

"Anyway, I escaped from the king's cooler and came back myself. The king had treated me pretty rough so my nerves were shot, and I thought I needed a few months of some quiet job incog, and got this one. I'd told Chabarian about the Institute in the course of a conversation in my cell, so I thought he might show up here sooner or later. Then, when he did, I couldn't denounce him directly without exposing myself, but Magramen took care of that."

They drew up to the laboratory building and got out and let Magramen out of the truck body. Schmidt opened the door with his pass-key, and led the way down the corridor towards the Dzlieri's stall. Magramen clattered behind, peering into the empty offices.

Lawrence glanced back at their companion and lowered his voice to ask a final question: "How did you get our equine friend to co-operate so nicely? Poor

Prevost has been trying to for months without getting anywhere."

"Simple again. I knew what was making Magramen wild, so I promised him a beautiful blonde."

"What?" cried Lawrence with something like horror. "Jeepers, you can't! I mean it's physically impossible!"

"Can't I?" As they approached the stall a whinny came from within, and there stood a bay mare. Schmidt nudged his subordinate. "Uh—see what I mean?"

Juice

OF LUNAR Centre, little was to be seen on the surface, except the observatory, the space port, and a few nondescript domes. Below the surface was a series of chambers, like those of a Maginot Line fort, and from these branched a labyrinth of tunnels. Some led to the shafts of the Lunar Mining and Metals Corp. One reached out half a mile to the chambers containing the rocket-fuel plant. In the control-room of this plant a slight sandy-haired man in his early thirties worked a slide-rule. He was Victor Gaston, the engineer in charge.

As a large young man entered the room, the lights flickered. Gaston barked: "Damn." Then he said: "Oh, it's you. Come in."

"I *am* in," said the other truthfully. "But I don't mind sitting down. What's in your hair this time, Vic?" He was Darwin Priest, assistant to the Chief Surveyor of the Space Transport Authority.

"The lights," grumbled Gaston. "Been wrong ever since Sella landed. And when I call Hartwig up, he says: 'Oh don't bawthah'." He maliciously exaggerated Chief Engineer Werner Hartwig's accent.

Priest nodded sympathetically, and scratched the chin from which no amount of shaving would banish the bluish tinge. "The trouble with you is, you've never

learned to handle your bosses. You know Uncle Pogy's terrible temper. He eats out of my hand. The Moon's a bad place for people with nerves."

Gaston fumed. "You can say that: Pogy's at least human. But if you opened Hartwig up you'd find nothing but stop-watches, efficiency tables, and a copy of Frederic Taylor's sermon on the duties of a good employee. Won't even let us do real research for fear of blowing up the fuel accumulators. What's Pogy's programme?"

"We start the survey for the emergency fuel-line pretty quick. That means froggin' around in a suit, okay if a meteor doesn't drill you. Say, where's the Dutchman?"

"Bill?" replied Gaston. "Asleep. He can—damn, there go the lights again. Routine check didn't find anything wrong. So Hartwig says: 'Waste the Authority's money tracing every wire in the place? Nonsense, young man!'" He listened. "Sounds like company. Yellow Peril's dainty steps, I think."

Priest craned his neck down the corridor. "You'd have to be deaf not to know 'em. Yep, Hank, and he's got a skirt."

"Female? Where's my comb! Damn, damn! No remarks from you about peristaltic movements." Gaston referred to Lunar Centre's chief topic of conversation, to wit, the unfortunate effect of the slight gravity on the human digestive system.

A thickset man with broad flat features entered with the female in tow. Gaston said: "Hello, Peril." Priest added: "Hi, Jenghis Khan."

Genrih Tseven, third assistant astronomer, would have been surprised if anyone had called him by his right

name. He broadened his perpetual smile, waved a pudgy hand toward the two, and introduced them: "This is Miss McGlomb. You know, *the* Miss McGlomb? She came up with her father last week, and I've been showing her the observatory. Take over, huh?"

Gaston and Priest went into action like a pair of terriers after a rat. McGlomb was the Authority's sixth vice-president. Besides, the female was good-looking.

"Say, Hank," Gaston put in as Tseven started to leave, "how's juice up your way?"

"The lights blink," replied the Mongol blandly. "As they have ever since Sella landed. And a couple of our 'phone lines went out a couple of hours ago. When the monkeys went over them, they found some of the contacts melted down into little puddles of copper. Nobody knows why. Be seeing you."

Priest was saying: "... and so the hydrogen ions are stored here, and pumped up to the port when a ship's about to take off. The fuel plant is out here so if it explodes ..."

"But I still don't understand what ions are," interrupted the girl.

"Well, I'll try to explain again. You know what an atom is?"

Gaston pulled at Priest and hissed: "Say, whose control-room is this?"

"Keep your shirt on," whispered the surveyor. "I seen her first." But Gaston took charge of explanations. "Last ship out was Sella's; been up on Maleyev's Ob——"

"Oh, I know Captain Sella," broke in Miss

McGlomb. "He's what I call a real hero . . . so handsome . . ."

"Maleyev's Object," continued Gaston firmly. "Another moon, as you may know, which we didn't know we had until a few months ago. Not surprising, considering it's only half a K through, and three times as far from Earth as the real moon. Sella was looking for scanlonite; that's what they mine here, you know. But nothing but nickel-iron, so he's gone back to Earth."

"What's scanlonite?" asked the girl.

"A complex magnesium-lithium silicate, found only on low-gravity bodies. In a magnetic field it conducts like silver. Cut off the field, and it conducts like porcelain, which is to say hardly at all. They can make it on Earth for \$2.74 a gram, and mine and ship it from here for \$1.96 a gram. Hence the ninety-nine year mining lease that Lunar Mining and Metals has on the Moon and on anything lying around on its surface. Won't say anything about how they got the lease; you'll hear things if you keep your ears open."

"But," protested the girl, "isn't Mining and Metals the company you work for? I thought it was all one organisation."

Good lord, thought Gaston, and her old man an Authority exec! "No," he said, "we work for the Transport Authority, as your father does. That's a public corporation whose stock is owned by the principal governments on Earth. Mining and Metals just leases——"

"What's scanlonite used for?" asked the girl.

Gaston felt a slight wave of annoyance at these interruptions. But her eyes were still big and blue and beautiful. "Oh, electric switches and things."

"Oh! I thought it would be something exciting, like a gem."

Priest was smiling slightly at his friend's visible cooling. He asked: "Don't you think that's enough engineering for now? Let's try the radio." He twirled the dials of the set. The set burped, gave out a short phrase of music, and went dead with a pop.

Gaston swore under his breath as he hurried over. "All this damned juice works are going haywire!"

Priest told the girl: "Don't mind Vic; he gets riled up easy. Have you been up on top yet?"

"Oh, yes. Captain Sella took me for a two-hour hike. He's such a wonderful man—so brave——" She sighted Gaston's canary. Here was something she understood. "Oh, isn't he a darling! What's his name?"

"Alaric," said Priest. "Personally I like Great Danes better. But they don't let us keep big pets because of the oxygen they use."

Alaric gave a mournful twitter and relapsed into silence. A red-faced young man in pyjamas appeared through a door. He said: "Excuse me, please," and vanished. Presently he was back in a bathrobe. Priest introduced him to the girl as Willem Kuyper, Gaston's partner.

"It must be thrilling . . ." began the girl.

"Please," said Kuyper firmly. "We have heard that before. Once a year something goes wrong, and we have a little excitement. Rest of the time we watch dials, and bush levers when a ship comes in, and blay bridge. The last ship was Sella's, and there won't be another for days."

"Do you know Captain Sella?" gushed the girl. "Isn't he a marvellous——"

"Ouch!" yelled Gaston. "The damn thing bit me! What's that?"

Something was oozing out of the receiving-set, like a soap-bubble out of a pipe. Like a soap-bubble it presently parted company with the set and floated up over the people's heads. It seemed to be a ball of light, varying in colour from magenta to deep purple, and a little bigger than an orange. It gave out a high buzz, like that of a small insect.

"Impossible," murmured Kuyper. The ball moved toward Alaric's cage. There was a poof! and a burst of feathers. Then there was no ball, and a dead canary.

Priest started for the cage, but jumped back. The glowing ball was swelling out of a joint in the cage-wires. In a few seconds it was drifting around the room again.

The girl screamed piercingly. The ball hesitated, then started slowly toward her. Kuyper jerked open the tool-cabinet and took out a yard-long spanner. "Gill our Alaric, will you," he growled. He swung at the ball. As the head of the wrench hit the thing it vanished with a report. The Fleming leaped straight up, face distorted, and collapsed on the floor.

Gaston pulled Priest back from the fallen man. "Watch out! It may be in him still. There it comes!"

The ball was oozing out the end of the spanner. Priest snatched open the door. "Can't get out that way. More of 'em in the hall."

Gaston was trying to disentangle himself from Miss McGlomb, who had fastened around his neck like an amorous octopus and was shrieking at him to save her. He got loose long enough to snatch up the telephone. The line was dead.

The ball floated up near the ceiling. Priest, bending over Kuyper, said: "He's alive; just electric shock, looks like. If we can use artificial respiration——"

"Not with that thing floating around," replied Gaston. "It seems to travel along metal—look, why not use this to fend it off?" He picked up a little table with a circular glass top. He grabbed a bottle of rubber cement out of the tool-cabinet, and smeared some of the goo on the brass screw that went through the centre of the table-top. "That ought to insulate it. For God's sake, Miss McGlomb, will you please let go my arm?"

The ball drifted; then swooped at Gaston. He brought up the table, and the ball bounced back from the glass top as if it had been made of rubber. Gaston, mouth twitching into his nervous little smile, yelled: "Ha! Can't go through a dielectric!" The ball tried again; again its attack was parried.

"Looks like it's alive," said Priest. "If we had another table we could play ping-pong with it."

Gaston's face showed he wasn't amused. The ball flew to a light-switch on the wall, shrank, and disappeared. Priest went to work on Kuyper's breathing.

Gaston yelled: "Look out!" The ball had appeared out of a lighting-fixture on the ceiling, and was dropping toward Priest's head.

"Whew," said Priest, "you saved my hash. Let's drag Bill into the lab."

"Oh, my God!" cried Gaston. Miss McGlomb had fainted.

"Keep your head, Vic. I'll carry 'em." Priest dragged the two limp forms out while Gaston held off the ball with the table-top. Gaston slipped into the

laboratory and shut the glass door quickly. He began brushing rubber cement around the door-cracks and over the metal door handle.

The laboratory had the messiness of authenticity, with heaps of wire, rubber tubing and miscellaneous junk piled around. Priest said : "What'll we do about the pipes and wires running in there? It'd take gallons of goo to insulate 'em all."

"Have to trust to luck that it doesn't find them for a while. They're pretty complicated, and if it isn't alive, it gives a damn good imitation."

Gaston looked through the glass door. "It's them," he announced. "The ones in the hall are oozing through the door-knob. Four in the control-room now." The glowing balls hovered about the room. The only sounds were their hum and Priest's heavy breathing as he laboured over Kuyper.

Gaston continued : "Seems like animated lightning-balls, sort of. Nobody knows what lightning-balls are, or what holds 'em together against the mutual repulsion of their electrons. My guess is our visitors are balls of electrons, spinning rapidly."

Priest grunted : "Bill's pulse is getting stronger. How do these things move?"

"Don't *know*, but it might be by repelling ionized air-molecules out one side. The one that attacked us has shrunk; must be getting worn out."

The smallest of the balls fastened itself to an open light-fixture. The men could see a blue flicker inside the thing's body. The ball grew as they watched.

"Hey!", cried Priest, "it eats juice! It shorts the light-circuit, and feeds off the spark it makes through its own body!"

"Sure," said Gaston. "What'd you expect it to eat, hamburger and onions? Oh, hello!" This was to Miss McGlomb, who had come to.

"Where am I?" she asked. Gaston explained. The girl cried: "Get me out of here! Get me away from those awful things!"

Gaston explained that the emergency exit to the surface was through their bedroom, which could be reached only through the control-room. Miss McGlomb wept. Gaston looked jitterier and jitterier. Priest said: "Look here, young lady, you're missing something very interesting. If we watch these things maybe we can figure out how to handle them."

"I'm not interested in your fire-balls! I want to get out! Captain Sella would know a way out! He's a real man!"

The ball detached itself from the plug and flew vigorously around the room. It joined another ball. The two whirled around one another. Then there was only one, the size of a grapefruit. The big ball changed to a torus, and the torus broke up into four small balls. These raced for the open fixture. The first to arrive anchored itself and began to grow. The others buzzed off, apparently looking for more light-sockets.

Priest said: "They're alive all right. You've just seen a red-hot drama of stark passion. Like this!" He made a pretended grab for Miss McGlomb, who squeaked and snatched up a burette stand, with: "Don't you dare! I'll brain you!"

"Act your age, Darwin," said Gaston. "Guess you're right; they reproduce like paramecia. Wonder where they come from? Not the Moon, or somebody would

have seen them. Can't travel through a vacuum, which is an insulator. Somebody brung 'em."

"Sella!" cried Priest.

"Exactly! From Maleyev's Object!"

"What?" It was Miss McGlomb. "Nonsense! I won't have you vilifying my friends this way!"

Gaston and Priest looked hard at the young woman, evidently not thinking beautiful thoughts. But a vice-president's daughter is a vice-president's daughter.

Priest turned back to the door. "We'd better do something. They're exploring the wiring system."

"Sure, but what? Let's see: what's their world like? Ours is made up of gravitational fields, and certain electromagnetic waves and sound waves, like the sound-waves between sixteen and 20,000 cycles. Our balls are probably blind to gravitational fields and sound-waves, but strongly conscious of magnetic and static fields. The wires and pipes are like hallways to them. Insulators are like walls or closed doors. Air they can move slowly through, like a man swimming."

"But that doesn't get us out," protested Miss McGlomb. "You scientists are supposed to be so smart——"

Gaston jumped nervously. "I'm not a scientist, my dear young lady. I'm just a poor dumb engineer——"

Gaston put in: "Don't rattle him, sweetheart. The great brain has to——"

"But," the girl persisted, "all you do is sit around and talk about walls and bicycles. Can't you do anything but lecture? Captain Sella——"

"Miss McGlomb," snarled Gaston tensely, "will you be so very kind as to shut up—before I stove your ports

for you? Where was I? Oh, yes. They shouldn't be able to see, lacking organs for focusing light-rays. But they might be able to tell which direction electromagnetic waves are coming from, the way you can locate the heat from a fire. If they feed on current, and can locate a source . . . I know, a trap!"

In a few minutes the men had rigged up a box of miscellaneous glass plates, precariously held together by machine-tape. The plate at one end was fastened at the upper edge only, so that it was free to swing.

"Now," said Gaston, "the bait." He rummaged around until he found a spark-coil. He explained: "We'll put the secondary inside, and the primary outside next to the glass."

"Yeah," said Priest, "but how to get the ball through the door?"

"We'll open the door."

"What?" shrilled Miss McGlomb. "Let those things in here?"

"We'll pin Bill's and my rubber aprons together," said Gaston. "Curtain. Stuff up the spaces on the sides of the box with glass wool."

"I won't let you——" began Miss McGlomb, but a growl from Priest stopped her. Gaston said: "Don't make it any harder for us, young lady. If a ball gets into the ionizers, the whole fuel supply'll go off with a loud bang. Only we shan't hear it."

Priest took a mouthful of thumb tacks and climbed a chair. Gaston opened the door, and Priest tacked up the improvised curtain. Then they pushed the trap across the threshold, so that the end with the door was in the control-room. They connected up the primary

of the spark-coil, which was crudely taped to the rear end of the glass box. The hinged plate at the far end was held up by a string running back into the laboratory.

"Damn," said Priest. "Have to get down on the floor to see what they're doing in there. Okay, Vic, 'the juice'."

A little blue streak crackled across the terminals of the secondary coil inside the box. Presently Priest yelled: "Here it comes!" A rosy ball hovered uncertainly at the open end of the box. "Come on, mousey!" pleaded the surveyor. "Look at the nice cheese!" The ball finally drifted into the box and pounced upon the spark like a hungry dog on a chop.

Gaston released the string, and the hinged plate dropped with a clank. They hauled the box into the room, closed the door, and sealed the hinged plate into place with tape.

The ball seemed to realise that something was wrong. It left its meal and circuited the box. It changed to bright pink and darted about, its shrill buzz coming clearly through the glass. Priest turned off the current. "No use letting it build up voltage to where it can bust out. Especially on the Authority's current. Now we've got it, what'll we do with it? It's probably sending out an SOS to its pals."

Gaston was silent for a while. Then he said: "If it's made of juice, it should be affected by a magnetic field. Motion of an electron in a field creates a voltage at right angles to its direction of motion. Let's see. For a core—no, the burette stand's too thin." He prowled around, and pounced on a yard-long mailing-tube. This he filled with buck-shot from the lunar static field gauge, and closed the ends with a pair of round tin box-

tops. "Now," he said, "ought to be plenty of lead-wire. Ah!" He began winding the insulated wire around the tube.

"Here, Vic," said Priest. "Punch a couple of holes in your tube and stick this lever through for a crank. *That's* it. I'll hold the lower end with my feet, and crank. You feed the wire."

They worked furiously, but the wire coiled with disheartening slowness. The lights went out. The one emergency bulb blinked wanly on over the doorway.

"Hell!" shouted Gaston. "Can't see what I'm doing. That means the 110-volt system's gone."

"Keep your shirt on. I've got it." He reached over and shook the box; the entity inside glowed brightly. "We'll use Alphonso's own light to fix him by."

"Step on it, Darwin. Here, I'll pour the rest of the rubber cement on the tube. Don't want it coming unravelled."

To the accompaniment of the baleful buzz of the imprisoned entity, three layers of wire were put on the tube, and the whole thing was covered with black machine-tape.

"Okay," said Priest. "Where's the 220 plug?"

The wires from the improvised electromagnet were plugged in, and Gaston pointed the thing at the glass box. Instantly the ball was snatched this way and that by magnetic forces, and finally buzzed into a corner, where it buzzed helplessly. Gaston looked his disappointment. "Not good enough. I can push Alphonso around with my magic wand, but I can't wreck him. Let's see——"

The girl shrieked. A ball was growing out of the

cold-water tap. It detached itself, floated up to shoulder height, and began shuttling purposefully across the room. "Damn it!" cried Priest. "It's after us! Oh hell, here's another!" A second sphere was growing out of the faucet. "Must have found the way, and they're lined up in the pipe!" The big surveyor dropped to his hands and knees as the first ball swept over him. The second ball was shuttling, too, and a third one had appeared on the tap. Their humming was like that of a swarm of mosquitoes.

Gaston swung the electromagnet at the first sphere that came near him; the field flung it six feet away, but it came back for more. Priest caught up the glass-topped table. Miss McGlomb was screaming continuously, so that the men had to shout to each other. They tried to protect the two other persons. But the third sphere joined the deadly hunt, and a fourth began to take its place. One was persistently trying to get past Priest's table-top; as he blocked each lunge, it backed up and came on from a new angle.

"Vic!" he yelled suddenly, "is that magnet on direct current?"

"Yes. You mean——"

"*Try A.C.!*"

The engineer backed up to the wall-socket and snatched the plug out. The slight spark caused thereby attracted two of the balls. They swooped as he fumbled for the alternating-current socket. Gaston in his excitement failed to turn around to see what he was doing. In a fraction of a second the onrushing spheres would plunge into him—they were only inches from the end of the electromagnet, which he gripped like a lance in his

left hand—and his fingers found the A.C. socket and thrust the plug home.

The two balls exploded with one shattering detonation. Gaston leaped across the room to the third ball, and the third ball went off likewise. Gaston swung his apparatus at the faucet, and another explosion rewarded him.

“Got ’em!” he whooped. “D.C. just pushes ’em around, but they can orient themselves to a constant field. But the A.C. field changes direction so fast it shorts ’em or breaks down their organisation or something. Come on! We’ll hitch a reel to the magnet, and set up a bunch of spark-coils for bait, and clean ’em out of the Centre. Why, what’s wrong, Darwin?”

Priest wasn’t listening. He was holding a large bare foot in his hands and hopping around on the other, meanwhile filling the ozone-smelling air with the greatest exhibit of plain and fancy cursing anybody in the room had heard. When the fourth ball had exploded, its discharge had melted the faucet, and Priest had gotten a drop of molten pipe-metal inside his shoe.

Genrih Tseven came to see them. Willem Kuyper was in a wheel-chair. His moves were jerky, as he could not yet completely control his muscles. As usual they greeted the Mongol with “Hi, Yellow Peril!” “Lo, Fu-Manchu!” “How’s the Scourge of God today?” He smiled good-naturedly.

“They’ve arrested Captain Sella,” he announced.

“Did he do it?” asked Gaston.

“Looks that way. He found that Maleyev’s Object was mostly scanlonite, with enough magnetite and

metallic iron to give it fair conductivity. He landed with a magnetic grapple, and the field caught one of these lighting-balls near the surface. They live in the Object, you know."

Gaston said : "It must be like a big hollow cavern to them."

"When Sella got out," Tseven continued, "he found this one ball caught at the end of a pinnacle by his field. So he collected it in a non-conducting box, and studied it on his way here.

"The Mining Corp.'s lease gives them not only all the scanlonite in and on the Moon, but all that's in any meteors on its surface. So Sella wanted to have the Corp. haul the Object into the Moon's orbit, and lower it down on the surface, so it would come under the terms of the lease, and their monopoly would be safe.

"But he wanted to present the governments that own the Authority's stock with an accomplished fact before they made a stink about moving the Object. So he turned the ball loose here, knowing it would wreck all the low-amp circuits, including that of our signal-beam modulator. But now the beam's been fixed up, and we sent word to Earth. So they pinched our gallant captain when he landed, and it all came out.

"I'm afraid it'll go hard with him. Eleven men knocked out, two of 'em dead. Anyway, you boys ought to get something out of it. I've heard rumours of promotions."

Gaston said : "I'll take mine on Earth. I'm applying for transfer."

The other three protested with one voice : "No, Vic!" "You can't do that to us!" "What'll we do for a fourth bridge-player?"

He smiled his nervous, twitchy little smile. "Thanks, but my mind's made up. Darwin was right; the Moon's no place for a man with nerves. Anyway, I don't get on with my superior."

Tseven asked : "Where's your beautiful young lady?"

Priest answered : "She's been barricaded in our bedroom for twelve hours and won't come out. The balls have all been killed, but she's staying for a while to make sure."

A beautiful smile spread over Victor Gaston's undistinguished features. "That gives me an idea for the most horrible revenge the mind can conceive." He dialled the telephone. "Mr. Hartwig? Gaston . . . Sure, Bill's coming along fine. Say, we have a surprise for you. Know Miss Eleanor McGlomb, *the* McGlomb's daughter? She was in the control room with us when the trouble started . . . Yes, she's here now. If you'll be in your office half an hour from now, I'll bring her up to meet you. Don't mention it; glad to. 'Bye." He turned, grinning to his friends. To Tseven he said : "If she nearly drove us nuts, Hank, what do you suppose she'll do to old Super-Efficiency Hartwig?"

Proposal

WHEN ALICE Wernecke walked up the path to the Greers' house she was mildly interested in the fact that the thing from that planet, which was staying with the Greers, would be there. Meeting it would be an interesting experience and all that.

But that was not the main consideration. She had read enough about these extra-terrestrials in the newspapers and magazines, and seen them enough on television, so that meeting one would cause no great shock. And they were certainly nothing pretty to look at; not at all human (barring the fact that they had two arms, two legs, and a head), but not much like anything else on earth either.

These Wolfians had certainly made the human race look silly, after all those important people had gone to so much trouble and appropriated so much money for a World Space Authority under the United Nations, and made so many dull speeches about the dawn of a new era, and then when they got their moon-ship half built the ship from the planet of the star Wolf number something had landed in Africa. The sixteen extra-terrestrials aboard had solemnly announced that they were paying a visit, and would the earthmen be so kind as to explain everything about this planet to them?

The fact uppermost in Alice's mind, however, was not the presence of the alien, but that of his guide and mentor, that Mr. Matthews from the State Department.

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Mr. Matthews was a kind of cousin of the Greers, unmarried, and for months the Greers had been promising to introduce him to Alice. The trouble was that Mr. Matthews worked (dreadfully hard, said the Greers) in Washington, and seldom got to the Philadelphia suburbs. Now, however . . .

Alice also felt a little guilty about the fact that her room-mate Inez Rogell was not coming to this party—though there was no reason why she should. The Greers had asked Alice, not Inez, who was no great asset to a party, anyway.

Harry Greer let her in and introduced her round. The being from Wolf whatsit stood at the far end of the room holding his cocktail in one hand and resting the knuckles of the other on the ground. The remarkable shortness of his legs and length of his arms made this possible. The creature was covered with a wrinkled grey leathery hairless skin that gave the impression of being very thick, like that of an elephant. His head reminded Alice a little of that of a turtle, though the skull bulged enough to accommodate a decent share of brains. Aside from a wrist-watch and a thing like a musette-bag slung from one shoulder, the being wore no clothes or ornaments, and aside from his large opalescent eyes and his beak-mouth there was nothing about him that could be definitely identified with a corresponding organ on an earthly organism. He was not quite so tall as Alice's five-four.

Harry Greer said: "Alice, this is——" and here he uttered a name that sounded something like "Stanko." "Stanko, this is Miss Wernecke, who teaches our youngest."

Stanko opened the musette-bag. Alice had a glimpse inside and saw that it was full of a fountain-pen, an address-book, and other things such as an earthly man

might carry in his pockets. He brought out and extended a calling-card, which read :

Kstaho 'Agu Lozlek Haag
Cultural Representative,
Wolf 359-1.

At the same time Stanko (as Alice continued to think of him, despite the hieroglyphics on the card) said slowly : " I am glad to meet Miss Wernecke. Does she teach that one child only, or others as well ? "

The accent was not bad—at least most of the sounds were recognisable—but the voice had a curiously inhuman flat quality, as when a man speaks with an artificial larynx.

While Harry Greer answered Stanko's question, Mary Greer presented Alice to the tall man with dark hair thinning on top, who stood next to the extra-terrestrial. Now Alice's interest really soared, for Mary announced that this was " Byron Matthews, who I've been telling you about."

" And she's told me about you, too," said Byron Matthews.

Alice wished that Mary had not poured it on quite so thickly. Nothing nips a beautiful friendship in the bud like the suspicion of the people concerned that they are being thrown together for matchmaking purposes. Still, this did look like a possibility. If not exactly handsome, Byron Matthews had a distinguished air and a pleasant manner. Certainly he was an improvement over anything in Alice's present stable : that twerp John, who taught English at Darbydale High, or Edward, who clerked at the Darbydale National Bank, or the two or three occasionals . . .

When she had shaken hands, Alice straightened up and drew back her shoulders to make the most of her assets. She was acutely conscious of Matthews's glance as it took in her freshly-set golden hair, her best blue

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afternoon frock matching her eyes, and her lush figure which careful dieting kept on the safe side of plumpness. She said :

“ My goodness, Mr. Matthews, you don’t look like one of those terrible State Department people one reads about.”

Matthews gave a theatrical wince. “ Young lady, if the State Department were as bad as its critics for the last two centuries have been saying, the Republic would have ceased to exist. But then, it’s an axiom of American politics that the better the Department is the worse it gets criticised.”

“ How awful ! Why is that ? ”

“ Because we have to take a long view and consider the whole world, which puts us on the unpopular side of many questions. Most folks, especially Congressmen, would rather take a short view and forget the rest of the world. Now that we have to start considering other planets as well it’ll be even worse.”

“ You poor things ! Are you staying up here to keep an eye on Mr. Stanko ? ”

“ That’s right. The Wolfians decided that the most profitable use to make of their time was to scatter and sample various earthly environments. So one is living with a family of Chinese peasants, another with a family of decayed European aristocrats in Denmark, another in a Catholic monastery in Quebec, and another with the Camayura Indians of Brazil. Kstaho was assigned to sample life in a typical suburban-bourgeois home in the United States.”

“ I think he got the best deal of the lot,” said Alice, absent-mindedly accepting the Martini that Harry Greer handed her. “ How long will he be here ? ”

“ About five months. Then they all fly back to Africa to take off for home.”

“ What do you do meanwhile ? ”

"I stay at the Swarthmore Inn, and during the day I take our guest sightseeing."

"You'll be here all that time?"

"Unless Congress decides the State people are all Wolfians in disguise and cuts off our salaries."

Then Mary Greer pulled Alice off to meet a couple more people, and there was a general scrimmage for a while. The other guests, once they had gotten over their initial nervousness towards Stanko, crowded round and plied him with questions:

"How d'you like this lousy Philadelphia climate?"

"Have you been to a football game yet?" "Do they have insurance on this planet of yours?" "What do you think of American women?" "Aw, don't embarrass the poor guy, George; he thinks they're inhuman monsters."

"Well, sometimes I think they are, too . . ."

The extra-terrestrial responded in his slow way, taking his time for solemnly exact answers. The milling of the party—and some volition on her part—brought Alice back into proximity with Byron Matthews, though she let it seem accidental. This time their discourse got to where he was saying, with more hesitation and evident trepidation than one would expect of a rising young diplomat:

"Uh, I thought maybe while I'm here, uh, maybe we could get together some time. Uh. You know, have dinner out or something."

Alice smiled her best. "That's sweet of you, Byron! Or maybe I could feed you some night? You must get awfully tired of restaurant food."

"I do at that. Do you mean you can cook as well as teach?"

"I should be able to! My folks are Pennsylvania Dutch . . ."

The flat mechanical voice of the Wolfian cut in: "Mr. Matthews, I have not yet seen one of your schools in operation. As Miss Wernecke is a teacher, could I perhaps watch her teach?"

"How about it, Alice?" said Matthews.

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"Oh, goodness," said Alice. "If Mr. Stanko comes in to one of our classes the kids will be so distracted nothing will be taught, and he won't see what he came for. Suppose I send him up to the High School? He'd find Mr. Lorbeer's science class interesting."

That, she thought, will fix *that* old goat's wagon. She had good reasons for disliking Mr. Lorbeer. The previous year, when she had been doing her practice teaching at the Lowland Avenue School, in Darbydale, to qualify for her Pennsylvania State teaching licence, Mr. Lorbeer had been her supervisor sent by the University to check up on her along with the other would-be teachers who were finishing the University's education course. And he had driven poor Alice nearly crazy by slinking around hinting that she would be sure of a good grade if she would only tender him the ultimate in female hospitality. Otherwise—out, and she had seen enough of his arbitrary firings of student teachers to know that he meant it. (One unlucky youth whom everybody else considered promising material had been tossed out at the end of his first day for what Mr. Lorbeer had reported as "intangibles"). The facts that he had a wife somewhere and that such conduct was not socially approved in a conservative Philadelphia suburb did not deter him.

Alice, however, had every intention of keeping her virtue, at least for another six years until she was thirty. Then, if she had not landed a man, she would see. Therefore she had adroitly held Mr. Lorbeer off, treading the tightrope between submission and defiance until she got her licence, and the principal of the Lowland Avenue School had also seen her practice work and had an opening for a third-grade teacher.

But the fact that he was no longer in a position to apply improper pressure had not discouraged Lorbeer. He still pursued her with 'phone calls, small gifts, and offers of dates. And though he was no longer her practice-teaching supervisor, he was important enough in the school system so that she did not dare insult him openly.

"Certainly it will be interesting," said Stanko, but

persisted in his implacable monotone: "I should still like to see this elementary school where Miss Wernecke teaches. Could I be shown around?"

Uncertain what to do with this request, Alice floundered. "I'm not sure—I suppose—oh, I know! The fourth-graders are putting on *Hansel and Gretel* tomorrow afternoon. Why don't you bring him around then? I'll speak to our principal."

It was a dirty trick to play on Inez Rogell, who taught one of the two fourth-grade sections, but at that moment it was the best that Alice could think of.

After Byron Matthews had walked Alice home, she sprang the news of the impending visitation on Inez. The room-mate proved a brick. After a quiet case of hysterics she said sure, she would make all the arrangements. Inez was a stocky girl, a decade older than Alice, with an unbeautiful face, thick eyeglasses, and all the sex-appeal of a lawn-mower. She had, Alice knew, given up hope of landing a man years before. Nevertheless, her virtue was still intact for want of takers. Alice sometimes reflected that if only Mr. Lorbeer would come slaving after Inez instead of her, everybody would be happy. Or at least happier.

Because of Inez's age and ugliness, Alice did not have to worry about competition from Inez for her own men. On the other hand, it put Alice in the position where she felt obligated to try to get dates for Inez from time to time, and these never turned out well.

Inez concluded: "But if that Warren boy has another fit, don't say I didn't warn you."

Alice was waiting when Matthews showed up ten minutes late the following afternoon, in the little black State Department sedan with Stanko beside him. Matthews explained:

"Sorry, couldn't find the place. Where do we go now?"

Alice led them to the auditorium, noticing that when in more of a hurry than his short legs could manage,

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Stanko put his knuckles to the ground and used his arms as crutches.

The auditorium was merely a big room with a stage at one side and several rows of folding chairs set along the floor. The first of these rows was now occupied by pupils of the fourth and adjacent grades, while the two and a half rows behind these were filled by the mothers of the fourth-graders. On the stage Father, in the person of a coloured sixth-grader with a false blond beard affixed to his chin, was singing his complaint about hunger's being the poor man's curse, while to the right of the stage Inez bravely banged out Herr Humperdinck's mediocre music on the school's battered piano.

Alice led her guests in, Stanko swinging along on his knuckles like an orang-utang. Though they entered and sat down quietly in back, heads turned and there were gasps and whispers from the fourth-grade mothers. As the auditorium was only imperfectly darkened, those on the stage could see the new arrivals, too. The song about the poor man's curse died away in a squeak as Father stood goggling, ignoring the backstage prompting of Miss Pasquale, who taught the other fourth-grade section. Then Father sidled towards the wings, where he engaged in a colloquy with the unseen Miss Pasquale. His stage-whisper wafted out into the auditorium :

"I scared. Can't sing with him lookin' at me."

Alice breathed an "Oh, dear!" Mr. Matthews looked serious. As Father tried to push his way offstage, Miss Pasquale's arm came out and grabbed him, and Miss Pasquale was heard to make some threat about beating his head in that would certainly not be found in any of the official manuals on child guidance. Meanwhile, the girl playing Mother caught his coat from behind in an effort to pull him back to the centre of the stage.

Stanko sat taking all this in with his great jewel-like eyes. As the efforts of Father to leave the stage, and of Miss Pasquale to stop him, became more gymnastic, Stanko asked in a low voice :

"Is something wrong?"

"You—ah—seem to have startled him a bit," said Alice.

Stanko rose to his stubby legs and his voice carried flatly : "Do not be alarmed; I am merely studying your tribal rites. Please go on."

The sound of the unhuman voice seemed to have more effect on Father than either Miss Pasquale's threats or her efforts at physical coercion. Father let himself be pulled and pushed back to the centre of the stage, where he concluded his song in a tremulous voice. After that the opera limped along for another three-quarters of an hour without major mishap, save when the Witch became so conscious of Stanko's scrutiny that she missed her footing and fell off the stage.

At the end the shades were pulled up to let in the light. The mothers took a good look at Stanko and hurried off without stopping to exchange greetings and gossip. Miss Pasquale and Inez Rogell and Miss Halloran, the principal, came forward to meet the visitor, though each of the three ladies seemed anxious to let the others experience this honour first.

When they finally got away, Alice caught up her coat to show Stanko and Matthews out. When they got outside, Mr. Matthews wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, though it was a cool October day, and suggested that they stop at the nearest drug store for a cup of coffee. At the drug store he said, even more hesitantly than when he had suggested a date the night before :

"Alice, Kstaho has another—uh—proposal to make."

"Yes?" said Alice with a sinking feeling.

"Yes," said Stanko. "I have been inquiring into your social customs, particularly that custom of dating which your young people practice. When I pressed Mr. Matthews for an example he admitted that he intended to undertake this rite with you, Miss Wernecke."

Alice glanced at Matthews, whose face bore much too unhappy, embarrassed, and self-conscious a look for even a fledgling diplomat.

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Stanko continued : " So it seemed to me that the most instructive thing that you could do would be to embark upon one of those dates with me along as an observer. You would do all the things and go to all the places that you would if I were not there; just pretend that I do not exist."

" Why I never——" Alice began with heat, but Matthews gently grasped her wrist.

" Please, Alice," he said. " It's important."

" Oh, all right," she said. After all, a date with Byron Matthews, even with this bizarre chaperonage, would probably prove more fun than one with John or Edward.

" How about a movie?" said Matthews; and so it was arranged.

When Alice got home the telephone rang, and there was Byron Matthews on the line. He said :

" I'm awfully sorry about this, Alice——"

" Sorry about what?"

" Why, tonight. I mean, uh, not that I don't want to take you out——"

" I wondered for a minute," she said.

" Well, uh, you see, under normal circumstances—but we have to play along with Stinky or it'll be bad not only for me but for the country, and maybe the world as well. These Wolfians are really very proud and sensitive and emotional——"

" Those shell-less turtles high-strung?" cried Alice.

" Yes, believe it or not. They even commit suicide when they consider themselves insulted."

" Oh, my goodness! That doesn't sound like the sort of people to send exploring the universe, when they may run up against any kind of treatment . . ."

" That's true. Stanko told me they've lost three members of their group by suicide already. Before they landed on earth, that is. So you see . . . But we'll have a real date as soon as we can get out from under Stanko's eagle eye. See you tonight."

During the evening Alice co-operated as well as she

could with Byron Matthews in the pretence that their chaperone was not there.

After the movie they stopped in at the same drug store, where Stanko ate a banana split, Matthews had a root-beer soda, and Alice, mindful on the one hand of her shape and on the other of the necessity of getting a full night's sleep to be in condition for her monkey-cage the next day, confined herself to a small coke. In answer to her questions, Matthews told her something of the inner workings of the Department of State. She commented :

"When you explain it, it doesn't seem so mysterious or glamorous at all, but just one more government bureau all snarled up in its own red tape, like the Darbydale public school system. I always imagined State Department people as dashing about in striped pants and dodging spies, with brief-cases full of priceless papers under their arms."

He answered : "That's what many people think. But the striped pants are merely our working-clothes, like an elevator man's uniform. And for the last five years I've been chained to a desk in Washington filling out forms in sextuplicate and buying airplane tickets for V.I.P.s, most of whom turn out to be just ordinary human beings with the usual percentage of stinkers." He took a final pull on his straw, so that it emitted a snoring sound as the last of the soda was sucked up. "But I expect more variety in the future. I've put in for transfer to the Foreign Service. Would you like something else? You might as well shoot the works. Uncle's paying for it."

"I think I'll have mercy on the taxpayers," said Alice, mentally adding, and on my waist-line.

When Matthews bid her good-night they shook hands. Stanko, watching, said :

"From what I have read and seen in your motion pictures, I understand that young people on dates in this country usually kiss before parting."

"Uh?" said Matthews.

"Well, do they not?"

PROPOSAL

"Sometimes," said Alice.

"And sometimes they do other things as well," said Matthews. "But as this custom you refer to is an—uh—somewhat sentimental rite, I don't think this would be an appropriate time . . ."

In the darkness Alice could not see if Matthews were blushing, but he certainly sounded as if he were. Stanko said :

"Nevertheless, I wish that you would kindly do so. My observations will not be complete otherwise. Pretend that I am not here."

Matthews swore under his breath, then held out his arms. "Might as well do it up brown."

Alice suppressed a giggle and went into the clinch. She had been kissed often enough to know that unless the other party had bad breath, a hare lip, or a full beard, the difference between one kiss and another is not astronomical. Nevertheless, she was pleased to find that Byron Matthews did a smooth job, as a man of his age and presumable experience certainly should. Before they broke he whispered :

"As soon as I can get rid of Stinker, I'll be around for more!"

Alice went into her apartment thoughtfully. The last word had been somewhat ambiguous. Perhaps Stanko's chaperonage had not been an altogether bad idea. If Byron Matthews's notions of "more" were like those of Mr. Lorbeer, the extra-terrestrial's presence had at least saved the date from degenerating into a wrestling-match, as sometimes happened on dates with young men whose hands seemed to possess an uncontrollable exploratory urge of their own.

In the case of Matthews she was not even sure of how strong her defences were against one whom she found so attractive. She fortified her resolution by remembering her mother's last warning :

"Ach, Alice, remember yet, any time you think you don't vant a good girl to be, you never gatch a man by giving him free vot he vill marry you to get!"

Alice Wernecke was correcting papers in her apartment the following afternoon when the telephone rang. Her heart leaped at Byron Matthews's voice, then sank as she took in his graveyard tones.

"Alice," he said, "you know what?"

"What?"

"Stinko—pardon me, Cultural Representative Kstaho—wants a date with you!"

"You mean like last night?"

"No! He wants it all by himself. I'm not even to come along as chaperone."

"Oh-oh!" said Alice.

"Exactly, oh-oh."

"What's the big idea?"

"He has a line of double-talk about how to understand our cultural pattern he has to engage in our activities as much as a difference of species permits."

"I hope the difference doesn't permit too much. What sort of date has he in mind?"

"He's hell-bent to take you to a football game; heard the men at the Greers' party talking about it. I suppose I can use my State Department connections to get you a pair of tickets to the Penn-Army game . . ."

"I've got a better idea. Darbydale High plays Lansdowne High tomorrow. It won't be a very hot game, but he won't know the difference, and it'll be easy to get seats at, and I'd rather be stared at by a couple of hundred people than fifty thousand. Or maybe you could persuade him to stay at the Greers' and watch a good game on their TV?"

"No; I've tried that. He'll call for you at two-thirty tomorrow, then. Uh?"

"Yes?"

"Damn it, I was all set to ask you out tonight myself, but I've got to get in a report. The Under-Secretary's been putting the heat on me."

"Oh," said Alice. "I'm sorry. But then, I have papers to correct, too."

PROPOSAL

Stanko showed up in a taxi the following afternoon. After a trip to Lansdowne High School, marred only by a tendency of the driver to crane his head around to stare at Stanko when he should have been watching the road, they got out and trailed in with the crowd. The high-school bands were cutting up on the field, and they were hunting for seats when a familiar voice said :

"Hello, Alice!"

It was Mr. Lorbeer, with a blanket over his arm and a pipe in his mouth, looking not at all like the leading lecher of the Delaware County public schools.

"Oh-ah," said Alice nervously, then pulled herself together: "Mr. Lorbeer, this is Mr. Stanko, of Wolf three hundred and something. Mr. Stanko, meet Mr. Lorbeer, who teaches science at Darbydale High."

"I've heard a lot of the Wolfians," said Mr. Lorbeer. "Have you become a football fan?"

"As I have not yet seen a game," said Stanko judiciously, "I cannot tell whether I shall acquire a fanatical devotion to the sport or not. Perhaps you would be so kind as to explain the rules?"

"Sure, sure," said Mr. Lorbeer, and drifted with Alice and Stanko to a vacant spot in the stands.

For the next two hours Stanko and Lorbeer almost completely ignored Alice. They seemed to get on famously. Considering the identity of her swains Alice was just as glad, and tried to act as if she were sitting with them purely by accident.

Lorbeer not only explained the nuances of football, but even draped his blanket around Stanko's shoulders when the latter got cold. Lorbeer knew a lot of things that Alice did not, and that interested Stanko.

"I," said Stanko, "tried that curious custom of breathing smoke once, and nearly choked to death. Tell me, how did the custom originate and what is its cultural or ritualistic significance?"

Lorbeer launched into an account of the peace-pipes of the North American Indians, the cigars of the Caribs,

and the cigarettes of the Aztecs. Wolfians, thought Alice, were poor judges of human character.

When Lansdowne had beaten Darbydale 55-36, Mr. Lorbeer got up, reclaimed his blanket, and said : "This has been a most pleasant afternoon. I'll be seeing you, Alice."

He made the last statement with that emphasis that made Alice think that he rather than Stanko ought to be called a Wolfian.

Stanko crutched his way out of the curb where the same taxi had stood all through the game. The bill, thought Alice, must be fantastic, but then the government was probably paying it too. As Stanko stood back for Alice to get in, he said :

"I trust that I am not too precipitate in asking you for another date, Miss Wernecke, but I request that you accompany me to dinner at the Bellevue-Stratford this evening. Is that agreeable to you?"

Now to dine and dance at the Bellevue-Stratford had been an ambition of Alice ever since she settled in the Philadelphia neighbourhood. Unfortunately neither John nor Edward nor any of the occasionals could afford it, and while Mr. Lorbeer would have taken her she did not wish to date him under any circumstances. On the other hand she would have preferred never going near the hotel to going with Stanko. But in view of what Byron Matthews had said, she did not quite dare turn him down flat . . .

"I can't tell you right now," she temporised. "I have a half-way date this evening already."

"Oh?"

"Y-yes. Let me go home and check up—I'd have to get dressed anyway—and then call me."

As soon as she got into her apartment she bolted for the telephone, causing Inez to say : "Here, what goes on?"

Ignoring her room-mate, Alice dialled the Swarthmore Inn and got Byron Matthews. She wailed :

PROPOSAL

"Byron, that mud-turtle of yours wants to take me out again tonight!"

"Hell!" roared Matthews. "I worked most of last night to get that report done so I could ask you out tonight myself—though I thought you'd probably be dated up in advance anyway."

"Then couldn't we just pretend——"

"No! Honey, you've got no idea how important this is. If Stinky wants anything short of physical indignities, go along with him as far as you decently can."

"Oh. Is that really true? About the importance, I mean. Or are you trying to get out of——"

"True!" came the blast of sound out of the receiver. "You're damned right it's true. Listen. These Wolfians act friendly and honest enough, and maybe they're all right. But nobody has yet been to their damned planet to check up, see? And they're at least as smart as we are. So it's absolutely vital to keep on the good side of them until we can find out what they are up to."

"You mean I'm a sort of key figure in interplanetary relations?"

"For the time being, yes. So put on a long dress and toddle off with Stinko. If he wants to be a big turtle-about-town, you help him be one."

"But am I safe? If you don't really know much about these creatures——"

"You'll be as safe as the Department can make you. You didn't notice you were followed by a couple of F.B.I. men all afternoon, did you?"

"N-no."

"All right then. If the Cultural Representative acts up, just yell."

She hung up with a sigh. Byron was evidently one of those exasperating males, incomprehensible to any normal woman, who would sacrifice even their women to some abstract ideal. Like that nonsense about "I could not love thee, dear, so much, loved I not honour more."

Alice took a bath and made up. Inez caught her admiring her assets in the mirror and remarked sourly : "Yeah, you make a good appearance, especially without your clothes. But it's all wasted on your friend from the Galápagos."

Alice made a face at her room-mate, repaired the damages thus done to her makeup, and slid into her second-best evening dress. ' (She was saving the best one for a hoped-for formal date with Byron Matthews). At the appointed time Stanko showed up in the same taxi.

At the Bellevue, Alice moodily drank her cocktail and fiddled with her dinner. Being stared at was bad enough, but in addition she found Stanko, even with allowance for the difference of race, to be egregiously dull company. Despite his near-perfect English the extra-terrestrial seemed to have no sense of humour, no sparkle whatever; no visible motivation save an insatiable appetite for facts and statistics about the earth. When she tried to get him to talk about his home planet he answered her questions with curt one-word answers and returned to the attack. His slow monotone was maddening in its deliberation.

The only time she brightened was when he said : "I trust, Miss Wernecke, that you will not be affronted if I do not ask you to dance. I am not familiar with the sport, and it is moreover one to which my form is not well suited."

"That's all right," she said heartily.

At ten Stanko looked at his wrist-watch and said : "I understand that at this time the more conservative citizens among you are accustomed to return home to sleep. Is that correct?"

"Yes. Wait, Mr. Stanko, you have to pay your bill."

"So I do. Oh, *garcon!* I mean waiter! By the way, Miss Wernecke, I have heard of your custom of tipping. How much do you think I should give?"

Alice made a rough guess and walked out with Stanko. In the taxi home the inquisition continued :

PROPOSAL

"Now, please explain the social significance of this custom of chewing the gum of the sapodilla tree. Though I have seen many performing the act, I note that neither you nor Mr. Matthews does it. Is it regulated by law, or what?"

Alice answered with half her mind, the other half silently urging the driver to get them home as soon as possible to rid her of this galactic bore. At the doorstep, however, Stanko said :

"Wait, Miss Wernecke. I have several things to say. To begin, I think we had better forgo your custom of kissing, which strikes me as most unsanitary. You do not mind?"

"Not in the least!"

"Well then, we now come to the question of our next date. I wondered what we could do tomorrow. Another dinner and dance, perhaps? One of those places of revelry called night-clubs?"

"No, Mr. Stanko, you can't. In Philadelphia all the places of revelry are closed on Sunday."

"Then how about the theatre? It impresses me as a highly developed art-form——"

"They're closed, too."

"Another motion-picture?"

"I've seen all the good ones."

"Then how about doing something in the afternoon? For instance, we might pay a visit to the zoological gardens. I have already been there, but I should not mind repeating my visit."

Alice shook her head grimly. "The animals bother my allergies, and I see enough monkeys every day in my class."

"That is unfortunate. Perhaps we could have a swimming party. We" (here he used a word from his own language, full of nasal vowels and guttural consonants) "are good swimmers,"

"In October? That's much too cold for us mere humans, Mr. Stanko. All the pools will be drained."

Alice suspected that some heated indoor pools might be open in the Philadelphia area, but had no intention of giving him this opening by suggesting it. Interplanetary crisis or not, she was not going out with the Cultural Representative again as long as she could think of excuses.

"I see," he said, his alien form drooping a little as if with sadness, though his flat voice betrayed no emotion. "We seem to be at an impasse. Tell me, would you consider the term 'a few' as including the number 'two'?"

"What an odd question! I suppose you could, though 'few' doesn't have any definite limits."

"Well then, it could be said that I have had a few dates with you. We can count Thursday night's episode as half a date, I think. I had intended to have one more before putting my proposal to you——"

"What proposal?" said Alice, alarm running up her spine.

"——my proposal to you, but since that seems impractical I will stretch a point and proceed. Mr. and Mrs. Greer were kind enough to tell me much about your custom of marriage. They explained that it was common for a male of your nationality, after he has had a few dates with a female, if he likes her well enough to wish to live with her, to ask her to marry him. As I have now qualified, I ask you to marry me."

Alice stood staring, her throat refusing to make a sound for several seconds while the enormity of the proposal sank in. At last she squeaked:

"Did you say m-marry?"

"Yes. I assure you that I am not always so devoted to my work as during my present investigation, when I must make every minute count. Back on Wolf 359-1 you will find me an agreeable and not an exacting companion, and you shall enjoy such comforts and luxuries as you are accustomed to on your own world."

"But—b-but—Stanko, that's *im-possible!*"

PROPOSAL

"What is impossible about it? Marriage, as I understand it, is a matter of the couple's agreeing before a magistrate to live together in mutual affection and support for the rest of their lives. What prevents us from doing that?"

"It wouldn't be legal, you not being a human being . . ."

"If your magistrates raise legal objections, the captain of our ship can devise the necessary contractual ceremony."

"Oh, no Oh, no. Stanko, you don't understand."

"And what do I fail to comprehend?"

"There's much more to marriage than that."

"Really? Please explain."

Alice found herself tongue-tied.

"Well? I await your reply, Miss Wernecke."

Alice, never having reared children of her own or taught adolescents, had not developed a technique for answering such questions. All that she could say was :

"Didn't the Greers ever say anything about the facts of life?"

"They have explained a great deal, but I do not know if that includes the facts that you have in mind."

"You know, about the bees and the flowers."

Stanko gave the Wolfian equivalent of a sigh. "Miss Wernecke, I am striving to follow you, but am admittedly finding it difficult. Why should the Greers lecture me on insects or plants? Neither is an entomologist or a botanist."

Alice, feeling her face flaming in the dark, had no choice but to explain in plain words what she meant. When she finished there was a little silence. Then Stanko said :

"I see. Miss Wernecke, I have committed a grave social error, and hope that you will accept my assurances that it was through ignorance and not through intent. By pure chance nobody had explained to me the connection between marriage and the reproductive process

to which you allude. On Wolf 359-1 things are managed differently. A male there fertilizes a female only once in his life. After that he is assigned to another female to serve her in his time off from work. Our females are much larger than the males—about the size of one of your elephants—and of quite a different exterior form, so that they find it difficult to move about. They are also less numerous, so that each female has sixteen to twenty males assigned to her. And I had erroneously equated this latter relationship to your marriage.”

“But what made you think——” began Alice in a small voice, close to tears.

“That you would find the relationship agreeable? I fear that I was judging by the reactions of my own kind. This contretemps goes back to when my fellow-explorers were discussing the matter, shortly after we had alighted, and I in a jesting way spoke of bringing an earthly female back home with me. Considering that you are hardly larger than I, the prospect looked inviting. You could hardly mistreat me as my ex-wife, from whom I was divorced so that I could come on this expedition, treated all her husbands.”

Alice could hardly imagine Stanko’s joking about anything, but let that pass. He continued :

“The others kidded me (I believe you say) about this rash boast until I swore that I would in fact carry it out. Now that I see that I have failed and have been humiliated in your eyes, my own, and those of my companions, there is nothing for me to do but die. I shall sit down right here and will myself to death.”

“Oh!” cried Alice. “Don’t do that!”

“I am sorry, but there is no alternative. Rest assured that the process will take only an hour or two, and then the garbage-collectors will remove my corpse in the morning.”

“But——” Alice stared helplessly into the darkness, then remembered Byron Matthews’s promise of surveillance. She called : “Help! F.B.I. ! Help!”

PROPOSAL

"Coming," said a voice. Footsteps pounded.

Three men approached. One was the taxi-driver, one a man whom she had vaguely noticed sitting near her at the Bellevue-Stratford, and the third was Byron Matthews.

In strangled sentences Alice explained what had happened, pointing to Stanko, who had sat down with his back to the wall in a kind of yogic posture and seemed no longer conscious. Then, sobbing, she melted into Matthews's arms.

"Hell and damnation," he said, "does that guy have to get ahead of me in everything? I was going to propose to you, too, after a few more dates to get decently acquainted."

"You were?"

"Yes. But now there's only one thing to do."

"What?"

"You must marry him, as he says."

Alice, hardly believing her ears, squirmed out of Matthews's arms.

"Byron Matthews, are you crazy?"

"Wish I were. But we can't have this guy willing himself to death while we're responsible for him. It might cause God knows what kind of interplanetary crisis."

"Do you know what you're saying? To go to the other end of the universe with this—this——" She almost said "mud-turtle," but decided that such an epithet would only aggravate matters.

"I know," he said grimly. "I'd as lief marry him myself. But——"

"If you were going to propose to me——"

"Rub it in!" he said furiously. "I love you. Sure. I do. But I've also got my duty to my country and my world. Corny, isn't it?"

"You mean you'd actually want me to——"

"Who said 'want'? I'd rather will myself to death

like him first. But I know what I've got to do when I've got to do it. Go on, tell him you will."

"Byron Matthews, I'll never see you again. I'll never speak to you again, for urging such a thing."

"Okay, you probably won't have the chance. I know how you feel. But go ahead. You've got to."

"Here," said the voice of Inez, "what's all this? Is everything all right, Alice? I heard you call."

"Everything's not all right," said Alice, "but I don't know what you can do about it. Inez, this is Mr. Matthews of the State Department and a couple of gentlemen from the F.B.I. Miss Rogell. You know Mr. Stanko."

"F.B.I.?" said Inez, the light on the front porch of the little apartment-house gleaming upon her glasses. "What on earth is this? And what's wrong with Mr. Stanko? Has he a stomach-ache?"

Alice explained.

"Oh," said Inez. "Let me think. Mr. Stanko!"

"Yes?" said the Wolfian.

"As far as you're concerned, would you say Miss Wernecke and I were about equally attractive?"

"I should say you were. Perhaps you have a slight advantage, since you look a little more like a female Wolfian."

"Then it doesn't matter which human female you take back with you, does it?"

"No, though naturally some would prove more congenial companions than others. That, however, is something that could only be determined by trial. What have you in mind?"

"Why not take me instead of Alice?"

Alice gasped. "Now you're crazy, Inez. I can't let you sacrifice yourself for me."

"I'm not. I'm just a typical old-maid schoolteacher, and I know it as well as you do. Whereas if I go with Stanko I'll be the first woman on Wolf 359-1 and have all sorts of interesting experiences. Maybe I'll revolu-

PROPOSAL

tionise their educational system. Well, how about it, Stanky?"

"I accept your offer with pleasure," said Stanko.

"But Inez——" began Alice.

"But nothing. I'm doing this because I want to, and I'm a free agent. Drop around tomorrow and we'll make the arrangements, Stank."

"Thank you, I will." Stanko got up and began to hobble towards the taxi.

"Alice——" said Matthews, reaching.

"Go away!" she said, trying to keep down another spate of tears. "I still never want to see you again, after you tried to get me to—to——"

"But I still love you——"

"And I still hate you!"

Matthews's footsteps receded on the walk as he followed Stanko and the F.B.I. men.

"Seems to me," said Inez, "that when you get a chance at a good man like Byron you're a fool not to grab him. If I were in your place——"

"Oh, shut up!" said Alice. The tears were coming freely now.

"By the way, old Lascivious Lorbeer called. He's got a pair of tickets for a concert next Friday night——"

"Oh!" said Alice.

The vision of life without Byron Matthews suddenly filled her mind—bossing her roomful of brats, holding off Lorbeer, tolerating the insipid John and the feckless Edward, grabbing at invitations to parties like the Greers' in hopes of meeting something worth playing up to . . .

"Byron!" she called.

He came back on the run. Ineez tactfully went back inside. When the clinch and the reconciliation had been executed and the vows had been exchanged, he said:

"I haven't had a chance to tell you, but my transfer

to the Foreign Service just came through this morning, with a promotion."

"How splendid! I don't care where they send you; I'll go with you to the ends of the world."

"Swell! That's the kind of wife a State man needs."

"Only I hope never to see Stanko or any other Wolfians again."

"I'm not so sure. We're setting up a new Extra-terrestrial Division in the Foreign Service, and I'm scheduled to be First Secretary of our new embassy on Wolf 359-I as soon as it's . . . Hey!"

He made as if to catch Alice's arms.

"No, I'm not going to faint," said Alice. "It was just the shock. But I'll manage. After all, Byron darling, you do have one advantage over Stanko, don't you?"

The Saxon Pretender

CLAUDE GODWIN became involved with the naked princess as follows :

In driving north from Santa Barbara most people follow Route US 101, which cuts inland across the base of Point Conception. Some, however, take the secondary road that runs along the seashore around the Point via Jalama and Surf, leaving 101 at Gaviota and rejoining it at Arroyo Grande. It is a winding road, much of it blasted out of cliffsides where the Santa Ynez Mountains come right down to the Pacific. The road runs along a rugged and almost unpeopled stretch of coast, forming a great contrast with the shores south-eastward, which ever since California became the most populous state about the year 1990 have been almost solidly built up from Santa Barbara to San Diego.

On an October afternoon Claude Godwin was driving his fellow-actor, Westbrook Wolff, along this scenic stretch and explaining why he intended retiring at the early age of thirty-one :

" . . . so I can make thirty grand a week; what good does it do me? Coming on top of the income from my securities, Uncle gets ninety-four dollars out of every additional century, leaving me a lousy six bucks which will buy one Sunday newspaper."

Wolff sighed. " Wish I knew how you did it. I've known a lot of actors, and never yet knew one who could save up enough to live on in ten years. By the time

Uncle, and your agent, and your ex-wives have all had a crack at your stipend——”

“Not to mention the parties and the ponies and the contractor who puts in your swimming-pool and the tailor who makes you a suit a week out of imported Tibetan yak-wool and so on. I avoid the alimony problem by staying single, and I live in a small house without a swimming-pool and staying away from parties and ponies. That’s why they call me MacGodwin,” he concluded.

He was a dark young man, handsome in a histrionic way, and rather on the small side. For hero rôles the studio put lifts in his shoes.

“But then you’re not a typical actor,” said Wolff. “In Hollywood you stand out like a sunflower in a coal-scuttle.”

“I am an individualist, you are eccentric, he’s nuts. I never did like this damned show-business anyway. What I always wanted was to be a scientist. You know, like that Doctor Rotheiss I played in *Crimson Dawn*.”

“Why don’t you?”

Godwin sighed in his turn. “You just don’t walk into a casting-office in some scientific institute and get taken on as an electrogeologist. I did go see old Dr. Goff, you know, the preesident of Cal. Tech. I told him I knew I wouldn’t stay young and handsome forever. Hell, I’m no great actor; I’m just a guy who can jump around in front of a camera with a wig and a sword and leer at the dames. Well, I told the old geezer about my secret craving. Says I: ‘Dr. Goff, I think I could be a real honest-to-Goldwyn scientist if I had a chance, but how do I go about it? I can’t see enrolling here as a frosh with the sobsisisters from all the papers and picture-mags breathing down my neck. So what?’

“He squints at me and sprinkles some cigar-ashes down his shirt-front, and says: ‘Take this,’ and hands me a book off his desk. ‘Go through it and do all the problems and then come back. If you still wish to become a scientist we shall go on from there.’”

“Did you?” said Wolff.

"That's the sad part; even sadder'n when I got bumped off in *Fatal Decision*. It was a math book: plain, solid, and analytical geometry. I struggled through about half and gave up."

"Doesn't sound like you, Claude."

"No, does it? But I got to where the funny little diagrams and equations and things just went round and round when I looked at them. I *couldn't* make sense of them even by sitting up all night over a bucket of coffee. Maybe if I'd had a normal education instead of being in show-business from the age of six weeks, it might have been different. But it's too late to go back and begin over, like I did in *Three Wishes*."

Wolff yawned and stretched. "Oh, well, maybe there's some other science that doesn't require so much math. Say, haven't we seen enough of this God-forsaken scenery? How about a stretch on the beach?"

They had just come around Point Arguello and the road was undulating along a stretch of sand-dunes between the Coast Range and the sea. Godwin looked for a place to park and presently found a turnout. He stopped the Studebaker and got out, not bothering to raise the top because at that time of year the climatic engineers allowed rain only on Wednesdays.

They climbed down the sandy, grassy slope to the beach. A few yards away a heavy surf boomed against the hard-packed sand. The beach was a small crescent with its concave side facing seaward, perhaps a hundred yards long, and terminated at each end by a rocky promontory. The landscape seemed devoid of human life. Shoreward the olive-brown hills bore a scattering of oaks among the scrub.

Godwin took a sharp look to make sure that he could see his car from where they were, and started north. At the promontory he and Wolff had to scramble over the rocks and found themselves at the beginning of another little crescent of sand. They plodded north to the next promontory and were climbing over these rocks when Wolff (who, being the taller, was in the lead) drew in his breath sharply and held out a hand in warning.

Godwin halted, thinking that perhaps his friend had surprised a family of sea-lions or some such denizens of the wild. Wolff silently beckoned. Godwin moved up beside the other actor.

Just beyond the rocks, at the beginning of the next beach, a girl was lying naked on her back upon the sand, asleep in the sun. She was a girl of pretty good size—"brawny" was the word that occurred to Claude Godwin. She was moderately pretty in a flat-faced Oriental way, as if she were part Asiatic, but there was nothing Mongoloid about the carrot-red hair stirring in the breeze. Dark glasses protected her eyes from the sun, and her head lay on a handkerchief spread out upon the sand. Beside her a neat pile of clothing was held down by a small camera.

Wolff whispered: "Boy, ain't that something? What'll we do?"

Godwin murmured: "She's liable to get a bad burn sleeping in the sun that way, even this late in the year."

"She probably didn't mean to go to sleep. But we can't exactly wake her up to tell her so."

"N-no. On the other hand we can't just walk off as if nothing had happened . . . that would be missing a gorgeous opportunity!"

"Say!" hissed Wolff. "I got an idea!" He outlined a plan.

"Swell," said Godwin. "But which of us does what with what?"

"Oh, I take it and you're in it."

"No sir! You'd make a better model than I."

"Can't! I'm running for king this winter!"

"Let's flip then."

Wolff won the toss. He cautiously climbed down and picked up the camera while Godwin silently removed his clothes and piled them on the rocks. When he was as nude as the girl he climbed down and stood beside her.

"If she wakes up now we'll have some explaining to do," he whispered.

"Don't make me laugh or she will. Now lie down

beside her. No, on your back. No point doing it on your stomach."

Wolff retreated a few paces, adjusted the camera, and took a photograph of the recumbent pair. The automatic film-winder purred faintly and stopped with a click at the next frame. Godwin started to rise, but Wolff motioned him back, took two steps, and shot a picture from another angle.

This time Godwin did get up. While Wolff replaced the camera on the girl's pile of clothing, Godwin climbed back up on the rocks and dressed with guilty haste. When he had finished, both men crept down off the promontory on the south side and hiked swiftly back the way they had come. When they had put enough distance between themselves and the girl they let out their pent-up mirth in raucous war-whoops, capering and slapping each other on the back. "Boy, wait till she gets those pics back from the drug-store!" "What wouldn't I give to see her face . . ."

"Hey!" said Godwin suddenly. "Suppose she recognises me? I may not be Hollywood's most popular actor, but my puss does get around. My agent says I packed 'em in at Julianehaab in *The Honour of the Clan*."

"What's Yooly-anna-hawp?"

"The capital of Greenland. Since the climate-control boys melted off the ice-cap the Greenlanders have become the world's most fanatical movie-goers. There's nothing else to do on the long winter nights."

"I wouldn't worry; your last few pictures all had you wearing a moustache, so they wouldn't know you without it."

They came to the place where they had first reached the beach and climbed back up the slope. When they were back in the car, Godwin drove slowly, peering ahead.

"Whatcha looking for?" said Wolff.

"Her car. She musta parked somewhere; nobody lives along this stretch . . . Ah, there it is!"

He slowed to a crawl as they came abreast of another

parked automobile. This was a typical Hollywoodian vehicle : an enormous pink Cadillac convertible with imitation python-skin upholstery. Godwin said :

"You'd swear that was a star's car, now wouldn't you? But I've never seen our sleeping beauty around the studios."

"Neither have I. She doesn't look to me like star-material anyway. She might belong to some actor or producer."

Godwin speeded up, saying : "We could look up her licence-number, but it's not worth the trouble. And what do I wanna get involved with strange dames for? I got enough trouble holding off the ones I know already."

"Well, you'd have a time convincing anybody who sees those pics you're not involved with her." At Godwin's look of alarm Wolff added : "'Sall right, Claude old boy. When the paternity suit comes up I'll testify for you."

"That would be a big help. But I'm not worried. I look different without my makeup, and I'm too short to run for king like you, and some day I'll quit this racket, anyway."

Westbrook Wolff did indeed intend to run for King of the United States of America at the decennial contest to be held in Washington in December. For following the wars and revolutions of the twentieth century, the world in a frantic search for stability and security had revived the obsolete institution of monarchy. The United States had done so in a more rational manner than most nations. Instead of the nation's entrusting the choice of the monarch to the vagaries of heredity, the king and queen were chosen from Hollywood's bravest and fairest for ten-year terms at a beauty-contest in which the U.S. Senate served as judges.

In due course Claude Godwin returned to Hollywood. After several months of miscellaneous movie work he was chosen for the title-rôle of Sabatini's *Scaramouche*, being re-made for the eighth time in two centuries. When the inevitable delays postponed shooting for a few days

he let himself be talked into attending a party at the house of his leading lady, Gloria Malloy.

About twenty-three hundred Godwin surveyed the scene and found it not to his liking. In one corner Gloria Malloy was giving the English actor Beaumont the low-down on the aberrations of Hollywood, in the process accusing practically every denizen of the cinematographic jungle of being queer in one way or another. In another corner Vakassian, the script-writer, was complaining to Cuevas, the bit-player, about the crass materialism of the motion-picture industry. In the third, Gloria's husband, Lauder the cameraman, was making love to Cuevas's wife. The fourth was occupied by a roaring crap game involving Finkelman the producer, Novalis the director, and McCarthy the sound technician. McCarthy's girl had fallen into the swimming-pool and had been sent home in a taxi, while Novalis's girl had passed out and been carried upstairs to recover.

Claude Godwin had heard and seen it all before and found it boring. Despite his almost complete lack of formal education he liked to picture himself as a serious thinker, interested in world affairs and the latest advances in the arts and sciences. Inevitably he found that very few cared to discuss such matters, and those few usually had some axe to grind and were willing to lecture him on their pet obsession but not to listen to his replies. To hell with it, he said, and let himself quietly out the front door.

The Studebaker was parked in the driveway behind Finkelman's all-chrome Mercedes-Benz. Godwin got in, started the engine, and pressed the button that actuated the parking-wheels, so that the car should sidle crabwise out of its space without the necessity of cramping the wheel. (This was now regular equipment on Super De Luxe Ultra Imperial models; on the plain Super De Luxe Ultra Special or standard line it was extra).

Claude Godwin set the control lever on the steering-column for sidewise travel, stepped on the foot-brake, released the hand-brake, and started to let the foot-pedal

up slowly, when he became aware that something was not normal. Some whisper of sound told him that he was not alone in his car; that there was, in fact, a man crouched behind the front seat . . .

WHEN he came to, Claude Godwin was lying on a bed. As he opened his eyes he gradually became aware, first, of the ceiling; then of the pyjamas he was wearing; then of a large window through which he had a view of rather barren-looking greenish-grey hills under a grey sky; then of something on his left wrist.

It was a handcuff, and attached to the handcuff was a tall, broad, moon-faced 250-pound man with prominent blue eyes and a fringe of faded blond hair around a pink scalp covered with the fuzz that resulted from persistent use of trichogenone, the hair-growing hormone.

"What the hell?" said Godwin.

"Yes?" said the man. "You are feeling better now, ha?"

"Better? Than what? Where am I? Who are you? Why was I snatched? How long have I been out? What's the idea of this bracelet?"

"Vun at a time. First, I am Sven."

"Sven who?"

"Sven Kaalund. But ve shall friends be, yes? So you call me Sven; I am calling you Claude."

"Well, isn't that damned decent of you! And where am I?"

"Dis is de King Edvard Hospital in Julianehaab, in Gronland."

"*Greenland!*" Godwin shouted. "But why? What have I got to do with Greenland?"

The moon face smiled. "You vill everything in time learn. Meanvile, please to be a good boy and do as you are told."

"The hell you say!" yelled Godwin. Propping himself up on his left elbow he swung a right at Kaalund's jaw.

In a calmer moment Godwin might have admitted that it was a silly thing to do. Although he had had occasion to learn boxing in the course of his employment, he was hardly in a position to land a real blow; nor was he, at 145 pounds, fairly matched with his vast opponent. But Claude Godwin was anything but calm.

Sven Kaalund moved his big head and raised his right shoulder so that Godwin's fist bounced off the deltoid muscle as off a truck-tyre.

"*Yeow!*" yelled Godwin.

A terrific pain had shot through his left wrist, doubling him up into a foetal position. It was gone in an instant, and Godwin relaxed. He now looked more closely at the other end of the handcuffs. Instead of a twin of his own cuff encircling Kaalund's wrist, the cable attached to his own cuff ended in a gadget something like a knuckle-duster, gripped in Kaalund's great fist. A guard ran across the back of Kaalund's hand, and on the other side of this object were buttons, on one of which Kaalund's thumb rested lightly.

"I told you to be good," said Kaalund in the tone of one reproving a child.

Godwin recognised the Kobik neuronic stimulator, the outstanding improvement in the art of inflicting pain since the time of Torquemada. Godwin almost wept with frustrated rage, but then pulled himself together.

"*What* are you?" he asked.

"Detective first-class of de police department of Julianehaab."

The door opened and a nurse said something.

"*Han gar man inte uden Forskyndelse,*" said Kaalund. "*Sage on Ophæveren at man kan ham snakkes.*"

The nurse disappeared. Not knowing Danish, Godwin could not follow the conversation. He relapsed into glowering silence while an interne took his temperature and blood-pressure and other bodily indices. When the interne (who like most Greenlanders showed a mixture

of Danish and Eskimo descent) finished his task and departed, Godwin asked his man-mountain :

"What now?"

"You shall yust for de boss vait."

"Who's he?"

"Prime Minister Gram. I do not know vat about you so important is dat the head of de whole country is coming to see you, but dat is how it is."

Godwin stared out the big window at the bleak landscape, noting the dwarf willows and birches sparsely scattered over the craggy hills. The hospital must be located on the outskirts of Julianehaab, for there were only a few houses in sight. The melting of the ice-cap by the climatic engineers a century before, while it had made Greenland into a modern nation with a huge habitable area and a lusty and growing population, had not converted it from a miniature Antarctica into a tropical paradise. Instead the land had become something like a large insular combination of Iceland and Norway, with the damp climate of the former and the snag-toothed mountainous coast-line of the latter.

The door opened and in came a lean, dark, bald man with a long droopy nose. Sven Kaalund jumped up, saying :

"*God Dag, Excellenz!*"

The men replied in almost-perfect English : "Good-morning, Kaalund. Good-morning, Mr. Godwin. I am Anker Gram. How are you feeling?"

"Like plain and fancy mayhem," growled Godwin. "What is this? I'm an American citizen, and you can't go snatching me all over the world! I won't stand for it! My government will make a stink——"

"On the contrary, my dear Mr. Godwin, you will stand for it," said Anker Gram.

"Huh?"

Gram drew a brown paper envelope from the inside pocket of his jacket : an envelope of the sort that photographic service establishments send back prints and nega-

tives in. Gram took out two prints and handed one to Godwin, saying :

"Does this look familiar?"

The print was obviously one of those that Westbrook Wolff had taken eight months previously of Godwin and the red-haired girl lying naked on the beach near Point Conception. The colour of her hair came out fine.

"Guk," said Godwin.

"And now this."

Gram extended the other print, a portrait showing the same girl, seated, clad in a shimmery evening-gown with a tiara on her hair. This picture was of the sort that actors like himself had made up in great numbers to send their fans, and true to form it bore in the lower right corner a facsimile of a longhand legend reading : "Hjertlige Onsker, Karen af Gronland."

"What does it say?" said Godwin.

"Best wishes from Karen of Greenland."

"You mean Karen's a name? That—uh—she's——"

"Certainly; it is the Scandinavian equivalent of 'Catherine.' And the young lady, if you have not yet realized the fact, is Princess Karen, the only child of our king, Edvard III of Greenland."

"But—what—that is—I didn't know——"

"So she maintained her incognito throughout your liaison? I knew she had entered the University of Southern California under the name of 'Karen Hauch,' which is, of course, her true laic name : Agnes Brigitte Karen Leonora Margaret Arrebo-Hauch. She seems to have shown more prudence than——"

"What d'you mean liaison?" cried Godwin. "I never even saw the dame, except when that pic was taken!"

He described the jape to Gram, who shook his narrow head.

"It is a fine story, and from your air of virtuous indignation one might almost believe it if one did not know better."

"How do you know better? Were you there? All

the evidence you got is that fool pic, which shows us acting a little unconventional, maybe, but——”

“Unconventional!” said Gram with a grin. “No, my fine American bird, you will never get anybody in Greenland to believe that, especially as your countrymen are a byword for uninhibited lechery. And since the medical evidence was inconclusive, and most of the population has heard a rumour of one sort or another, we find it necessary to act accordingly.”

“How’d they find out?”

“That is simple. When the princess finished her roll of film she air-mailed it back to Julianehaab for developing and printing by her favourite photographer, Hans Tungak. When he saw the prints he knew something was wrong and took up the matter with the government.”

“So what?”

“We naturally sent a mission to the United States to escort the princess home before she could get into any more trouble. Incidentally they found who you were from the pictures and brought you also. That was perhaps not strictly in accord with international law, but since one of Tungak’s assistants who also saw the photographs had talked, our hand was forced.”

“But why? Even if I had done what you guys think, what good does it do to kidnap me to this God-forsaken piece of Arctic real estate?”

Gram smiled thinly. “Perhaps you are familiar with the legendary American institution called a ‘shotgun wedding’?”

“You mean you want me to *marry* the dame?”

“Precisely.”

“I won’t!” yelled Godwin. “I’m damn well gonna stay a bachelor until I feel like changing!”

“You will not find the position of consort difficult. Your material wants will be well supplied.”

“Hell with that! I got all the dough I need. In fact I was gonna quit the movie racket. I don’t care if the Prince Consort brushes his teeth with a platinum

toothbrush set with natural diamonds. I'm gonna do what *I* want when I want it, and I ain't gonna marry no goddamn lady wrestler . . ."

Gram let him rave until he ran down, then said: "You forget, my dear Mr. Godwin, we have means of coercion available. Has Kaalund demonstrated his special manacle yet?"

"Yeah."

"Well, either you shall go through the ceremony in a civilized manner, or we will have Kaalund stand beside you as best man, with his handcuff on your wrist, so that should you balk he can apply the necessary stimulation. Would you like a cigar?"

"Thanks," said Godwin and took the proffered smoke; then wished too late that he had spurned the offer in righteous wrath.

"You see," said Gram, puffing, "you Americans take a very cavalier attitude towards sex, like the Eskimos from whom we Greenlanders are partly descended. We, however, look upon things differently. We therefore cannot have our princesses running around and—ah—mating with all and sundry."

"I tell you I never——" began Godwin, but Gram continued:

"I was opposed to Karen's going to California alone for just that reason; but she is an unusually sensible girl and persuaded her father to her way of thinking, so I weakly gave in. And now we must—how do you express it?—pay the devil."

"Even if you make me do this, I won't—I'll—I'll run away and get a divorce at the first chance. You can't keep me locked up the rest of my life."

"I do not believe that will be necessary. There is another possibility that will, I think, reconcile you to your—ah—fate."

"Yeah? It better be good."

"It is. It transpires that you are the beneficiary of the most amazing coincidence in history."

"Well?"

"You are the legitimate heir to the throne of Great Britain."

"Huh? Ga wan, you're loopy!"

"It has been proved, I assure you."

"What's the matter with George XII?"

"He is merely the descendant of the usurping Duke of Normandy, William Fitz-Robert, while you are the heir of Harold Godwinson, otherwise Harold II, the last Saxon king of England."

"You mean the guy who got bumped off at the Battle of—uh—Hastings?"

"The very one. Harold Godwinson's children by his mistress Edith Swan-neck being ineligible, you are the oldest legitimate descendant in the male line of his post-humous son by Aldyth, Harold Haroldson."

"Ulp. And you mean you're gonna talk the Limies into kicking out George and putting *me* in his place?"

"That is the idea."

Godwin tugged at his hair with his free hand. "I never heard of such a crazy idea in my life! I must be in a booby-hatch and you're one of the inmates!"

Gram relighted his cigar. "You shall see. Your accession to the British throne will not be so difficult as you suppose. For one thing the British, like most people, have made a fetish of legitimacy in recent decades. For another, George XII is unpopular for his vices—a thoroughly maladjusted type."

"Wait! Last winter I played a supporting rôle in *Bonnie Prince Charlie*. I dunno much about the real history—you know how the script-writers always hash it up—but it was something about a guy who claimed to be the rightful King of England and invaded Scotland to prove it, but got chased out again. They had us running around in kilts and wigs and talking with Scottish accents. Well, why couldn't the descendants of this Charlie guy have something to say about your project?"

"Oh, you mean the Jacobites. The answer is no, for several reasons. The English Parliament decreed that James II, having become a Roman Catholic (this being

a time of religious controversies) was ineligible to be king, and the succession was therefore vested in his daughter Mary and her husband Prince William of Orange, a grandson of King Charles I who lost his head. Then when William and Mary died *sine prole*——”

“What did they die of?”

“Without issue. The crown went to Mary’s sister, Anne. In the meantime Parliament had passed the Act of Settlement in 1701, which named as Anne’s successor a granddaughter of James I whose husband was Elector of Hanover, and when Anne died in 1714 this woman’s son became King George I. The Jacobites claim the line should have gone to James II’s son, James Stuart, and then to this man’s oldest son, Charles—the fellow in the cinema—and then to Charles’s younger brother, Henry of York. Then when Henry died, leaving no more descendants of James II, they should have gone back to the descendants of Charles I through his daughter, Henrietta, who married Duke Philip of Orleans——”

“Stop! You got me dizzy with all these Jameses and Charleses. What happened to the Jacobite claim finally?”

“Oh, nobody has taken it seriously for centuries. It got into the royal house of Sardinia for a while and then into the royal house of Bavaria. Just now the pretender is a young man named Werner von Wittelsbach, a German living here in Greenland.”

“Why does he live here?” asked Godwin.

“I arranged that our leading magnate, Thor Thomsen, should offer him a job here he could not afford to refuse, so we could keep an eye on him. And where should he live? The Germans do not want him because he is also the Bavarian pretender, and Bavaria is now under the Austrian crown, and the British will not have him because Jacobitism is high treason by their Act of 1707.”

Godwin said : “I remember from a book that one time there was a Danish king of England named Cahoots or something. What happened to his line?”

“The claim of Knud the Mighty comes down to the

modern Danish royal house through his nephew Knud II, since both his sons died *sine prole*. The Arrebo-Hauchs are related to this line, but only by a cadet branch. And as the present King of Denmark will have nothing to do with such an enterprise, we must resort to the remaining line of pretenders: the descendants of Harold of Wessex, which means you, my friend."

"How do you know? They didn't have birth-certificates in the Middle Ages, so you can't trace a line over a thousand years. Who ja think you're kidding?"

"Ah, but we can! Have you ever heard of Viggo Bruun?"

"Nope."

"Naturally not, because we have kept his work quiet. Dr. Bruun is the world's greatest authority on terrestrial magnetism. He discovered the Bruun effect."

"What's that?"

"A permanent impress left in the magneto-gravitic matrix of our planet by every event that happens on its surface; something like the Akashic Record of the occultists. By means of an instrument he has developed, Dr. Bruun can photograph these impressions. The instrument is called a parachron, short for 'parachronoscope.'"

"You mean if you took this here gadget you could see the Battle of Waterloo being fought over again?"

"More or less."

"My Goldwyn, what'll they think of next? But what's this got to do with me and your nutty king scheme?"

"Simple. We have made records of the entire lives of Harold Haroldson and his descendants. We have been working on it for several years, and now have a huge library of the lives of historical characters."

"It'd sure be a big library; a roll of film to give one man's whole life would fill a good-sized room."

"Not so bad as that. You can condense a lot, for example cutting the periods of childhood and sleep. For genealogical purposes you only need the first twenty years or so, up to the time when the man begets his eldest child."

"Could I see some of these movies?"

"Certainly, as soon as the physicians say you may leave. Quarters have been prepared for you at the palace, and the faithful Kaalund will accompany you. Now you must excuse me, please. I take it the prospect of royalty no longer appals you?"

"I'll think about it. But wait: you never said why you Greenlanders are going to all this trouble. What's in it for you?"

Gram smiled. "A matter of high politics. You know that in theory the King of England reigns but does not rule. However, he has some influence as *ex officio* chairman of the Commonwealth Conference under the Act of Parliament of 2035, especially right now when the governments of the Dominions are evenly divided over the Assam problem. We wish to accomplish several things such as taking Greenland out of the Scandinavian Union and into the Commonwealth, and a British King faithful to our interest would be very useful. And now good-bye; I shall see you soon."

Though he thought it more prudent not to say so outright, Godwin has made up his mind to resist this lunatic scheme to the last ditch as well as the plan to marry him to Karen. So they put him up as a figurehead King of Great Britain with the idea that Gram would always control him through his wife! From what he recalled of the proposed wife's brawn, perhaps Gram had something there, too.

While Gram had recovered the print of the photograph by Wolff, he had left behind the portrait photograph of the girl herself. Godwin glared at it. A handsome wench even if a little big and squarish. She must weigh nearly as much as he. He pointed to the inscription:

"*Hjertlige Onsker, Karen af Gronland,*" and asked: "How do you pronounce that?"

Kaalund obliged with a jerky, guttural singsong. Godwin, staring at the print, was struck by the thought that

Gram might have left it with him in the hope that he would fall in love with it. He cast it from him, saying :

"Sven, put that thing on the bureau, face down. I don't care if she's Crown Princess of Greenland or Queen of Mars; the less I see——"

The door was opened by a nurse who stepped to one side and curtsied as another woman entered. Kaalund heaved himself erect again and bowed, crying :

"*God Dag, Hoihed!*"

Godwin blinked and looked again. Yes, it was the red-haired girl on the beach : Karen Hauch, Princess of Greenland.

CLAUDE Godwin stared. His imagination had been adding little by little to his unwanted fiancée's thews until he pictured her as a veritable female gorilla; and here she turned out to be not so big after all. She was better-looking than he remembered her, even if not quite the beauty that the photographer had made her out in the portrait.

"Well!" she said. "So you are the terrible Claude Godwin!" She spoke with less accent than Sven Kaalund, though her English was not so flawless as the Prime Minister's.

"That's right," he said. "I suppose you want to see what your partner in sin looks like before it's too late?"

"You need not be nasty, Mr. Godwin. After all, it was your own doing that got us into this fix, and I am not liking it any better than you."

"But you know nothing *happened!*"

"Are you sure?"

"I think you would have woken up," he said dryly. "So why didn't you tell 'em so?"

"I did, but they did not believe. My poor father was terribly shocked by that photograph. So now I am stuck with *you*."

"What's so terrible about me?" he retorted, stung. "Lots of dames think a movie-star's a pretty good catch."

"Oh, I did not say there was anything really wrong with you. In fact one might say you were quite pretty." (Godwin winced.) "But you know what self-centred and immoral people actors are, and I could have had the captain of the U.S.C. football team. He was a *big* man."

"Is that so? Well, I could have——" began Godwin hotly, then thought better of what he was going to say. "But let's not fight over who got rocked the worse on this deal. I don't suppose you got any idea how to get out of it?"

"No-o," she said, with a glance at Kaalund, who was taking all this in. "We shall have to make the best of it. Perhaps love will come after the first ten or twenty years."

Godwin realised that they could not make any serious plans for evading their fate in Kaalund's presence, and that Gram was determined to keep Godwin under close surveillance until he had accomplished his aims. While Gram's political objectives sounded no more wicked than most political manoeuvres, the thought of being used as a passive pawn in this game made Godwin clench his fists with rage.

"Your sense of humour," he said, "is well-developed but gruesome. When they gonna let me outa this box?"

"Tomorrow, they tell me. And now I must leave to shop down-town for my—how do you say—torso?"

"Trousseau," said Godwin with a shudder. "You got the other already, worse luck."

"And to keep you from being bored by the wait, I am giving you these." She brought out of her handbag a white paper bag which she handed him, saying: "*Ne les evalez pas; serrez-les entre les dents.*"

"Hey!" Sven Kaalund spoke up. "No langvages I am not understanding! You speak English, Dansk, or Eskimo and notting else!"

Godwin blinked in bewilderment. He had a limited knowledge of French, dating back to an abortive singing career, and it seemed to him that she was telling him

not to swallow the bag but to do something to it with his teeth.

"Thanks," he said.

"It is nothing. I shall be seeing you again, yes?"

"All too soon, I'm afraid. G'bye, Miss—uh—what *shall* I call you?"

"The people here say 'Your Highness,' but that is too formal for your betrothed. And I do not know you well enough for 'Karen,' because we Greenlanders are not using first names everywhere as you do in the United States. So call me 'Miss Hauch'."

"Okay, Miss Hauch. S'long."

She was gone. Kaalund rumbled: "Let me see dat bag, Claude. I am here from being poisoned to stop you as vell as other tings."

Godwin wordlessly handed over the bag. Kaalund looked in and handed it back. "Gumdrops!"

Godwin took out a gumdrop. Now the pattern became a little clearer. She must have said something like "Do not swallow them; hold (or pinch) them between the teeth." If it had only been possible for her to repeat the sentence . . .

He gripped a gumdrop firmly between his molars. It softened and dissolved with the passing of the minutes. Now, if she had meant to convey a message in one of these things, it would be in some sort of capsule. He would have to eat his way through the entire bag to be sure.

When the first gumdrop had gone the way of all confections, he took a second. Kaalund looked at him with a mouth-watering expression, but Godwin hard-heartedly ignored it and continued to consume the candies himself. It would hardly do to have the message-capsule eaten by his guardian. The detective muttered something about:

"I see vat she meant by de kind of people actors is!"

Godwin continued devouring his way through the bag. When he had eaten over half the gumdrops, he came to one that felt a little different from the others.

It had a hard core, and as the gelatinous outside dissolved away his teeth closed down upon this object, not much bigger than a vitamin pill. As he wondered whether he would have to hide the capsule under his tongue until Kaalund was asleep, so that he could investigate it more closely, a buzzing sensation in his teeth startled him so that he almost dropped the thing out of his mouth.

Recovering in time, he gripped the capsule more firmly. The thing contained a tiny sound-record player which had been actuated by the pressure of his teeth, and which was now playing off its record. The sound was transmitted through his teeth and skull so that he could hear it quite clearly though nobody else could. He heard :

"Mr. Godwin! Mr. Godwin! This is Karen Hauch. By now you know of Minister Gram's plans for us. I do not wish to marry you, and I suppose you feel the same way. Our only chance of escape is by air, but I do not know if I can make arrangements. See if you can bribe Detective Kaalund."

The record stopped. Godwin bit it again without result. He had heard of these phonographic capsules; the only way to repeat the record would be to unscrew the casing and wind it up again with a microscopic screw-driver. After some thought, Godwin swallowed the capsule.

That left the rest of the gumdrops. Although this was probably the only one with a message, there was a chance that another might contain a similar capsule with further plans of escape. He therefore did not dare hand over the rest of the bag to Kaalund, though he was already sated with the taste of gumdrops. He kept right on eating, remarking to the ceiling: "You know, Sven old man, my studio would pay plenty to get me back pronto. We were just gonna start shooting *Scaramouche*, and it'll raise hell with their plans if they gotta dig up a new star at this late date."

"Unh," said Kaalund.

"In fact, I'm not exactly broke myself. If I chipped in, the guy who arranged to have me sent back to Hollywood would pick up a nice piece of lettuce."

"Ha. You tink I am vun of your corrupt American policemen, so you can bribe me to let you go, huh? Vell, dis is Gronland, Claude, and de sooner you learn de difference the better off you are. No more bribes, please."

Godwin stewed a while in silence, then said: "Say, don't they have anything to read in this dump?"

"Do you read Dansk?"

"No."

"Den it vould no good do you. De newspapers and books in de hospital library is all in Dansk, except some in Eskimo."

The door opened again and the nurse spoke to Kaalund, who reported: "Another visitor, Claude. My, such a popular fellow ve got!"

The visitor turned out to be a stout eyeglassed young man, who bounced in and said effusively: "I am glad to meet you, Mr. Godwin! I am Karl Bruun, the son of Viggo Bruun. We understand you wish to visit my father's laboratories?"

"I did say something of the sort to Gram."

"Would tomorrow morning suit you?"

"Okay, if they let me out by then. Do you work in this lab?"

"Only on my off-time. I am a whale-herd."

"A what?"

"I herd whales. The bowhead whale, once almost extinct, is one of Greenland's main economic assets."

"How do you do it? I mean, d'you chase 'em around with a motor-boat?"

"No, with a helicopter. I also have to be ready to drive off orcas. Just now my relief has the machine out. We shall see you tomorrow morning, then. And by the way, lest you be bored while awaiting your release from the hospital, I brought you some gumdrops." Karl Bruun handed over another paper bag. "They taste

better if you grip them between your teeth and let them dissolve slowly. I must be running; good-bye!"

Godwin glared into the bag. Another capsule message? He grimly popped the first into his mouth . . .

This time he had to go through nearly the entire bag, while Kaalund glowered at him and made Danish noises in his throat. At last he came upon the one containing the capsule. The message said:

"Mr. Godwin? You know who this is. If you do not like your situation we may find it possible to co-operate, for there are those who would like to do, with that upon which the present stasis depends, that which you would like to do with yourself. If you agree, signify by saying, when you meet us, 'The gumdrops were superb.'"

Now what did that mean? They (the Bruuns, he supposed) evidently wanted to help him somehow, but he could not make any sense of that long and involved third sentence. He would play along with them anyway to see what happened.

He finished the bag, crumpled it, and threw it into the waste basket just as the nurse announced another visitor. This was a tall blond young man of pure Nordic type with several scars criss-crossing his face, who began:

"Godwin? I'm Werner von Wittelsbach. My boss, Thor Thomsen, sent me to ask if you were comfortable."

"I'm doing about as good as you can in jail."

"Mr. Thomsen will be glad to hear it. By the way, he thought you might like these."

And the young man thrust forward a third bag of white paper. As Godwin took it, von Wittelsbach said: "He suggests you go through the gumdrops before you start on the big piece."

Godwin, looking into the bag, saw that it did indeed contain a number of gumdrops and, at the bottom, something that looked like a small chocolate-bar wrapped in aluminium foil.

"Thanks," he said with notable lack of enthusiasm.

The face of Werner von Wittelsbach, who was stand-

ing by Godwin's bed, now underwent a noticeable change. Up to now the young man had behaved with the correct and colourless affability of any well-brought-up man sent on such an errand. Now, however, there was a glitter of animosity in his eye and a hostile edge to his voice as he said :

"So you are the so-called Saxon Pretender, eh?"

"The—? Oh, that. So they tell me, though I think it's a lot of fertilizer. And you're the—uh—Jacobite Pretender, huh?"

"I am the rightful King of Great Britain. We shall see, sir, whose claim prevails."

Thereupon von Wittelsbach brought his heels together with a click, bowed, and stalked out. Godwin had never seen anybody click heels outside of actors playing parts in movies about Old Vienna; he did not suppose that anybody actually did it in the twenty-second century. Yet there it was.

"*Herregott!*" said Kaalund. "Are dey trying vith gumdrops to poison you? You better not eat dem all; dey make you sick."

Godwin glowered at his jailer and went grimly to work on the gumdrops, though by now the taste almost nauseated him. This time the one with the capsule was the third one he ate. The message ran :

"Claude Godwin! If you wish help in achieving your objective of escaping from Greenland, hide the chocolate bar in the parachron tomorrow morning and leave it there. That is all for the present."

Godwin sighed. Everybody seemed anxious to help him to escape except Kaalund and Gram, the ones who really mattered. And why should they want him to leave a chocolate bar in the time-viewing machine? Was Thor Thomsen trying to sneak a message to the Bruuns too? Or was it a bomb to blow up the machine? That seemed unlikely. If Viggo Bruun were a man of any sense, he would have at least one complete set of plans of the parachron in a safe place. He might even have filed applications for patents, in which case the machine's

principles of operation would eventually become public knowledge. There was no such thing as a secret invention any more. Even if there were, why should Thomsen wish to blow up such a marvellous machine?

Anyway, Thomsen had been the only one to sign off at the end of his message so that Godwin would not have to eat all the other gumdrops to make sure they had no capsules in them. Accordingly Godwin removed the chocolate bar from the bag and tendered the rest of the gumdrops to Kaalund, saying :

"Like some?"

"Tank you."

"Keep the whole bag."

"Tanks. I told you you would not feel good if you ate too many."

The detective went through the rest of the gumdrops like a devouring flame. In a few minutes they were all gone. An orderly came in and spoke. Kaalund said :

"He wants to know vat you wish for lunch."

"Tell him thanks, but I don't want any lunch."

"I told you! But dat is no reason vy I am starving." He spoke at length in Danish to the orderly, who went out and returned with a tray heaped with enough food for two ordinary men. Kaalund fell to with his free hand while Godwin, bored and restless, stared gloomily out the window.

"Sven," Godwin asked, "if the climatic engineers had such success in melting the ice-cap off Greenland, why don't they do the same with Antarctica? That's a lot bigger than Greenland."

"Sure," said Kaalund with his mouth full of *Smorrebrod*, "but so much vater would de level of the de oceans raise maybe ten, twelve metres, and vat would happen to all de seaports? De melting of the Gronland cap raised it about a metre and a half, and some cities like New Orleans raised an awful stink."

Kaalund finished and summoned the orderly to remove the tray.

"You know, Claude," he said, "I am not feeling so

good neither. Maybe I should not be eating on top of dose candies . . ."

The orderly removed the tray. Godwin, glancing at Kaalund, felt a shock of alarm. The man's ruddy round face had taken on a mottled hue, and sweat glistened on his forehead.

"I got a *fordomme* belly-ache," muttered the sufferer. "I must telephone for my relief to come qvick so I can . . . *Ow!*" The big man grunted and doubled over. "Hey, Claude, push de button! Somebody is poisoning me!"

With a bellow of pain the detective rolled out of his chair to the floor.

THEY took the moaning Kaalund away, and presently another detective came in and picked up the hand-grip on the other end of Godwin's handcuff. This was a smaller man, black-haired and flat-faced, who introduced himself as Niels Kirdlavik.

"Is that an Eskimo name?" said Godwin.

"Yes."

"Are you Sven's regular relief on this job?"

"Yes."

"What's gonna happen next?"

"Do not know."

"Do they know what's wrong with Sven yet?"

"Do not know."

The man was not a sprightly conversationalist. Presently another detective and a couple of uniformed cops came in and poked around the room. They gathered up the remains of the gumdrops and retrieved the empty bags that had contained the first two lots from the waste-basket. The detective asked Godwin a lot of questions that brought out the stories of the three bags of gumdrops, though Godwin refrained from telling about the message capsules.

Godwin finally asked: "Was he poisoned? How is he now?"

"He vas. Ve think it vas meant for you, whom it

would have killed quick, but he is so big it will not hurt him much. He will be back at work in a couple days."

"Who's trying to poison me?"

"That is what we are trying to find out. It might have been your last visitor, or any of the people who prepared and brought the lunch."

Godwin did not know of any motive for Thomsen's trying to murder him, though never having met the man he was in no position to judge. The name of Werner von Witteelsbach had entered his mind at once. The man did have a motive, even though a screwy one. But while Godwin hesitated to tell about this, the detective hustled out.

The afternoon was dull. In answer to his loud protests the hospital personnel finally dug a battered book in English out of their library: *The Theory and Practice of Chicken Farming*, by John H. Pappakostas, N.Y.: McGraw-Hill, 2097, 347 pp. \$49.50.

Claude Godwin groaned and covered his eyes with his free hand.

Next morning he was awakened by a tug on his wrist, and Kirdlavik's voice: "Hey, Mr. Godwin, wake up! The doctors is examining you to see if you can go out!"

Examination showed that the effect of the drug that had kept him unconscious during his transportation to Greenland had wholly worn off. Kirdlavik unlocked his handcuff long enough for him to dress.

"Where am I going?" he asked.

"To the palace. They got a room there for you."

"Yesterday Gram said I could visit the lab where Bruun's got his parachron. Why couldn't I stop there on my way?"

"I will see." Kirdlavik spoke Danish into the telephone, then said: "You may." While the policeman had been telephoning, Godwin slipped the seeming chocolate-bar into his pants pocket.

When Godwin had finished dressing and had eaten his breakfast, still another detective arrived to take the

place of Kirdlavik, who was yawning from his all-night vigil. Otto Malling, a tall, thin, knobby man with faded blue eyes and a handlebar moustache, proved more communicative than the dourly silent Kirdlavik, and started off with a lecture on the beauties of Greenland in general and the Julianehaab region in particular: ". . . and you must take a ride out to the Oster-Bygt, where is the ruins of the houses Eric the Red and his people made when they came here in 982 . . ."

Godwin was not overly impressed by Julianehaab, where the bicycles outnumbered the automobiles, though it did have a quaint, old-fashioned air with its field-stone houses with small windows and steeply-gabled roofs. The taxi purred up a winding street towards an academic-looking group of buildings.

"The University of Greenland," said Malling. "The laboratory is this building separate from the rest. You understand, I suppose, that the parachron is a secret yet. You must not talk about it to anybody except those like Doctor Bruun, who know already."

"If it's so important, wouldn't the news leak out?"

Malling shrugged. "Plenty of rumours is floating about, but so long as nobody knows exactly, no harm is doing."

Malling showed his identification to the uniformed cop at the front door of the laboratory building. Inside they waited in a small, front office, where Malling exchanged chaff in Danish with a girl secretary. Presently two men entered: Karl Bruun and an older man with a white goatee, introduced as Viggo Brunn. Both Bruuns had their sleeves rolled up and were dirty from tinkering. They wiped their hands on pieces of waste and shook hands.

Godwin said: "The gumdrops were superb."

"Good," said the elder Bruun. "You wish to see the parachron, do you not?"

He led the way through featureless concrete halls to an automatic elevator, where another policeman stood guard. On the second floor of the building he led them

from the elevator to a large room at whose door stood still another gendarme.

"Why all the cops?" asked Godwin. "Even if this machine works—I mean, in spite of the fact that it works, I don't see why the secrecy."

Bruun said: "It is Anker Gram's doing. He has all sorts of profound political plans connected with the parachron. Besides, he thinks some criminal might wish to destroy the machine lest it be used to view his crimes in the past. This machine should eliminate crime and clear up a lot of mysteries like the Aarestrup fraud."

The elder Bruun led them into a laboratory room littered with the usual clutter of wires, tubing, electric cables, glassware, stands, clamps, meters, old copies of technical magazines, and ash-trays made of discarded scientific apparatus. In the middle of the room, on a massive concrete bench, stood the parachron: a thing somewhat like a television set without its cabinet, but much larger. Besides the viewing screen facing the door, the machine bore on top a gadget with a parabolic reflector, something like a small radar antenna. Viggo Bruun continued:

"We think that is all foolishness. This is science. We should take it around the world to solve the great historical problems, and not waste time in political manœuvres and tracking down petty pickpockets."

"If you had to track them down," said Otto Malling, "you would not take such a yolly attitude about them."

"Perhaps not, my friend," said Bruun. "But if this works that way a lot of you fellows will be out of jobs, because a crew with a parachron can visit the scene of every crime and get all the evidence to convict right there."

"If the lawyers don't have the machine outlawed because it makes it too hard for their clients to make an honest living by robbery," said Malling.

Bruun turned back to Godwin. "Some day, maybe,

we can take the parachron down between Latitudes thirty and forty North and really find out something about history. Meanwhile, Anker Gram says no, and he is the boss."

"You mean," said Godwin, "you gotta lug the machine around to the places where the things actually happened? You can't just sit here in Greenland and twiddle knobs and see the Battle of Waterloo?"

"That is right. You cannot. Actually, the magneto-gravitic matrix precesses about three degrees to the West per century, so the impressions of the Battle of Waterloo would be—let me see—" (he glanced at a wall-map) "—about where the south-west tip of England is now." Bruun sighed, a faraway look in his eyes. "If I can only live long enough to get it down to the latitude of Alexandria and photograph the lost books in the Library . . ."

"How ja get the pics Gram says prove I'm descended from that King Harold?"

"We flew the parachron in one of the whaling helicopters down to the middle of the Atlantic, between fifty and fifty-five North and fifty and fifty-five West. The whole life-history of King Harold and his immediate descendants is there. It is quite a job, because if you start shooting on a stormy day the wind makes the helicopter—how would you say—wobble about, so the pictures wobble, too."

"Look, Dr. Bruun, I'm no scientist, just a dumb actor, but I know a *little* about probability, and it sure doesn't stack up that I should be the guy to get—uh—involved with the Princess Karen, and at the same time be the eldest whatsit descendant of this old king. That's too much like drawing two pat royal flushes in a row."

Bruun smiled faintly. "You cannot argue with facts, my friend. Would you like to see the parachron in operation?"

"You bet!"

Bruun turned to the machine. "Karl, put that quintode tube back in. You see, Mr. Godwin, you can't see

much right here, except the neighbourhood of Bergen about the year 420 A.D., or the Oslo region about 320. And they are not very impressive."

Karl Bruun replaced the tube that had been taken out of the machine, then pushed a wall-switch, whereupon the windows became opaque and the room dark except for the faint glow of vacuum-tubes inside the jungle of rods and wires and condensers. Viggo Bruun twirled knobs until a ghostly light appeared on the viewing-screen, then a blizzard of flickers and flashes like a television set out of tune.

The image cleared. Godwin found himself looking at a rugged landscape with a body of water in the distance.

"Bergen Fjord," said the older Bruun.

As the scientist turned more knobs, the antenna on top revolved, and the image on the screen swept around in a panorama. The image was black and white, surprising to Godwin, who had been brought up on colour in photography, cinematography and television.

Bruun said: "We are about the tenth of June, 421 A.D. As I remember, there is a man who goes close by here . . ." The image jerked as he made an adjustment. "There he is! Take a good look."

A man was walking across the view. Though Godwin could not judge his size well without familiar objects to compare him with, he got the impression of a short man. He was dark and shaggy, clad in rough woollens: a kind of kilt wrapped around him under the armpits and reaching to his knees, and a shawl over his shoulders. He bore a bag on his back and gripped a staff in his free hand. As Godwin watched, the man passed out of sight.

"Very few people in Norway and Sweden at that time," said Bruun. "You have to hunt hard to find one. Mostly they were a miserable lot of Lapp-like folk living along the shores and digging clams. The big migration of Nordics from Jutland had not yet started."

"How far back can you go? To the age of the dinosaurs?"

"Oh, my, no! In theory you can go back twelve thousand years, the time required for the matrix to precess clear around the earth. In practice, the image gets fuzzy when you try to go back more than five thousand. There is one nice view a little older than that . . ."

The scene shifted, and Godwin was looking at a huge herd of bison drifting through snow-covered woodland.

"That is near modern Upsala," said Bruun. "If we go on back and eastward all we see is Russian and Siberian forest—hundreds of years and thousands of miles of it."

Godwin asked: "How about those movies of my ancestors? Got any here?"

"Yes."

Viggo Bruun spoke in Danish to his son. The parachron was switched off. There were clicks and whirrings in the dark, and a motion-picture image sprang into life on one concrete wall.

"This," said Viggo Bruun, "is the first reel of the Harold of Wessex series. That is King Harold marrying Aldyth. It wobbles a little because of the wind the day we photographed it."

The scene—black-and-white like the direct view, and badly lighted—showed a man and a woman in early-medieval costume standing before a man in ecclesiastical garb. The first man was a tall, broad-shouldered, clean-shaven fellow with a crown on his square-cut blond hair.

"Those are Earls Edwin and Morcar, who made all the trouble," said Bruun. "The little fellow at the right of the scene . . ."

"Say," said Godwin, "that Harold guy looked all right. He'd have made a good actor."

"Quite a heroic character, but you ought to see the other Harold he fought against, King Harold Sigurdson of Norway. There was a legendary character in real

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life! Now the wedding is over and they are going in to the wedding-feast . . .”

As the film ground on, Godwin remarked: “It just occurs to me this’ll put the costume-movie out of business. You could dub in the sound. Who’ll pay to see an actor playing Lincoln when he can see Lincoln himself? Say, this damn thing doesn’t give a guy any privacy at all!”

“That is right. With the parachron you can really find out who is descended from whom.” After a further pause, Bruun said: “Here are a few sequences of the Battle of Hastings, to give continuity.”

Looking at the confused and dust-obscured scene, Godwin said: “We could put on a better battle in Hollywood. Look at those extras just standing around! Half of ’em aren’t earning their pay.”

“Let me remind you that this is the real thing, my friend.”

“Well, then, your King Harold needed a good director. Maybe the costume-movie has a future after all, if this is what the real thing looks like. But I’ll say one thing: the censors wouldn’t let us show guys’ guts and gore spilled all over the place the way this does. Oh-oh, there’s your King Harold all haggled up!”

“He is dead. Now,” said Bruun, “we come to the birth of Harold Haroldson . . .”

It occurred to Godwin that now was the time to secrete the chocolate-bar in the parachron. But he could not do it, even if he could get away with it. Though he was not a scientist, the thought of destroying a valuable scientific discovery, the life work of this nice old bird Bruun, was repugnant to him. He would even rather marry Karen.

The reel came to its end. Bruun threw the switch that let daylight into the room again, saying: “We have all the rest, showing the birth of Harold Haroldson’s eldest son, Stigand Haroldson, and his eldest son, Godwin Stigandson, and so on. We can establish that the senior branch is the Godwin family of York, and

follow them down to the nineteenth century, when birth-records became general and genealogists preserved the pedigree of your family. Shall we have lunch now?"

Godwin was surprised at the speed with which time had flown. After lunch, the Bruuns excused themselves, and Godwin asked Malling :

"What do we do now?"

"Whatever you like, so long as I get you to the palace by seventeen hundred. You must be there in time for the betrothal banquet to-night."

"The *what*?"

"Has nobody told you? The king is giving a big party, your engagement to Princess Karen to announce. All the bigwigs will be there."

"Well, how about visiting that oyster-bug or whatever you called it?"

"The Oster-Bygd? Sure, we got time enough." Malling gave directions to the taxi-driver, who drove them out of Julianehaab along a narrow, winding road.

Godwin wished people would leave him alone long enough to think. Despite the assurances of the Bruuns he was still not convinced that the claim to the British throne was kosher. Those movies could have been faked.

Then he realised that he still carried the so-called chocolate-bar in his pants pocket. If the thing *were* a time-bomb, it might go off any minute and splatter him and Malling all over southern Greenland.

"What makes you so pale?" asked Malling solicitously. "Are you not feeling good?"

"I—I'm all right, thanks," said Godwin, tensing his jaws to keep his teeth from chattering.

He would have to get rid of the thing, but in an inconspicuous manner, and in such wise that when and if it did go off it would not kill anybody. It wouldn't do to throw it out of the cab . . .

They reached the Oster-Bygd and got out to look at a singularly unimpressive group of ruins: a little clump of what had once been houses of raw fieldstone, un-

mortared, of which now only a few stretches of thick wall remained. Wire fences surrounded them and a policeman paced back and forth.

"The settlement of the great Eric Thorvaldson," said Malling reverently. "We keep the cop there to stop American tourists from carrying the houses away as souvenirs, stone by stone."

"Let's walk down to the shore," said Godwin.

They climbed over the rocks, hampered by being handcuffed together. When they came near the sluggish sea, Godwin threw the chocolate-bar as far as he could.

At Malling's questioning look he said: "That was a piece of candy in that bag von Wittelsbach left with me. I figured it might have been poisoned, too."

"You should not have thrown it away! We needed it to examine!"

"Too late now. Let's go back."

As the taxi purred off on the road back towards Julianehaab, a terrific roar split the air behind them. The shock made the little automobile quiver, and the air was filled with the cries of startled gulls. Craning his neck, Godwin saw a tall geyser of water settling back into the sea a few metres off-shore.

Malling ordered the taxi-driver to turn around once again and return to the parking-lot at the Oster-Bygd. He hurried down to the shore, where the uniformed policeman was already standing, looking out to sea. There was nothing to be seen. At last Malling returned to the cab, saying:

"Maybe, Mr. Godwin, it is just as well you threw that thing away when you did!"

"Why don't you pinch Werner von Wittelsbach before he poisons or blows up somebody else?"

Malling looked unhappy. "I should like to. But that is not easy without very good proof, and we do not *know* that the candy-bar was what exploded. That young man is a—how do you say—protégé of Thor Thomsen, who works closely with Herre Gram . . . So

you see . . .” The detective spread his hands helplessly.

AT THE GATES of the palace stood a pair of troopers of Greenland’s microscopic armed force, wearing parade uniforms topped by conical cossack-style lambskin hats. When Malling identified himself and his fellow-passenger they snapped to present-arms with a click and a clank that made Godwin wince.

“You will get used to it,” said Malling.

The taxi drove around a winding driveway between scrubby dwarf trees and stopped in front of a big field-stone house similar (except in size) to the other residences of Julianehaab.

“The palace,” said Malling, getting out and paying the taxi-driver. “Oh, here comes the king!”

Godwin looked around at the crunch of tyres on gravel. Three men were approaching on bicycles. The one in front, in civilian tweeds, was a man about Godwin’s stature with a fringe of greying red hair around his nude scalp. He looked stocky and powerful, and the resemblance to his daughter was obvious. Behind him pedalled two more soldiers in black kalpaks, each with a drawn sabre held against his right shoulder.

Malling came to attention and took off his hat, saying: “*God Dag, Herlighed!*”

The leading cyclist braked to a stop and got off, saying: “*God Dag, Malling,*” and then to Godwin: “So this is my future son-in-law, eh?” He wrung Godwin’s hand in a bone-crushing grip. “Come inside.”

King Edvard III led the way to the front door and bellowed: “Ingeborg!”

When a woman appeared, the king exchanged words with her in Danish, then said to Godwin: “Your room is not quite ready yet. Come into my sitting-room.”

Then he conversed briefly with Malling, who finally unfastened the hand-grip of Godwin’s fetter from his hand and remained outside while the king led Godwin into a room and closed the door.

"He was afraid to leave you alone with me," said King Edvard. "As if *I* needed protection from *you*! Ha!"

"What ja mean, your Majesty?"

The king stuck out his jaw and thrust his face close to Godwin's, his blue eyes narrowed to slits. "I mean if it weren't for Gram's *fordomme* banquet tonight, I'd tie you in knots and stamp the remains into the floor, you young swine!"

The king reached out and tweaked Godwin's nose between his powerful fingers.

"Ouch!" said Godwin.

"That's just a taste. Lucky for you I can't afford to have you turn up at the banquet with a pair of black eyes and a few broken teeth."

Godwin's temper rose in its turn. "Look here, pop, I don't care who you are, you can't push me around! If you wanna fight, I know something about that too. An actor has to learn——"

"Actor! To make it worse, he has to be an actor!"

"What's the matter with being an actor? I didn't ask you to kidnap me up to the end of nowhere and marry me to your daughter!"

"And who asked you to seduce my poor innocent darling and drag the honour of the royal house in the mud?"

"I never did!"

"But those photographs——"

"That was just a joke——"

"Yust a yoke!" roared the king, his speech becoming more Danish under stress. "I'll show you vat is a yoke——"

"I can prove it! Goddam it, let me talk for a change! You can take your parachron to California and set it up on the beach, and see exactly what happened! And if it didn't leave her as pure as I found her, I'll not only marry the dame; I'll eat your second-best crown, jewels and all."

"So?" said the king. "That's an ill wind of another

colour. If we *could* take the parachron to California . . . But Gram would never consent."

"Why not?"

"It suits his purposes to marry you to Karen, and this gives a fine excuse. He can always say that since the rumours about those photographs have got out among the people, nobody would believe our denials even if the machine proved otherwise." The king lit a knobby pipe and blew great clouds of smoke.

"Is Gram a kind of dictator in Greenland?"

Edvard lowered his voice to a conspiratorial level. "For practical purposes, yes. He is in a strong political position and controls the police and the guards, so the rest of us must jump to his bidding. If I could get away with it I'd—how do you say it—hop the coop too?"

"You mean quit?"

"Absolutely. This monarchism is a lot of nonsense; an archaistic revival based on a temporary emotional aberration among the world's peoples. Maybe after you're safely—ah—hooked I can persuade Anker Gram to let me abdicate, and you and Karen can handle the headaches. I have no more use for Greenland now that my wife is dead. Maybe I'll settle in your California, where it's at least warm."

Godwin lit a cigarette and said: "If you fly the coop you oughta take me along."

"Why? You caused all this trouble, even if you only meant it as a joke."

"No reason. But—I don't suppose you can bribe a king, can you?"

"Not this king. I've made arrangements to be assured of an adequate income no matter where I live."

"How about a screen test?"

"A screen—you mean you could get me in the movies? Yes?" A light of eagerness showed in the king's eyes.

"I don't say I can get you a good part, but I can give you a start. I got *some* little influence."

"Now you are speaking. You promise to get me into the movies, I'll promise to try to help you escape . . . if you can prove what you said about you and Karen."

"I can't do that until we're in California."

"I understand; we have to trust each other a little. We shall have to try to make it in one foul swoop—you and me and the Bruuns and their machine all together. Karen too, if she wants to come. But don't fool yourself; getting away from Anker Gram won't be so easy as falling off a tree."

There was a knock on the door, and Ingeborg announced that Mr. Godvin's room was ready. In the hall Detective Malling waited to take up his old duty. He looked relieved that nothing had happened either to the king or to his charge.

In the suite, turned over to the future prince-consort, Godwin found a valet, one Syv, waiting to serve him. Syv had laid out a gaudy costume of the sort that Godwin would have associated with historical movies: a garb similar to a diplomatic uniform with a high-necked coat covered with gold lace in front.

"Do I wear that?" he said.

"Yes sir," said Syv.

By the time Godwin was regally clad, sounds without indicated that the festivities were imminent, though the sub-Arctic summer day still had several hours to go. Godwin said:

"By Goldwyn, I could use a drink about now!"

"I vill get vun, sir," said Syv. "Vat would you like?"

"How about a double Martini? And get one for Otto too."

Malling protested, but with little fire of conviction, and when Syv came back he let himself be persuaded to drink. Half an hour later Godwin was regaling his hearers with reminiscences:

" . . . so the director says: 'Are you a stunt man or aren't you?' and the stunt man, he says: 'If you wanna wrassle that there octopus, you get in that there tank

and wrassle him. I got a family.' So the director turns to me and says—what is it?"

It was Ingeborg with a message that his Majesty and her Highness were waiting Mr. Godwin to accompany them in to dinner.

Feeling no pain, Claude Godwin, accompanied by a slightly weaving Mallings, rose to leave. Godwin murmured :

"Pull yourself together, Otto. They'd never believe you could control me if they saw you stagger."

The ill-matched pair made a reasonably smooth progress to a reception-room where they found the king and the princess milling around with early arrivals. Godwin, remembering his costume-pictures, half expected a liveried trumpeter at the door to blow a flourish and announce his name, but no such thing happened. The Greenlanders, even if they kept a king, were somewhat stingy with their pomp. Mallings whispered :

"Hold your left hand close to my right, Mr. Godwin, so the handcuff von't show."

"Hell with that," said Godwin. "If they're such dopes as to throw an engagement party they gotta drag the groom to with bracelets, damned if I'll help 'em out."

Godwin was introduced to various people, but as most of the talk was in Danish he could only give them glassy smiles of polite incomprehension. A servitor passed him with a tray of glasses containing a pale liquid that Godwin took for more Martinis. His first sip, however, showed that he had got hold of something stronger.

"Aqvavit," said Mallings.

Karen was saying : "Father, how shall Mr. Godwin take me in to dinner with Mr. Mallings attached to him?"

Godwin suggested : "The king could take Mallings in, and I could follow right behind with you."

"Nonsense," said Edvard. "I shall take my daughter in, and since you're joined to Mallings you can take him."

Karen said : "Has not this foolishness gone far

enough? I am sure we could trust Mr. Godwin not to dive through the window if he were freed."

The king shrugged. "No doubt, but *he* won't agree." He nodded towards where Anker Gram was talking to the British Minister Plenipotentiary. "By the way, I don't think you know Thor Thomsen, our leading industrialist."

Godwin saw that Thor Thomsen was old and potbellied with a jowly bulldog face. The Stuart Pretender glowered gloomily over the industrialist's shoulder.

"I have had that—ah—pleasure," said Werner von Wittelsbach.

As Godwin finished his drink it occurred to him that his unknown ill-wisher might have poisoned it, but he was too well lubricated by now to care. When dinner was announced he trailed docilely in behind the king and Karen, Malling shambling beside him.

An hour later Godwin had tucked away the last of the banquet and sniffed suspiciously at a glass of yellowish liquid set before him.

"Svedish punch," explained Malling. "Used for breading."

"For what?"

"Breading. You know, ven we say 'skaal'."

"Oh, toasting." Godwin tried some and found it good though sweetish. Malling had already drunk half of his.

The chatter died as Gram finished his coffee and rose. He made a speech ending in "Skaal!" which Godwin took for a toast to the king. Godwin watched those around him and went through the same ritual motions. Gram made another speech with a "Skaal!" to Karen Hauch. When he did the same thing once more Godwin started to rise for the third time, but a jerk on his handcuff brought him down again. Malling hissed:

"Sit down, stupid! That vas to you!"

"How should I know? He knows I don't understand Danish."

"Den you better learn, but fast."

Gram, ignoring Godwin's gaffe, went ahead to make another speech introducing somebody, who in his turn made a speech. Not being able to understand what was said gave Godwin an uncomfortable feeling of having been struck deaf, though he tried to laugh when the others did.

Two hours, five speeches, and uncounted Swedish punches later the banquet broke up. Godwin awakened Malling by jerking the handcuff, and together they wandered into the ballroom, where the king had started the record-player and was dancing with Thomsen's wife, a middle-aged dame with a battleship jaw. Through the broad windows on the north side the long Greenland sunset blazed in purple and gold. Godwin spotted Karen Hauch and dragged the now alarmingly unsteady Malling over to her, saying:

"Miss Hauch, I hope some day when I'm not hitched to old Otto I can ask you for a dance."

"It is too bad," she replied. "If Mr. Malling could find a partner we could make a foursome of it . . ."

"You mean like a square-dance, the kind I danced in *Blood in the Ozarks*? But it would take awful good shink—synchronization, and I don't think the guy's up to it. Matter of fact I'm not either."

Then Karen went spinning away in the arms of Werner von Wittelsbach, who gleamed triumphantly over her shoulder at Godwin. Maybe, the latter thought, the German had cherished hopes of not only acceding to the British throne, but also of becoming Karen's consort.

"Mr. Godwin." It was Sir Keith Lampson-Hart, the British minister.

"Yesh?"

"What's this rumour about your putting in a bid for the British crown, on some silly dynastic pretext?"

"Better ask Gram or the king," said Godwin. "They cooked it up. Not me." He hiccupped.

"I just thought I'd say," said the diplomat, "that the British crown is conferred by the British people, you

know. They make the rules of legitimacy and any time they don't like the result they can change them, you know."

"Thanks for the advice, Sir Keith." Godwin turned to Malling. "Otto, let's get outa here! If I don't get a breath of fresh air I'll pass out in front of all the big-shots of Greenland!"

He dragged the wordlessly goggling Malling through a door. Not knowing the layout of the mansion and being the worse for wear, it took him some time to find an exit . . .

He found himself, not quite knowing how he had come there, leaning against the fieldstone wall on the west side of the house. He was standing on moss-covered ground dotted with waist-high dwarf willows and birches. Beside him Malling had folded into a sitting position with his back to the house, his prominent blue eyes picking up highlights from the sunset.

Godwin drew in long breaths of the cool air and felt his vision clear somewhat, though a headache threatened to take the place of his former anæsthesia. He did not know how long he stood there gazing at the sunset. In more equatorial latitudes the phenomenon would have ended long since, but in Greenland it lasted from twenty-one hundred to midnight, and was immediately followed by a sunrise of equal leisureliness.

"Hey, you!" said a voice.

Godwin turned. Werner von Wittelsbach stood before him with a couple of elongated objects cradled in his arms.

"I have been looking all over for you," said the Stuart Pretender. "I thought you had run away. Now, you degenerate American mongrel, we shall see who files a claim to the British throne!"

"Pardon me if I'm thick, old boy," said Godwin, "but what the hell are you talking about?"

"We will fight it out, pig-dog!"

"How the hell can I fight with Malling tied to me?"

"We shall not fight in the barbarous American

fashion, with fists, but in the cultured German manner. Take one!"

"One what?"

Von Wittelsbach thrust the large ends of the objects into Godwin's face. Godwin saw that they were the hilts of a pair of swords. Hardly knowing what he did he took one and waggled it for balance, saying:

"Are you kidding?"

"On the contrary, I am most serious! Only a light-minded American would joke about the duties and honours of kingship."

"Don't be a sap. I don't want the damned kingdom; I got a career and plenty of dough already. If you wanna be king, go ahead. I'm not stopping you."

"A coward, eh? Then I shall have the pleasure of beating your backside raw with the flat. Bend over." Von Wittelsbach's voice was thick with the effects of alcohol.

"Look here," said Godwin, "I said I wasn't interested in fighting, but I won't let you push me around. I suppose you think I don't know how to handle these silly stickers, huh? You didn't see me do Tybalt in *Romeo and Juliet* a coupla years ago, didja?"

"Bend over, swine!" yelled von Wittelsbach, and he took a wild swipe at Godwin.

Godwin parried more by reflex than by intention and instantly found himself engaged. He discovered that he was holding, not a foil, épée, or other familiar hand-weapon, but a German *Schläger* with a big basket hilt, a long straight narrow blade, and no point but a razor-sharp edge. The purpose of the implement was not to kill an antagonist, or even to pretend to do so, but to inflict cuts on his scalp and face which would later result in a prized set of scars, and also give him a chance to show his Aryan mettle by continuing the fight without flinching even when his head was a mass of gore.

If he had been less befuddled Godwin would perhaps have devised a way out of his predicament. After all the weapon was unfamiliar to him, and the Stuart

Pretender had an advantage of height and reach. Godwin could not run with the half-comatose Mallings chained to him, and he never thought of yelling for help. While he could fence well enough for cinematographic purposes, he had never expected to have to fight a real duel for blood—handicapped, moreover, by having a drunken detective chained to his wrist!

Werner von Wittelsbach, his left arm behind his back, advanced upon Claude Godwin with wide-spread legs, swinging his *Schläger* at Godwin's head as if he were cutting sugar-cane. Godwin, who had learned sabrefencing for the part of the noble Confederate officer in *The Last Plantation*, had no trouble in parrying; especially as von Wittelsbach was almost as drunk as he. But crude as the methods of *Schläger*-fencing seemed, Godwin realized that his opponent would wear him down in time by superior strength of arm and wrist.

Godwin threw back a few strokes without effect and tried to use footwork, but was hampered by Mallings. As he dragged at Mallings's arm, the detective, aroused by the clang of blades, lurched to his feet.

"Hey!" cried Mallings. "*Nej, i Gronland bliver . . . In Greenland is dat forbidden! Stop, at vunce!*"

Otto Mallings staggered forward, his hands groping the air, just as von Wittelsbach aimed a terrific cut at Godwin. Mallings thrust his head in the way so that the long blade came down upon his skull with a short dull sound. He fell to hands and knees, blood running from a two-inch gash in his scalp, and collapsed on the moss.

As he did so, Godwin decided that this mediæval farce had gone far enough. He stepped forward and kicked von Wittelsbach. As the German doubled over, Godwin brought the pommel of his *Schläger* down on his head. Werner von Wittelsbach fell across the body of the detective.

Godwin stuck the point of his sabre into the ground so that the blade remained upright and bent to examine the recumbent forms. Both were alive if unconscious, and Mallings's wound did not appear serious. Then

Godwin examined the hand-grip of the handcuff which Malling still held.

Malling's right hand was secured to the grip by a shaped guard that passed over his knuckles. This guard was hinged at one end and latched at the other, and fitted the back of Malling's hand so closely that while it was in place there was no chance of his losing his grip accidentally. However, the latch that held the guard in the closed position was not locked, and a little manipulation enabled Godwin to open it and remove the grip from Malling's hand.

He had got this far when a suppressed feminine cry made him whirl. There stood Karen Hauch and Karl Bruun. The latter exclaimed :

"What is this? Are they dead?"

"No." Godwin explained.

Karl Bruun said : "So you are free? Good! You wish to come with us, do you not?"

"Where to?"

"My father and I are making a break for freedom, together with Karen and the king. We heard the swords and came to see . . ."

"Say no more; lead on!"

Karl Bruun led the way along the winding paths until he was almost out of sight of the palace. They approached a large helicopter. When they reached the machine Godwin saw that half the capacious cabin was taken up by the parachron. He said :

"Taking the gadget?"

"Yes. My father has always wished—where is he?"

Karl Bruun began hunting around, but no trace of the elder Bruun did he find.

"*Bevare!*" he said. "I told him not to be wandering off . . ."

They stood uncertainly for a few minutes. Bruun said : "I do not dare go off to hunt, because then if he returned I should be missing. As I was saying, we hope to get the machine to a country where we shall be allowed to use it for scientific purposes and not this

absurd dynastic business . . . I hope he gets back before the police discover Malling and Wittelsbach, or learn that we took the parachron off the roof of the laboratory building."

"This the machine you herd whales in?"

"Yes. We shall not be allowed to keep it, but if it can get us to Canada, that is all we ask. Ah, here he is!"

Viggo Bruun appeared, snapped : "*Jag fand ham ikke; nu skal vi gaa,*" and boosted Karen Hauch into the helicopter.

UNCOUNTED hours later, Claude Godwin yawned himself awake. Despite the excitement of escape he had fallen asleep almost as soon as they had taken off. Now he looked around, stiff from sleeping sitting, and overhung from strong drink. The sun was up, but that meant little in these latitudes. His watch told him that he had been asleep something over ten hours; in fact, it was about time for breakfast.

Karen was sitting by Viggo Bruun, who twiddled the dials of the radar set while Karl Bruun piloted. They were all talking Danish, but switched to English when they became aware that Godwin was awake.

Viggo Bruun said : "That should be the Naskaupi River ahead. I hope, Karl, that your inspiration of cutting inland will not land us in prison for breaking the Canadian flying regulations."

"If we had gone straight for Gander, anybody who followed us could have picked us up," said Karl Bruun.

"Speaking of which, here is a pip! Somebody is behind us," said Viggo Bruun.

In a matter of minutes, Godwin, peering past the parachron through one of the rear windows, saw a speck against the piled clouds. The speck swiftly grew to an airplane which swelled and flashed by overhead with an explosive shriek and roar, and dwindled to a speck again as it banked for a long turn.

"Thomsen's machine!" cried Karl Bruun.

"That would be Wittelsbach piloting," said the elder Bruun. "Here he comes again."

The airplane, having slowed to a mere 200 k.p.h., came back. Again it skimmed overhead, barely missing the helicopter. Godwin, forgetting his aching head, flinched as it passed.

The Bruuns were excitedly talking Danish again. Karen Hauch said :

"He wishes us to alight. See, he is putting down his wheels to break our rotors if we do not."

The helicopter sank towards the bleak Labrador landscape, where the coastal tundra began to give place to forest. As the country was mostly open at this point there was no trouble in finding a landing place. They had hardly touched their wheels to the moss when the airplane (a sportsman's version of a fast single-jet police craft, without armament) alighted, too, its flaps and slots extended, and taxied up beside the helicopter. The canopy flew open and von Wittelsbach and Thomsen scrambled out. The former ran over to the helicopter, waving a pistol.

"Get out!" he shouted. "Keep the hands up!"

When the four people in the helicopter had complied, Thomsen waddled past them with a hatchet in his hand. He climbed into the helicopter, whence presently came smashing sounds.

"Hey!" cried Godwin. "He's busting up the parachron!"

Von Wittelsbach said nothing, but swung his gun to cover Godwin, who glanced around, expecting to see signs of strong emotion on the faces of the Bruuns. Instead, they took the destruction of their life's work impassively.

"What's this all about?" said Godwin.

Viggo Bruun said : "It is all right; there are complete plans——"

"Were," said von Wittelsbach. "We got them out of Gram's private safe-deposit box and burned them. Now shut up."

A mosquito sank its probe into Godwin's cheek, but he did not dare slap it for fear von Wittelsbach might mistake the move and shoot. The smashing sounds ceased, and Thor Thomsen climbed out of the helicopter, saying :

"God. Skytte dem op."

The sentence sounded enough like "Good; shoot them up," so that Godwin guessed the meaning, a guess confirmed when von Wittelsbach raised the pistol and aimed at Viggo Bruun.

"Hey!" yelled Godwin. "Thomsen! You can't trust that creep; he tried to poison me when you only wanted him to take a message——"

There was a metallic sound behind him, followed by the roar of a shot. Godwin, craning his neck, saw that the door of the luggage compartment of the helicopter, below the passenger compartment, was hanging open, and that on hands and knees in the cavity with a pistol in his hand crouched Edvard III, King of Greenland. When Godwin turned back, von Wittelsbach lay supine with a huge hole in his chest. Thomsen was slowly raising his hands.

"Well, well," said the king. "So they were right when they said you had hired the man who killed that witness in the case of the Aarestrup fraud! And fearing lest the Bruuns with their machine should track down the whole story, you chased us to destroy the parachron and all the witnesses. What a bloodthirsty little man!"

Though he did not know about the Aarestrup fraud, Godwin followed the general drift of the accusation. He said :

"Say, your Majesty, isn't it too bad you couldn't have shot him before Thomsen busted the machine? Now it's gone for good . . ."

"Not quite," said Viggo Bruun. "I feared some such attempt, so I made a duplicate set of plans, addressed them to the British Government, and had Karl drop them on the deck of a British ship on one of his whale-herding flights."

"Oh," said King Edvard. "Then all is not lost. When I got to the helicopter I found nobody—Dr. Bruun must have gone off to search for me—so I hid in that compartment lest the police find me."

"It is better than that," said Viggo Bruun. "Sir Keith passed on a confidential message to me that the British had built a machine and tried it out. The first thing they discovered was that Harold Haroldsen had no legitimate heirs, though plenty of the other kind. The picture Gram was using to advance Mr. Godwin's claim was partly a fake, using modern actors dressed up like eleventh-century Anglo-Saxons. I knew that all along but did not dare say so. They also found that legitimacy is no good anyway, because every few generations you find that the putative heir to the throne is not the son of the king but of some lover of the queen. So all that foolishness will soon be ended."

A month later, having testified in the Canadian court that sentenced Thor Thomsen, Claude Godwin returned to Hollywood. Despite frantic long-distance conferences the studio had not been able to hold off on the shooting of *Scaramouche*, but had gone ahead with Ricardo Peralgoles in the title-role. However, as Godwin's contract had four months to run, they gave him the lead in *Carson of Venus*. Only, as the real Venus had been visited and found not to resemble that imagined by Burroughs in any particular, the setting of the story had been moved to a suppositious planet of Procyon and the title changed to *Swords across the Void*. The studio had also found the Burroughs' plot too slow for their purposes and had entirely re-written it until nothing was left of the original—not even the names of the characters.

Godwin sat in his bungalow telling his adventures to his friend Westbrook Wolff: ". . . and now Viggo Bruun is at Cal. Tech. finishing a new parachron, and he's promised me a job as a technician when my contract runs out. I may never be a real scientist, but I can twiddle knobs and hold a soldering-iron."

THE SAXON PRETENDER

"How about our red-haired sun-bather?"

"Back at U.S.C.; her old man took a house in Glendale, and thinks I'm Santa Claus because I got him a bit-part in *The Spider of Brazil*. Anker Gram stood on his head trying to get us all back to Greenland so he wouldn't have to pay me damages for kidnapping me, but they wouldn't go. That reminds me . . ." Godwin picked up the telephone and dialled. "Karen? Claude. Ja like to see the premier of *Amazon Gold* to-morrow night? Okay, I'll pick you up at twenty-hundred. See ya."

As Godwin hung up, Wolff looked at him with an amused expression, saying: "Don't tell me that after all the fighting and running you did to avoid marrying the dame you're going to do it anyway!"

"Not at all. I am dating Miss Hauch in the normal manner, and if on further acquaintance we decide we're made for each other and etcetera, who knows? Or again we may not. But nobody's gonna pressure us into it!"

The Space Clause

DR. MATEO Marco Lope Aguirre Malaria, the eminent jurist, sat at a table in the bar of the Convention Quarters and wept into his rum.

These Quarters were those of the World Government Constitutional Convention, in a set of concrete chambers deep underground in the Rhône Valley. These accommodations had been hastily converted from the former Supreme Headquarters, United Civilised States, usually known as SHUCKS. The Convention was taking place in this armoured warren, first, because most of the earth's larger cities had taken hits in the war and were, therefore, short of housing—when they had any houses left at all; second, because the war was not quite over.

A journalist named Dagobert Heck sat down at the same table and asked: "Why do you weep, Dr. Aguirre?"

"My friend," said Aguirre, "I weep because we are off on the wrong track. Once again we fail to grasp opportunity by the forelock."

"Oh, I don't know," said Dagobert Heck. "Considering what the world has been through lately—most of its cities mashed flat and half a billion of its population blown to bits—I think we're doing better than we had any right to expect. We're getting a bigger improvement on the United Nations than the United Nations was on the League of Nations. The new World Government will have a directly elected legislature, the right to tax, and the world's only armed force. Ten years ago we'd have said that was Utopian moonshine. Why then so sad?"

"Because these narrow-minded so-called statesmen cannot look beyond the petty confines of their own planet!"

"Oh, you mean the Space Clause." Heck closed his eyes and recited the beginning of the controversial clause from memory: "'The Gerousia shall have the exclusive right to represent the peoples of the earth in relations with extra-terrestrial life-forms, should any such forms be discovered to exist; to limit, regulate, and forbid intercourse between the peoples of the earth and such life-forms; and to limit, regulate, and forbid movement of persons and things between the earth and other heavenly bodies . . . ' Oh, well, it's probably not vital. We've been to the moon and found nothing but a few viruses, and conditions don't look promising for life on the other planets, either."

"Exactly what that fool Carstairs-Brown said!" Aguirre mimicked the speech of the British delegate. "Really, you know, wouldn't Her Majesty's Government look a bit silly getting all set to welcome the Martians, and having it transpire there aren't any?" They forget that this is not the only sun in the universe."

Heck nodded sympathetically. Aguirre went on:

"And others, I think, hope to defeat the clause so that they can carry on nationalistic and imperialistic policies, if not on the earth, then off it somewhere."

"Look here, are you sure the fact that you're the author of this clause hasn't prejudiced you?"

"Sir, I have no prejudices!" Aguirre lowered his voice. "Save perhaps a slight one in favour of living."

"What do you mean?"

"You know my glorious chief?"

Heck nodded. Aguirre's chief was Juan Serafín de la Torre Baroja, President of the Andean Federation, a new political entity that had taken the place, amid the general uproar of World War III, of several of the nations of western South America. Not satisfied with making himself president for life of Andea, la Torre had appointed himself head of the Andean delegation

to the Convention so as to have a personal finger in the new constitutional pie.

"Well," said Aguirre, "he is, as you know, a man of the utmost sense of personal dignity. I—ah—sold him on this Space Clause, as you would express it, with the result that he has placed the Andean delegation squarely behind it and made speeches on its behalf. Now if the clause is not adopted he will feel that his honour has been insulted. And since he cannot take his feelings out on Carstairs-Brown and the other sceptics, he will vent them on *me*."

"What'll he do? Can you?"

"If that were all! Did you not hear how he had fourteen political opponents shot without trial before taking off for this Convention?"

"I probably did. So he's the guy who calls himself the great democratic liberator?"

"Oh, but he is! Think of all the things that he has done for the masses—free parades, extra holidays to hear his speeches, and all the rest! But these people were criticising him in public. Naturally he could not tolerate such insults to his dignity, or the people would have doubted his virility and thrown him out. After all, one must make oneself respected. But that, alas, will not save *my* neck."

"Too bad," said Dagobert Heck. "You Andeans have certainly done all you could to put the clause across. Short of having a space-ship land with a load of little green men with tentacles . . . Hey!" Heck frowned into his drink. "That gives me an idea. There's an old friend of mine in India named Dick Nugent, used to work with me on the *World-Telegram-Sun*, but he retired a few years ago to become a yogi. Maybe . . . Say, when does this clause come up for a final vote?"

"To-morrow, if the meeting goes according to schedule."

Heck consulted his watch. "Excuse me. I think I can just make it."

THE SPACE CLAUSE

"Make what?" asked Aguirre. But Dagobert Heck had gone.

Myron Kalish, the American Secretary of State, took his turn as president of the Convention the following noon. His bland exterior concealed a battalion of worries that would have floored a lesser man, the chief being that after all his toil and travail the Senate of the United States would insert a long, sharp knife into his back by refusing to ratify the new Constitution. Already senators from the Middle West were talking ominously about "giving away the rights that our boys fought and died for at Valley Forge, Antietam, Château-Thierry, Midway and Teheran . . ."

Nevertheless, Kalish prepared to call the meeting to order. With luck the Steering Committee should be able to wind up the thing in three more days. Most of the terms and clauses of the document had already been agreed upon. There remained only the controversial questions of what power, if any, the World Government should have over tariffs and immigration, and this silly Space Clause in which Juan de la Torre seemed so inexplicably interested. Kalish thought such a provision absurd, but did not wish to offend La Torre, who, despite his domestic sins, had brought the Andean Federation into the war on the side of the United States.

Kalish was opening his mouth to speak, when the sight of a messenger-boy hurrying down an aisle stopped him. It must be pretty urgent or the guards would never have let the boy through during the actual session.

The boy walked right up to the president's desk and handed a fistful of radiogram forms to Kalish, who said "Thank you" in an absent-minded way, and peered at the forms. The boy murmured "*Bienvenu, monsieur*," and walked off.

Kalish swallowed as he read. The message was one long radio running over a half-dozen sheets. At last he laid down the radiogram and spoke into the microphone :

"The meeting will please come to order. The first item on to-day's agenda is the so-called Space Clause proposed by the delegation from the Andean Federation. It was planned to conclude arguments pro and contra this clause and vote on it this afternoon. However, news has just reached me which, if authenticated, has so great a bearing on the adoption of this clause that I think I should read it to you. It is a Reuter's dispatch from Darjeeling, India, and reads as follows :

"November fifth. An object described as a spaceship of extra-terrestrial origin landed yesterday in eastern Neping, near the Tibetan border in the vicinity of Kishanganj. First reports indicate that the beings who man the ship are green bipeds nine feet tall with tentacles for arms. Their intentions are said to be friendly.

"The arrival of a visitor from outer space is confirmed by a number of witnesses in Sikkim, over which the ship slowly passed while looking for a landing-place. In view of the enormous importance of this arrival, both as proving the long-surmised existence of intelligent extra-terrestrial life and as bearing upon the political organisation of the world to deal with the problems posed by this fact, the Government of Neping has waived its usual prohibition against entry of foreigners into the country to permit qualified experts and officials of the Indian Government to investigate the visitors. As Prime Minister Rajendrachandramohanana of Neping expressed it in a telephone call to Darjeeling, 'For the sake of God, sirs, let wise men be sent forthwith to cope with this appalling manifestation. We of Neping are not qualified to do so.'

"Pending the arrival of an official mission of the Indian Government to welcome the visitors in the name of the peoples of the earth, Richard Nugent, a retired American journalist living in Darjeeling, has crossed the border into Neping and struck out into the wild region where the ship is said to have come to earth . . ."

Kalish finished the radiogram, took off his glasses, and rubbed his eyes with his finger-tips. Then he said :

“ In view of the importance——”

Wilhelm Feuer, of the German delegation, was waving for attention. When recognised he said :

“ This is all very impressive, Mr. President, but let us not by our emotions carried away be. To me it seems that the coincidence of such a landing, just when the so-called Space Clause is under consideration, is simply too perfect to be believed. At least we should await confirmation to be sure we are not the victims of a hoax.”

“ As I was about to say,” continued Kalish, “ in view of the importance of this development, the chair will entertain a motion to defer action on this clause until this time tomorrow.”

The motion was made and carried, and for the rest of that session the Convention devoted itself to a long wrangle over tariffs.

When the meeting adjourned, the members swarmed around the newstand. By that time the newspapers bore not only the Reuters dispatch that Kalish had read, but a confirmatory Associated Press dispatch giving further information.

Richard Nugent, it seemed, had radioed that he had reached the space-ship and met the aliens, who had brought an elaborate equipage of linguistic apparatus, picture-books and the like, to enable them to get into communication with the Terrans. Further information was promised soon.

Mateo Marco Lope Aguirre Malaria glanced up from his newspaper with a smile of quiet triumph. It seemed to him that the other delegates were looking at each other with a new seriousness. When he had brought up the Space Clause, some had thought it ridiculous because there were no intelligent extra-terrestrials; others preferred to leave all non-essential controversies to the future, counting on amending the Constitution when and if civilised e.-t.'s were discovered. Now that the dele-

gates were faced with extra-terrestrial reality, the petty national disputes that had stirred up such high words and hard feelings seemed small.

Next morning the papers carried still more information. By working furiously Nugent had gotten into communication with the aliens. He announced that they were from a planet of the small star Ross 154. There was a blurry radiophotograph which Nugent had transmitted with his portable set to Darjeeling and which had been re-transmitted around the world. It showed a bald man standing between two tall things that might have been a backward child's attempt to model a man in plasticene. The Indian party had already flown to Darjeeling and would take off the following day for the space ship in a helicopter with a television camera.

At that afternoon's session, Aguirre braced himself for argument. But none came. In fact one of his bitterest critics, Jacob Atta of Nigeria, rose to say that :

"While I have been opposed to this clause in the past, the events of the last twenty-four hours have changed my mind. Even if the space-ship should turn out to be a hoax, I now think it advisable to have this clause in the Constitution, just in case."

After a minor bicker over the meaning of the word "intercourse," the Convention adopted the Space Clause and went on to the rest of its business. There was little debate; everybody's mind was far away, in the rhinoceros-haunted wilds of Neping. In fact the President (Bretkun of Lithuania) managed to get compromise proposals on tariffs and immigration adopted that afternoon, leaving nothing to do but make laudatory speeches until the Drafting Committee finished polishing and homogenizing the final draft. The Sheikh of Aden made a speech in Arabic, followed by speeches from delegates of Afghanistan, Albania, and Algeria, and then the meeting adjourned.

Aguirre was relaxing in the bar when his glorious chief stalked in and strode up to him.

THE SPACE CLAUSE

"Aguirre," said la Torre, "we leave tomorrow. Art thou ready?"

"*Carajo!* Why, chief?"

"I have received word that my enemies conspire against me, so I must get back to Andea at once."

"But you will miss the final ratification!"

"No; I have arranged it with Kalish and Carstairs-Brown. The Drafting Committee shall work all night and present the Constitution tomorrow morning to a special session. Then I will make my speech—Andea comes alphabetically after Algeria—and we shall rush to the airport as soon as I have finished. Get packed."

"Yes, yes, chief, of course."

And so it was done.

La Torre's airplane was over Venezuela when the radio broke the news that the arrival of the extra-terrestrial space-ship had been a hoax after all, perpetrated by a group of journalists including Dagobert Heck and Richard Nugent. The announcer ended with a sardonic note :

"... the delegates to the World Government Constitutional Convention are having a hearty laugh over the departing speech made this morning by Senor Juan de la Torre Baroja, in which he boasted in extravagant terms of his authorship of the Space Clause and claimed sole credit for any benefits that might accrue to the earth hereafter as a result of communication with other civilized planets. However, inquiries at the Convention indicated that there is no present intention of repealing the Space Clause, as this would require procedural complications, and since the clause is regarded as at worst a harmless piece of whimsy . . ."

Aguirre became conscious of his chief's glittering black eyes. La Torre rasped :

"So! My dignity has been insulted! And who is responsible? Who put me up to backing that accursed Space Clause, saying that it would resound to the eternal fame and credit of the Andean Federation and its

President, the people's choice, Juan Serafín de la Torre Baroja? Who led me astray and exposed me naked to the pitiless laughter of the world? Fool! Poltroon! Thou shalt see!"

The President's voice rose to a scream as he added details of Aguirre's ancestry and love-life. He caught Aguirre by the lapels and shook the smaller man until the latter's teeth rattled. He slapped his face, forehand and backhand, a dozen times, then hurled the eminent jurist from him, shouting:

"Guards! Tie up this filth until I can deal with him in a more appropriate manner!"

In the prison, Aguirre stood on the trap with the rope around his neck. In one corner his wife and his mistress sobbed quietly in each other's arms. In front of him stood la Torre with fists on well-padded hips, grinning ferociously.

"Ha!" snarled the President. "So, thou thoughtst I should weaken and let thee go for old times' sake? Hast ever known me to forget an insult to my dignity?"

"No, sir," said Aguirre miserably. "If you are going to hang me, will you please get it over with?"

"I will hang thee when I am ready. I have had requests from many quarters, including the President of the United States himself, to let thee off. I threw these impertinent requests back in their faces! I told them that if I heard any more such mush, I should refuse to ratify the Constitution, and defy them! That is what I, Juan Serafín de la Torre Baroja, think of the rest of the world! Well, hangman, art thou ready?"

"Ready, chief," replied the hangman.

La Torre gave the final command. The hangman did his duty. The wife and the mistress screamed in unison with the snap of the rope, and Dr. Aguirre departed for happier climes.

While the body still swung, an officer of the Federal Police rushed in.

"Chief!" cried the newcomer. "Hold everything!"

THE SPACE CLAUSE

"What?" cried la Torre. "Nonsense! As thou seest, there is nothing to hold. What is it?"

"Well, sir, you will not believe this, but——"

"But what?"

"The ambassador Mencias Mola is here with a visitor. This visitor is one of a group who arrived in Mexico a few hours ago. Señor Mencias flew this one here as fast as possible."

La Torre gaped. The Andean ambassador to Mexico appeared in the doorway and came forward, saying: "Chief, I have the honour to present a visitor. His name, as nearly as I can say it, is Vraku. Senor Vraku, I present the President de la Torre Baroja."

The visitor blinked two of its three eyes and extended a tentacle to grasp la Torre's limp hand; then pointed another tentacle towards the figure dangling from the scaffold, and raised all three eyebrows.

"The—ah—suspended one . . .?" It said in weird but comprehensible Spanish.

"A martyr to his country, señor. A paragon of wisdom and loyalty. Even now I am planning a special medal for him." La Torre stepped close to the scaffold and peered up with experienced eyes. "It will, of course, be awarded posthumously," he said with marked sadness.

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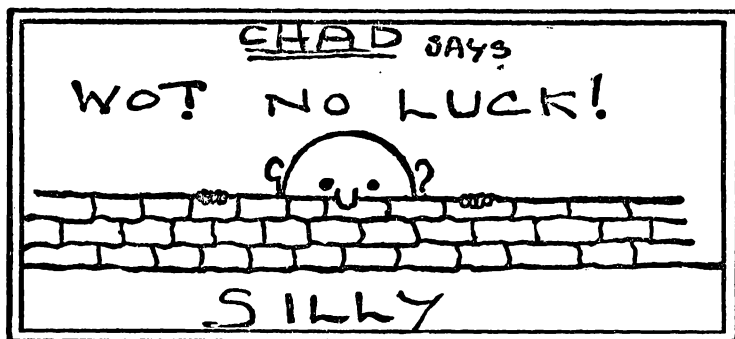
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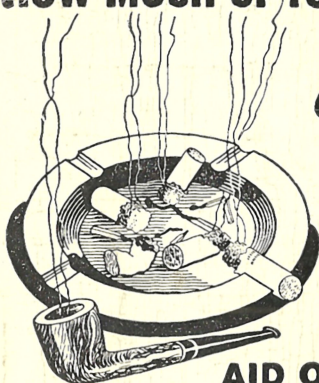
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